

**THE SECOND FIFTY YEARS:  
THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY 1947-1997**

**THE REMAKING OF MODERN ARMIES POST COLD WAR  
Robert O'Neill**

Armies have been made and re-made many hundreds of times. Oliver Cromwell wrote, at an early stage in his military career, that their essential element was:

Such men as had the fear of God before them and as made some conscience of what they did ... the plain russet-coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows.

In this current era of making and re-making we need to keep that figure in our minds. Armies are capable of much good and equally of much evil. The historical record is abundantly clear. But if soldiers are motivated by some high cause, which they recognise to be worth the sacrifice of their own lives, they will serve well the societies in whose name they march, and whose vital interests they defend. Soldiering continues to need a moral foundation, and therefore a moral society with a moral leadership, else it is a vain enterprise. The soldiers in Napoleon's *Grande Armée* believed they were fighting in defence of the values of the Revolution, but they were ultimately deceived and were brought to nought by others who saw their Emperor as a ruthless oppressor.

The same can be said for the millions who served in the armies of Germany in the two World Wars, Japan in the Second, and the states of the Warsaw Pact in the Cold War. Our own experience, by contrast, has been in defence of a high moral purpose and we fortunately lack the tensions within the Australian Army and between it and the nation at large which characterise so many other armies. We do not have to live with the legacy of a notably vain and grossly immoral use of military force. We have a whole relationship that even the stresses of Vietnam were unable to damage permanently.

At the current time we do not know whether we are at the end of an age as far as the use of force is concerned or simply in a temporary trough between two tumultuous periods. The policy debate literature is replete with controversy on whether or not major wars between states are a thing of the past. At the same time we hear very clearly the call to remake our armies and armed forces, and we cannot ignore it. The electorates of the democratic states have spoken their wishes and their representatives in government are demanding action to reorient the functions and structures in accord with changes in the international context and, in doing so, to reduce expenditure.

**The Australian Regular Army 50 Years On**

These calls come early in the life of the Australian Regular Army. It is hard to think that our Army is only 50 years old. When I joined the ARA it was only eight years of age. It certainly did not seem like that. The Australian Army, for anyone whose forebears had fought in both world wars, seemed to have been there forever. It was a major part of society, whose members had had a profound influence on the shaping of our society in the 20th century and whose veterans have had no small influence on the course of national politics.

But of course the First and Second AIF had a minuscule regular component. And outside the years of the world wars, Australia's military capacity had rested really in the hands of a few hundred professionals, who were poorly recognised for their service. Until the ARA was founded there could be no guarantee that we would not revert to that obsolete tradition which would have made impossible a timely response in any of the smaller wars of the past 50 years. So we look to 1947 as the time when the Australian government recognised that the nation needed a new foundation for its Army. At the same time we know full well that the ARA

had deep foundations in its predecessor, the Permanent Military Forces, and in the two Australian Imperial Forces. Its roots extended even into the British Army of the 19th century, and that Army, more than any other, has shaped the structure, the operational methods and equipment, the culture and norms of the ARA. Without the foundation of a regular army, Australia's defence development would have remained stunted, with an organisation rooted entirely in the past and unable to contribute to the kinds of commitment which arose so frequently during the Cold War. Generals Sturdee and Rowell, and their contemporaries, worked hard to establish the ARA. They would be pleased to see what has resulted from their creation. Whether they would think much of the successor term for the ARA, the 'full time army', I would not care to say.

But for the past 50 years the ARA has been on its own—not without friends both inside Australia and abroad—but it has learned to survive by its own efforts in the many currents and rapids in which it has been immersed from the Korean War to UNTAC, through two national service schemes, four wars, several reviews and reorganisations, and 33 peace-keeping operations. We are here today to celebrate the fact that it passed all those many tests with distinction, despite their variety and severity, and to honour the efforts of those men and women who made the ARA a highly professional force with an outstanding reputation around the world.

We are also here to think about how we might build on what has been achieved in the past 50 years in order to face the probably very different requirements of the decades immediately ahead. In the course of preparing this occasion I inspected the home page of the Australian Army on the Internet and found that I really did not need to write the paper at all. The arguments of 'An Australian Army for the 21st Century' are full, wide-ranging, cogent and convincing. So I am not about to discuss the Australian Army in any detail. Rather let me comment on some of the issues raised in the Army 21 review on the basis of the current debates on the development of armies on the other side of the world. If the cap fits you will know how to wear it.

