

The evolving role of the 2nd Division within Australia's defence mobilisation strategic framework



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Given changed strategic circumstances, planning on a 10-year warning of a major conventional attack on Australia is no longer appropriate. Hence, 2nd Division, an Army Reserve formation, has evolved beyond maintaining an expansion base as a strategic reserve. Its role now is principally operational. It maintains foundation war-fighting skills; raises, trains and sustains a battle group to reinforce Army's full-time ready brigade; commands, controls and contributes force elements to domestic operations [disaster relief and security support]; and contributes force elements for the ongoing defence of the nation's maritime approaches. Reserve call-out powers are available, if needed.

Key words: 2nd Division; aid to the civil authorities; assistance to the civil community; Australian Army Reserve; Australian Defence Force; border protection; disaster relief; humanitarian assistance; strategic warning time; war-fighting.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Institute in this dynamic, challenging period for the 2nd Division and Australian Defence Force (ADF) Reserves more generally. While I will focus primarily on Army reservists in this paper, I also acknowledge the work undertaken by Navy and Air Force reservists, many of whom who have worked alongside the 2nd Division over the past two years in domestic operations and without whom we would not have been able to succeed. I acknowledge also the achievements of my predecessor, Major General Kath Campbell, who commanded the Division with great vision and strong leadership. During her period of command, significant numbers of reservists deployed on domestic operations, particularly Operation Bush Fire Assist and Operation COVID-19 Assist, and the Reserves call-out legislation was used for the first time.

Since early 2020, 3688 2nd Division members have deployed on Operation Bush Fire Assist, 4371 and counting on Operation COVID-19 Assist, 172 on Operation Resolute (border protection) and 378 on Operation New South Wales Flood Assist. This is a rate of effort by the Division unseen previously in peacetime. The men and women of the 2nd Division continue to be ready to assist government respond to significant domestic crises across the nation, in addition to supporting off-shore operations and force modernisation during the unpredictable decade ahead.

The government's 2020 Defence Strategic Update (Defence 2020a) and the Force Structure Plan (Defence 2020b) pose the contemporary challenges of Australia's strategic environment, where major power competition has intensified. Defence's strategic objectives have been cast by the Government as the deployment of military power: to **shape** Australia's strategic environment; to **deter** actions against our interests; and, when required, to **respond** with credible military force (Defence 2020a: 24-25).

Army's response to Defence (2020a, b) is contained in *Army's Contribution to Defence Strategy* (Burr 2020). This articulates the Chief of Army's vision, through the concepts of 'accelerated warfare' and 'an Army in motion', to support the ADF in confronting the challenges of the here and now, while concurrently preparing for the environment and new capabilities detailed in Defence (2020a, b).

Army's capacity to prepare teams for the Joint Force³ comes from making use of the total workforce as 'One Army', *i.e.* full-time personnel, flexible-work personnel, part-time personnel, contingent work contractors, and Australian Public Service (APS) personnel. Army reservists, as part of the One Army, are central to all of Army's planning *vide* the Army Objective Force.

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³The Joint Force in this context refers to the ADF and, more specifically, to the joint forces deployed on operations from time to time by the ADF. 'Joint' infers a balanced grouping of Navy, Army and Air Force assets and personnel as needed by the specific operation.

This paper will focus on the role of the 2nd Division, an Army Reserve formation, in meeting Army's contribution to the Joint Force in the context of the defence mobilisation strategic framework.

Australia's Changed Strategic Mobilisation Context

There is a common public perception that mobilisation requires a significant increase in the ADF's workforce capacity to meet an external strategic threat. This is consistent with Australia's historical national response to World Wars I and II where the defence forces were significantly increased from a small standing force with the luxury of relatively long mobilisation lead times.

The 2020 *Defence Strategic Update* provides a stark contrast to our historic experience of national mobilisation. It refers to previous defence planning based on a 10-year strategic warning of a major conventional attack on Australia as no longer appropriate (Defence 2020a: 14). Instead, coercion, competition and grey-zone activities affecting Australia's interests are occurring now and this means that Australia can no longer rely on timely warning ahead of conflict occurring.

Given that strategic context, in contemporary ADF parlance 'strategic mobilisation' is defined as: "the act of generating additional capability and capacity beyond Defence's current scope and scale, by increasing the defence budget, redirecting workforce and reallocating or repurposing defence and other government, commercial or community resources to achieve government objectives". Accordingly, Reserve forces enable scaling of military power within the strategic mobilisation framework by drawing upon an otherwise part-time force. Individuals and force elements with baseline training can be made available for duty with, or in support of, regular units on operations. This was, and still is, a cost-effective model of scaling military capacity, rather than maintaining a large standing force. This fundamental logic has withstood the test of time.

