

***SERVING VITAL INTERESTS:
AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGIC PLANNING IN PEACE AND WAR***

INTRODUCTION
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The subject of this year's history conference—strategic planning—should quite rightly reside in the province of Headquarters ADF and the Department of Defence. Indeed it is the subject of much contemporary study and activity in Australian defence circles as we struggle to come to terms with our changing strategic outlook and the varying expectations which our society has of its defence forces.

It is always possible, of course, that the services' view of the strategic imperatives at any point in time, and those of the Australian people, could diverge significantly. Such an occurrence would not be without historical precedent. But, as we all know, any successful engine of war must be fuelled continuously by the spiritual and material resources of the community whose interests it represents. This applies in peace and war, but there can be little doubt that the way you go to war, and indeed, the nature of the war itself, will be determined in large part by the relationship which exists between the Parliament and the Defence Force, in peace, and the mechanisms which are put in place to give expression to this. How these have been shaped in the past, and what effect they have had on Australian strategic planning, is of great interest to us. Their effectiveness in the transition from peace to conflict should inform our judgements about what is their most suitable form. Indeed, a study of these matters should help to reveal to us some idea about the optimum relationship between national security policy and force structure, while recognising that economic factors may throw this out of kilter at any point in time.

Recently we have been through a paradoxical period of strategic planning in which, on the one hand, the Government has resisted vociferous claims that Defence should sustain large cuts in order to share the burden of reductions in public sector spending more fully, while on the other hand defence spending has been reduced below two per cent of GNP for the first time in close to half a century. To this sort of audience the paradox will be obvious. There is a sense that the Australian people are sufficiently uneasy about the emerging strategic environment to want to keep a viable, modern defence force, but not so uneasy as to want to do so at too much expense to other areas of public outlay. There is generally bipartisan support for this view, which means that it is probably about right. These perceptions are the foundation.

At every point in history people have looked forward with some expectation of uncertainty about the rate of change, and it is generally agreed that from the position which Australia currently occupies things will change profoundly in the coming decades.