### **The Remaking of Modern Armies**

The challenges of this era are very like those confronting armies in the 1920s, as they groped their way forward in the context of huge technological changes such as the tank, the aircraft, the truck, massed artillery, and wireless communications. Many of them did not know it but they were in the midst of their own revolution in military affairs. The situation was compounded by the revolution in international affairs which led to the foundation of the League of Nations, and serious attempts to outlaw war and impose for the first time a global authority with both the legal status and military might to preserve peace forever. Of all the major armies of the world only the German performed really well in re-shaping itself in the 1920s and 1930s, and it did so with far fewer resources than the others, until late in the day. The *Reichswehr's* ability to learn from defeat was remarkable.

The British Army, with a much better resource base, and free of the political and social disapproval that the *Reichswehr* had to face, found many reasons for not changing much at all. As Alex Danchev has written in his soon to be published biographical study of Sir Basil Liddell Hart, the British Army was then divided into four factions: the realists who felt that they alone knew what war was about and would tolerate no change that they had not thought of themselves; the rationalists who could see a need for change but recognised that they could not move too far ahead of the political context; the revolutionaries who believed that only through radical change could the Army save itself; and the reactionaries who believed that the prime need of all cavalry officers was to be issued with two horses each. It would be inappropriate of me today to attempt any such analysis of the Australian Army, but I am sure you all would have some candidates for each of these four schools of thought if you were asked to name them. I do not need to remind this group that the process of change in any army, or indeed in any human organisation, is fraught with its own internal politics. Armies respond to orders when purposes are clear, when commanders' minds are made up, and when the situation permits no back-chat. That is not the context of 'Army 21'. You therefore have to persist with a process of debate and analysis, of trial and error, in which there will

inevitably be divisions and schools of opinion. All good armies have to endure this factionalisation at times of re-formation. It is usually creative. Just work, hope and pray that the right faction or the right combination will win the day because the consequences of making the wrong choices can be very painful, bloody and long lasting. The British Army took little notice of Liddell Hart when he published *The Re-making of Modern Armies* in 1927. The Army, not to mention the British nation, paid a terrible price for its own backwardness in the first three years of the Second World War. The French and Russians suffered even more acutely, yet they all could have been ahead of the Germans had they thought hard enough about their own profession.

## The Issues

General Sanderson has asked me to reflect on the debates currently taking place in the armies of the principal NATO states and to offer some thoughts on what it might all mean for the future of the ARA. It is a broad spectrum of issues. I shall group them into four clusters: first, the new strategic context; second, personnel matters; third, the political-military relationship; and fourth, the implications of technological change.

### *1. The New Strategic Context*

In the post-Cold War era the most basic question that arises for any army is 'what is the mission?' Lying beneath the issue of whether or not Russia might return to become a military threat to NATO is the deeper question of whether any major government is likely to go to war with any other in order to advance its own interests. Realists will say that one or more major states will always retain the potential to go to war, and therefore all likely target states or their allies must be prepared to go to war in their own defence. Political leaders in Europe do not dismiss this line of argument but they have not been funding the consequences of believing it. Political opinion tends to a consensus that Russia might still be a military problem, but only after a considerable warning period. And then it would be more of a local danger than a grave threat to the future of NATO members (unless of course Russia resorted to nuclear weapons, in which dimension the United States has more than parity). Western governments therefore will not fund the kind of military establishments that would be necessary to check a major drive from the East by an army a few million strong.

Consensus has formed about a much lower level of contingency: aggression by a regional strongman outside Europe requiring a force of several divisions to check, most of which would be provided by the United States. In other words America's major allies think much more in terms of providing forces of brigade and division level than of anything higher. In the current reorganisation of the French Army, divisions and corps are to be abolished. The French Army is now focussed on producing several brigade groups for long range intervention and power projection. The British and German Armies have retained the division, although Britain has only two of them in an operational sense and both are in Germany. The brigade is much more the unit of currency of the British and German Armies as it is of the French. The German Army, still conscript-based and therefore much larger, has retained the corps. How much longer it does so will depend on the future of conscription, an internal issue of some sensitivity given the popular unease about a fully professional military.

Gone are the days when NATO armies could plan around a single mission. Today the catch-cry is 'capability availability'. In other words the range of contingencies to be prepared for is so wide that the sheer availability of a capability is an important goal, quite apart from the degree to which that capability has been developed. The most likely contingencies stem from the collapse of states, hence state-rebuilding becomes an important military requirement because nobody else can be relied upon to do it. 'Operations other than war' have become a major theme in planning, force structure, equipment and training. It has been said recently that the US Army has changed its business from life insurance to health care.