The role of the Reserves, however, has evolved beyond maintaining an expansion base as a strategic reserve. Numerous reviews and white papers have advocated an operational focus for reserves. The critical need for reservists to sustain force rotations in East Timor from 2000 and subsequently in the Solomon Islands has demanded that reservists, as individuals and as 'capability bricks'⁴, are available to reinforce regular forces. This emphasis on reservists providing operational capability has seen them deployed on every operation the ADF has undertaken in the last 20 years.

2nd Division's Force Generation Foci

War-fighting

The 2nd Division's focus in the immediate past has been to support the Army's force generation cycle by the raising, training and sustaining a Reinforcing Battle Group⁵ to support the full-time Ready Brigade, thereby maintaining the Division's foundation war-fighting skills at unit level for security operations. This has been an important role for the 2nd Division and has allowed it to modernise and build capacity in conventional war-fighting skills alongside the Army's combat brigades.

More recently, the emphasis of the 2nd Division in the force generation system has moved to the integration of reserve capability bricks of platoon and company size into units of the combat brigades, as well as having a battalion headquarters attain skills through the joint war-fighting exercise series. This approach provides opportunities for the Division to build the foundation war-fighting skills of its junior leaders and soldiers and to provide confidence in the capacity of reservists to integrate effectively with their full-time peers, as well as providing the opportunity for a battalion headquarters to be trained to plan and execute tactical operations.

Defence Force Assistance to the Civil Community

Crystallising lessons from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (Binskin *et al.* 2020), and the ADF's lived experience from late 2019 on Operation Bushfire Assist, following then on to Operation COVID-19 Assist, and amplified more recently by Operation Flood Assist in New South Wales, the Chief of Army has directed that the role of the 2nd Division pivot to having primary responsibility for Army's contribution to domestic disaster relief and domestic security support tasks.

The stated mission of the 2nd Division to meet this new role is: "to generate land capabilities for the Joint Force and to command assigned contingency response forces in order to meet directed domestic operational requirements". The first part of that role, to generate land capabilities for the Joint Force, is not materially different from the previous role in that it provides for Army to direct the 2nd Division to generate specific land capabilities as it has already been doing. For example, the Civil-Military Co-operation function exclusively resides in the 2nd Division; as does the Emergency Support Force function in each of the states during the high-risk weather season. The capacity of the 2nd Division to support the ADF for domestic operations has long been proven with a consistent ability to meet the short-notice requirements for Defence Force

⁴A 'capability brick' is a small team of defence personnel that can be added to other such teams to create a defence operational capability e.g. a sub-unit or a unit. An analogous term, often used interchangeably, is 'force element'.

⁵A 'battle group' is a force of unit strength, frequently an infantry battalion, reinforced by a unit's allocation of supporting arms and services under command as needed by the specific operation.

Assistance to the Civil Community from all the states and territories for natural disasters and more recently for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Defence Force Aid to the Civil Authorities

To be clear, the responsibility for domestic operations does not replace the requirement to develop foundation war-fighting skills in reserve soldiers. The opposite is true, because the 2nd Division's span of responsibility for domestic operations is not limited to responding to natural disasters. The 2nd Division now has primary responsibility for Army's capability in generating force elements to support any Defence Force Aid to the Civil Authorities during domestic security contingencies. This capability requires soldiers trained in the foundation skills of Army's combat behaviours, which are the baseline skills for the development of foundation war-fighting in the Army. The 2nd Division incorporates Army's combat behaviours in its preparedness for meeting its domestic response obligations, as well as building on its foundation war-fighting capability.

Recently, the Division exercised the response to a request for assistance for Defence Force Aid to the Civil Authorities in the town of Toowoomba, a major urban centre in Queensland. During the exercise, the 11th Brigade Domestic Incident Security Force partnered with the Queensland Police Service, and local and state government agencies. The Domestic Incident Security Force operated across a range of tasks, including vital asset protection, low-risk search of public buildings, establishing cordons for Queensland Police Service operations, and partnered armed patrolling. Our soldiers were equipped with Army's current generation of weapons, body armour, night-vision sights and protected mobility. This highly-realistic training focused our soldiers and leaders on the importance of their combat behaviour skills and interoperability with state agencies. The continued development of this capacity will be a major part of Divisional preparedness going forward.

