

Island Australia: improving resilience in a rapidly-changing region
***The contribution of the Australian Army
to improving resilience***



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Army contributes to the building of national resilience through investing in its most important asset, its people, to develop them and their moral and intellectual attributes, to make Army more operationally relevant and competent both nationally and internationally.

Key words: Army; Australia; community engagement; interpersonal skills; Kabul non-combatant evacuation 2021; natural disasters; professional character; warfare.

Thank you for the opportunity, as Forces Commander, to give my perspective on how the Australian Army is improving national resilience. Forces Command, with our headquarters in Sydney and units all across Australia comprises about 80 per cent of Army, including all the brigades and training centres. Forces Command is charged to raise, train and sustain our Army for peace and wartime activities as part of a Joint Force.

In addressing the topic of how Army contributes to

improving national resilience, I will first address the changing nature of war and the increased demand for Australian Defence Force (ADF) assistance during national crises. Thereafter, I will talk about how Forces Command is creating mutually-beneficial strategic partnerships with our communities and the region, to give our people the social skills needed to enable the Joint Force to operate effectively in peace and war. The Fleet Commander earlier described how the region is

becoming increasingly complex, dynamic and contested. Herein, the Army has adapted to the new challenges and has demonstrated the required resilience.

Accelerated Warfare, Natural Disasters and Community Engagement

In the current era, the military is experiencing change in the character of war at a much faster rate. The Army terms this as 'accelerated warfare'. In addition to the changes in our international security environment, our government is increasingly turning to the ADF to support the nation in times of crises. In the past few years, the ADF has repeatedly been called upon to assist state authorities and emergency services to support communities affected by floods, fires, cyclones and most recently, a national health pandemic.

As extreme weather events and natural disasters become frequent, it is likely the government will increasingly rely on the ADF to contribute to domestic and emergency responses, and operate in challenging and complex security environments. This is not unfamiliar for our Defence Force who have adapted to changing threats and requirements consistently in our history. But, the combination of accelerated warfare and the increased requirement for ADF support in times of national crises has resulted in increased uncertainty about what the ADF needs to be ready for, and we expect this uncertainty to continue.

Adaptable Land Forces

For the Army to succeed amid this uncertainty, we need land forces that are prepared to respond to demanding and uncertain environments – forces that are able to: adapt quickly; partner with not only the other Services, but other government agencies and other militaries; and take on an increasingly wider range of roles and tasks. Such tasks could range from something as benign as COVID contact tracing, to complex war-fighting against an adversary with technologies and capability similar to ours, including operating in information and space domains. We describe the need for Army to be prepared for a range of tasks in multiple context as an 'Army in Motion', continuously sensing and adapting to the changing need. This agility relies upon personnel building their individual and organisational resilience outside of wartime.

Outside of war, the Army perhaps has never adapted as quickly as we have over the past two years. COVID has shown the resilience capabilities of our Army and our three services. As with every other workplace, COVID has restricted the movement of our people and tested their ability to get together to train in traditional ways. By necessity we have found ways to adapt our training, our operations and our routines to ensure continuity of our training and maintain our war-fighting readiness. COVID has in some ways forced us to rethink how we conduct our training and find efficiencies in our approach. In the response to restricted border travel, Army units located in dispersed regions of our country have adapted to decentralise training, and where appropriate, optimise on training online. I am proud of what Forces Command and

the broader Army have been able to achieve in the circumstances.

Army – a People-Centric Organisation

While continuing to contribute to the national response to the COVID crisis in conjunction with state and emergency services, the Army has been able to maintain preparedness for other contingencies. Army harnesses and coordinates efforts across all domains, including space and cyber, to help the Defence Force secure our national interests, and promote stability and security. History demonstrates that at some point it is always necessary to put boots on the ground. Army is fundamentally a people-centric organisation, and our people for us are our competitive advantage. In order to maintain the support the Army currently has with the community, we rely on the professional character of our people, their ethical and moral decision-making, and their desire to remain accountable for their respective actions. Maintenance of trust is essential for our personnel to successfully operate amongst communities, to support, to secure, to influence and, if required, engage in combat.

This professional character is the essence of what we call good soldiering. Good soldiering enables Army to quickly form teams whenever, wherever and with whom-ever is needed. To succeed, we develop many of the moral and intellectual attributes required of our people through focused training, education and experiences. These attributes encompass the development of character, leadership, communication, cognitive and interpersonal skills. They can be developed further by working with other partners. This is why strong partnerships are essential to build our capacity and resilience as an organisation.

Such partnerships span across local communities, our allies, regional partners, other government agencies, industry and academia. Army's partnerships expose our people to a variety of contexts to enhance their moral and intellectual capability. Army's partnerships are the basis of our capacity, our strategic depth and our commitment to national resilience. Within Defence there is always focus on developing our hard-edge war-fighting capability. But, exposing our teams to other contexts helps our people develop their social skills. Skills required to operate in and amongst communities; learning from and integrating experiences gained from these environments ultimately helps to improve our effectiveness. We value our connection with the nation and encourage our people to contribute to their communities whenever possible. Our engagement is multi-faceted but also multi-beneficial, enabling Army to serve local communities while also developing our people's social skills through working with partners and supporting civilian population in crises.