The range of contingencies that armies have to be ready to face seems likely to broaden as more thought is given to the security consequences of environmental disasters and population growth. In all these new tasks the element of danger remains present but not to

the degree where the main task of most of the troops committed is fighting. They still have to be able to fight, of course, but they have to be able to do many other things as well, from rebuilding shattered cities to supervising elections. Forces are almost invariably multinational in composition, making interoperability increasingly important across the spectrum of units and formations. Battalions of one country must be able to work, with battalions of another in international brigades. Standard NATO agreements on interoperability of equipment and communications systems and procedures are becoming ever more important. Armies that lack interoperability will be consigned to irrelevance in the new military environment controlled by the United Nations and led in the field by the United States.

As part of the readjustment to face these new tasks, NATO armies recognise that their inherited Cold War skills, structures and approaches can sometimes be irrelevant or even counterproductive. Future development has to address responsibilities that will be much more intrinsically political in nature, such as the promotion of democratisation, support for human rights, policing of international law and the apprehension of war criminals. Where combat is envisaged the key elements are not so much mass and breadth but timeliness and precision. At the same time major armies cannot entirely ignore the deterrent function of being seen to be capable of defeating major rivals in the field.

In parallel with this re-definition of roles and missions, Western governments have evinced an increased desire to reduce defence expenditure. Here we see a consequential coincidence, between the rise of political philosophies that emphasise reduction of the tax burden and the disappearance of the one major contingency on which NATO defence expenditure was justified for 45 years. This coincidence has created a formidable problem for armies struggling to remain competent and powerful. In Europe these financial trends are reinforced by the criteria for entry into the European Monetary Union. Armies have to be able to show substantial savings over their Cold War costs and if they will not do this co-operatively they will be taken by the scruff of the neck and made to comply. The new strategic context is thus extremely demanding for NATO armies. They are all in the process of making major changes to fit new financial constraints while broadening their range of capabilities except in the field of combat on the grand scale. New organisations, new weapons, new computers and new approaches to command and control are all being developed and pressed into service.

## *2. Personnel Matters*

I began this presentation by referring to people and their motivation. The new strategic context is compelling radical changes in the field of personnel policy and administration. Most European armies have relied on conscription from feudal times. During the past two centuries, including the Cold War, the system has been a key element of the social fabric of most European states. Compulsory military service has been accepted not only as the best way to obtain raw manpower cheaply and plentifully but also as a national institution, part of the growing up process, a national educator, integrator and leveller. It has served to reassure citizens in democratic states that they would not be dictated to by a professional military caste who could act as a law and a force unto themselves.

But other needs are beginning to make themselves felt. As armies had to transform themselves from massive deterrent forces against the invasion of their home or neighbouring territories into smaller, highly mobile, superbly equipped and trained forces capable of meeting a wide range of problems, conscription has been called increasingly into question. Britain, of course, gave it up in the early 1960s, but for an island power that was only to be expected! The United States moved to an all volunteer army in the mid-1970s as the draft system of the Vietnam War was staggering on the edge of incredibility. More recently Belgium abandoned the tradition, and has been followed recently by France. President Chirac's policy has engendered intense controversy but it is going clearly into effect, with the loyal compliance of the professional military, if not their warm support. The future of conscription is under debate in virtually all European countries, including Russia. They will adapt at very different speeds because of the different natures of their domestic political situations, but the writing does seem to be on the wall for this means of raising soldiery in the developed states. This is not true for east and southeast Asia, where conscript armies are the norm, at least for the present and the near future.

The end of the Cold War is also fostering repatriation of forces, albeit slowly. Germany, the common basing area in Central Europe for both sides, is now an increasingly crowded and expensive deployment area for foreign governments. Also the patience of the German citizenry with exercises and the bad behaviour of some allied soldiers has worn too thin to be ignored by Chancellor Kohl. Once governments bring their divisions of soldiers home they find that they no longer need most of them.

So, increasingly, NATO governments are forced to seek that most expensive recruit, the volunteer, the well educated and talented young person who is willing to serve as a professional for enough years to justify the training effort which has to be applied. The competition for enough recruits to man even the modest establishments of today is formidably keen. It may be regarded soon in some countries as too unproductive in terms of money spent on advertising and bonuses, compelling governments to lower their sights in terms of the size of forces and range of capabilities that they wish to keep. Let me quote some statistics from the British case.