Command and Control

As to the Division's responsibility to command assigned contingency-response forces, key lessons from the Royal Commission (Binskin *et al.* 2020) and Defence lessons have identified the need for the ADF to maintain enduring relationships with the state and territory emergency management framework, rather than developing *ad hoc* arrangements in response to a crisis.

The 2nd Division is uniquely placed within the ADF to provide the command and control architecture and force elements to meet short-notice domestic operational requirements across Australia. We are able to utilise the extant formation headquarters in each of the mainland states with additional reserve nodes in Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. The Division's nation-wide dis-

position, long-standing and enduring community links and a proven capacity to respond to short-notice domestic crises, leverages the capability of the Army Reserve.

As an observation, during the height of ADF support to Operation COVID-19 Assist, the 2nd Division's depots in regional and remote locations were extensively used to support and sustain operations. This experience has reinforced my view on the importance of the Division's regional footprint in supporting national resilience for the defence of Australia.

Joint Task Force 629

Of particular significance in the ADF response to domestic operations has been the establishment of Joint Task Force 629 (JTF 629). This national JTF was raised initially by the Chief of the Defence Force for Operation COVID-19 Assist, largely drawing upon the 2nd Division for command and control and for provision of force elements. As the commander of the JTF group in Queensland from late March 2020, I found it an odd experience in the early period of the JTF to see the bulk of ADF full-time elements in home isolation while reservists were taking on the bulk of the responsibility for the operation. This is not to say that reservists alone can meet the operational needs of domestic operations. Reservists have limited endurance and mass on operations due to their competing civilian work obligations. Full-time forces are required to sustain operations beyond reservists' capacity short of call-out. The development of the call-out powers under the *Defence Act 1903* provides options for government where a scaled response is needed for extended periods.

JTF 629 has been retained by the Chief of the Defence Force for the present time to provide the command and control, along with the state-based and territory-based joint task groups, for all domestic operations, including responses to natural disasters. Importantly, the JTF 629 headquarters is staffed primarily by 2nd Division personnel. The same applies for the joint task groups being drawn from the reserve formations, conforming to the Chief of Army's intent that the 2nd Division is to command assigned contingency-response forces to meet directed domestic operational requirements.

Governance Considerations

There is an increased appetite in government for the ADF to contribute to domestic contingency responses. This is clear from numerous recent high-profile deployments in which critical contributions were made by 2nd Division reserve personnel alongside their regular compatriots and the Navy and Air Force.

Similarly, reserve contributions have been crucial throughout Operation COVID-19 Assist, which has been running continuously for almost 18 months, and – as the most recent deployment of ADF personnel, including reservists from the 2nd Division, to support

police in Sydney shows – it is likely to require ongoing commitment of ADF resources.

Operation Bushfire Assist marked the first time the Commonwealth Government had ever used the call-out powers at s. 51f of the *Defence Act 1903* (C'wealth) to bring reservists onto an operation. This is of profound importance. Reflecting on the definition for strategic mobilisation that I provided earlier, the use of the call-out powers provides the mechanism for scaling the ADF response to meet threats, domestic or otherwise.

The use of the callout powers has opened the aperture through which the Government and the ADF can develop the capacity for reserves to provide scalability for the full spectrum of operations, including the defence of Australia. Impressively, the lessons learned from the callout of reservists on Operation Bushfire Assist in early 2020, were implemented in the passing of legislation in December 2020, which provided greater flexibility in the conditions of service on which reservists could be called out and provided indemnities and protections in the carrying out of their duties.

Exercise Talisman Sabre

The collective training the 2nd Division did this year to demonstrate integration with the combat brigades was Exercise Talisman Sabre 21, conducted in July with more than 17,000 Australian Army, Navy and Air Force personnel, partnering with troops from the United States, and with smaller contingents from the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand. This high-end war-fighting exercise is conducted biennially and is designed to enhance interoperability between the ADF and our allies.

Despite the COVID-19 interruptions, the 2nd Division contributed almost 300 soldiers to the exercise, integrating with the 3rd Combat Brigade to successfully complete a range of war-fighting tasks. When I visited the exercise, I was impressed with how effectively our soldiers had integrated with the full-time units, particularly with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. 2nd Division soldiers deployed with the same enhanced steyr rifles, Australian multi-cam uniforms, combat body armour and protected mobility as their regular counterparts. With their foundation war-fighting skills, they were able to integrate seamlessly and improve their skills with one of Army's high-readiness infantry battalions.