Recent Domestic and Regional Engagements

Despite the limitations of COVID in the past 12 months, Forces Command alone has engaged in and

supported 247 separate community activities across Australia. Of these engagements: 62 percent were with youth groups, including indigenous groups, cadets, sporting activities, and school visits; 26 percent were with veterans groups, charities and family open days; and the remainder were displays and ceremonial support. Not only do these activities develop social skills, relationships and empathy in our personnel, they also support whole-of-government welfare and development programs that help our communities to thrive. Supporting and actively contributing to local communities is a staple for Army and will continue into the future.

The Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Programme (AACAP) is a program run by Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, with support from Army to assist remote Indigenous Australian communities. AACAP commenced in 1997 and has proven a wonderful opportunity for our engineer trades personnel to work with remote Aboriginal communities to construct housing, roads, sewage facilities, airfields, telecommunications infrastructure, school facilities, potable water and other social services. In the last decade, the Army's involvement extended to the coordination of health and veterinary training and the delivery of employable skills programs for remote communities. AACAP reinforces the strong association between Army and indigenous peoples of northern and central Australia to ensure we are connected with and understand our regional perspectives.

Each of Army's brigades has established habitual training relationship with several regional military partners to improve cultural understanding and build enduring relationships. Regular training exercises with the partners and the others, including New Zealand, Fiji, PNG, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines and Malaysia enable our Army to learn from our partners, and enhance regional security and stability.

We are conscious that our future joint operations will comprise coalition force operations and inter-agency engagements with various stakeholders. Accordingly we are focusing our training with major powers – the United States, Britain, Japan, India, Canada and the Republic of Korea. Additionally, we are increasing our interoperability with Australian organisations including other government and civilian agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, state emergency services, academia, and industry; all of whom are potential stakeholders in conceivable future operations.

The 2021 Kabul Evacuation Operation

Operating with a wide variety of partners in varied environments prepares us for boots-on-the-ground roles I stated earlier. To illustrate an example, Corporal Jensen, an infantry soldier from Townsville was part of a joint inter-agency team that recently deployed at short notice to Kabul airport to assist Australian passport and visa holders to evacuate from Afghanistan. In the year leading to this deployment, Corporal Jensen and his Army team, conducted a full cycle of war-fighting training activities. The culmination was the joint international

Exercise Talisman Sabre 21 conducted in Townsville. The team also supported operation COVID-19 assist tasks in Western Australia, was involved in charity work with Legacy and with Ronald McDonald House, and routinely supported the local Townsville 'Proud Warrior' program to develop and empower indigenous and at-risk youth.

When Corporal Jensen's team arrived on-the-ground in Kabul, they found themselves in confronting conditions. Kabul airport had three entry gates geographically dispersed by about eight km, each congested with thousands of desperate people hoping to leave Afghanistan. Troops on-the-ground had to quickly assess the environment, develop a plan and execute their mission. It was arduous, dynamic and austere. They were operating for eight days with minimal rest or sleep as part of a multi-national inter-agency team. For a 12-hour period during that operation, Corporal Jensen engaged with the throng of people, single-handedly identifying members from the vulnerable Afghanistan women's soccer team of approximately 20 family groups. He found a local English speaker to translate and help him identify the team and their families from the crowd and successfully bought them through security and negotiated with various authorities for their safe passage to Australia. Those women and their families, and about 4,100 other people were evacuated from Kabul that week.

The capacity to comprehend distressing human conditions, often under heightened stress from environmental and social threat factors were critical to the success of the non-combatants evacuation operation in Afghanistan. Australian soldiers must have the skill to communicate in socially acceptable ways, develop understanding, and foster empathy with people from other cultures. Every soldier who can read and understand the non-verbal and verbal cues, anticipate changes in atmospherics and find alternative ways to communicate add significant value to achievement of the mission. Corporal Jensen highlights the critical need for land combatants to develop social skills that bridge cultural and language barriers – barriers that often need to be breached to gain access to segments of the population who need our support. We know that, in an era of accelerated warfare, our Army must evolve to be more adaptable and be prepared to confront and overcome greater range of roles required of us.

Conclusion

Forces Command contributes to the building of national resilience through investing in our most important asset, our people. We focus on developing good people with strong moral and intellectual attributes in order to make the Army more operationally relevant and competent, both nationally and internationally. We are doing this through win-win partnerships with as broad an array of organisations and groups that we can muster. We know that we need to continue to evolve; but our organisational response to COVID-19 and resilient attributes exhibited by Corporal Jensen demonstrate that the Army is well on the way to achieving the resilience it requires to be future-ready.