Operation Resolute

Transit Security Element. In addition to leading Australia's domestic operations and training for foundation war-fighting, the Division continues to support the defence of Australia's maritime approaches through Operation Resolute. So far this year, some 200 2nd Division personnel have deployed with the transit security element from Darwin in support of Maritime Border Command. These 2nd Division personnel are reservists who are prepared to leave their families and

negotiate their absence with their civilian employers to undertake the six-month deployment. They undertake vital security tasks, often in dangerous circumstances and in very remote areas.

Regional Force Surveillance Group: The Regional Force Surveillance Group (RFSG), also part of the 2nd Division, is tasked to provide a remote-area, land and littoral surveillance and reconnaissance capability in Australia's north and northwest. The RFSG consists of three regional force surveillance units: the Pilbara Regiment, the North-West Mobile Force (Norforce), and the 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment. These reservists conduct persistent (essentially continuous) surveillance tasks as a key Army contribution to Operation Resolute. The RFSG's presence in the north provides physical eyes and ears on the ground in a strategically important region. Noteworthy, also, is their lead in developing and encouraging indigenous participation in the ADF.

The Future

In 2022, it is planned that the 2nd Division will transition from Forces Command to become a separate functional command charged with the responsibility for Army's domestic response obligation and reporting directly to Army Headquarters. This is an important transformation for the Division as it matures in its responsibility for domestic operations. Augmentation of the headquarters' full-time workforce has been carefully calibrated to achieve functional command status without duplication of back-of-house functions that have resided in Forces Command.

Initiatives are being undertaken in 13th Brigade in Western Australia to trial workplace reforms and establish new capabilities. They include the re-establishment of the 10th Light Horse as a regiment and the introduction into service of the Hawkeye Protected Mobility Vehicle-Light to that unit; and the development of a nascent littoral capability within the 16th Battalion, The Royal Western Australia Regiment. Such initiatives provide concrete examples of how Army seeks to foster innovation and enhance capability in a strategically important region of Australia.

Work also is being undertaken as part of the future-ready workforce to include reservists in what have been traditionally full-time roles. An example is the creation of reservist positions within the aviation stream to harness a broad range of skills to build capability. Recognition of civilian qualifications to allow workforce flexibility has long been a desirable outcome for the employment of reservists. This is a key focus of Army to leverage its existing workforce in expanding capability, but also to provide alternative pathways to bring established civilian skills into Army. Partnerships with civilian employers, like the BHP mining company in Western Australia, to generate highly technical engineering skills is an example of where Army is looking to be more agile and responsive to workforce needs. Flexible

approaches to entry standards and training levels are part of the work being done to better leverage the avenues to recruit critical skills into Army.

Conclusion

I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you how the 2nd Division contributes to the Army and the ADF. The Division has demonstrated its inherent capacity to provide the command and control architecture for domestic operations and for its soldiers to meet short-notice contingency requirements. The Division, as it evolves into a functional command charged with the responsibility for Army's domestic response obligations, has an important and growing role within the strategic mobilisation framework.

The Division's success is firmly grounded in: its connection to the communities it draws on; the quality of the training that the Army training system provides; the equipment with which it continually modernises; and, most importantly, the people who commit to serving their nation.

Army's modernisation and reliance on the total workforce to achieve the government's strategic requirements means that the 2nd Division will continue to play an important role in defending the nation. As the newly appointed commander of the 2nd Division, I am proud of what the Division has achieved over the past 18 months. We will continue to support the Army and the ADF during these challenging times, while prepared for any future contingency.

The Author: Major General David Thomae assumed command of 2nd Division on 17 July 2021. He graduated from the Royal Military College Duntroon to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps in 1988. He saw regimental service with 2nd/4th and 6th Battalions, The Royal Australian Regiment; 16th Battalion, The Royal Western Australia Regiment; and 25th and 9th Battalions, The Royal Queensland Regiment, the last of which he commanded in 2007-08. He has seen operational service in Lebanon, Syria, East Timor and Iraq. Senior leadership roles have included Commander 11th Brigade, Adjutant General – Army, and Commander Joint Task Group 629.3, the ADF task group responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in Queensland. In civil life, he is a commercial barrister at the Queensland Bar. In 2021, he was appointed a Member in the Military Division of the Order of Australia. [Photo of General Thomae: Department of Defence]

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