The trained soldier strength of the Army is 97,902, 5.1 per cent in deficit. The infantry and artillery are 8.5 per cent undermanned. The Royal Armoured Corps and Household Cavalry are 1.4 per cent under strength. The whole of the Army save the Royal Engineers is short of personnel. The situation is worse than these figures suggest when one goes to a unit and speaks to the commanding officer. He usually has to detach personnel for training and other tasks such as Keeping the Army in the Public Eye and Regimental Information Teams. The actual situation may be a further 10 per cent worse than I have indicated. And this is at a time when unemployment among young people is high, and service pay and conditions relatively are very good.

Recruiting budgets are a heavy charge on the Army's income as top line PR firms such as Saatchi have to be engaged to carry the message to the public in terms which will penetrate. Physical, intellectual and medical requirements have been relaxed, but given the complexity of modern equipment and the subtlety of the new tasks which armies have to perform, such policies may prove counter-productive. Military trainers complain that they have to make silk purses out of sows' ears. What they really want are silk pigs.

Such animals are not only hard to come by but also difficult to retain. Huge sums of money now have to be devoted to soldier support, in the form of housing, education, health care, and employment for the partners of soldiers. Transition assistance becomes increasingly important as the term of service nears completion. The old policy of leaving the soldier to fend for himself or herself on re-entry into civilian life is counter-productive today.

Societal change also affects the nature of the discipline that can be applied and the training imparted. Again the British Army has just announced major reforms in these areas to try to stem the loss of both recruits and trained personnel. All armies will have to continue these adjustments, but it remains a formidable challenge to decide how fast to move and in what areas.

The virtues of unit and regimental cohesion are being rediscovered as the retention problem becomes more severe. Soldiers respond well to the sense of family that a good regiment imparts. The British regimental system consumes great efforts but the Army's predicament would be far more severe without good regiments which attract and hold their soldiers.

The pressures on regular manpower have sharpened incentives for admitting more women and for greater dependence on reserves. Incorporation of women into NATO armies is taking place unevenly. In the US Army women currently comprise 13.5 per cent. In the French Army they number some eight per cent. The proportion of women is bound to increase everywhere as armies move towards an all-volunteer composition, and as women become more assertive in the job market. At the same time the problems of sex and romance have dashed many a promising military career on both sides of the gender line. Maybe we will learn to manage these things better with time, but the experience of the US Army, which began integrating women seriously in the mid 1970s, is not reassuring. Difficult times lie ahead for all armies as they try to make better use of the female half of their national populations.

Reserve forces are being reformed to make them better suppliers of trained personnel to serve with the regulars on distant, complex missions. Regulars simply cannot provide the full range of skills required, and sometimes not even the full numbers of combat personnel needed. Reservists' conditions of service have to change in accord with this need, complicating relations with their employers, not to mention their families. The reservists need help on both counts. Reserve training has to become more attractive if it is to capture and retain the interest of young people with many other things to do. Reserve officers have to be incorporated into the Army's command structure at senior levels as well as in units. The British Army still has only three positions for Territorial Army brigadiers, and none beyond that level.

Reserve forces also help to strengthen the vital links between armies and the societies from which they come. Reservists are immersed in their own communities for most of the time. They can be highly visible when they are on duty, and they are well suited to conducting a special representational role for their army at large. Good armies build on this strength. Others ignore it. The reserves have a much more important role to play in the current context than during the Cold War.

### *3. The Political-Military Relationship*

As the purposes for which armies are used become less clearly identified with national security in the direct sense of the term, and more focused on broader security objectives such as strengthening respect for international law, so the quality of the political-military relationship becomes even more important. Political leaders need to have a very clear understanding of what armies can and cannot do, of what they require for particular missions in terms of combat strength and logistics, and of the consequences of a particular commitment proving to be protracted. Politicians must develop clear objectives for their force commanders, consider before the event their own reactions should new contingencies arise, and agree on what their exit strategy will be. This all has to be done in close co-operation with the force commanders who have to undertake responsibility for operations and their heads of service. During the course of a commitment, leaders on both sides of the political-military divide have to stay in close contact. Soldiers do not always understand the thinness of the ice on which politicians skate, especially in terms of their popularity with their own electorate. Politicians, who now come from an age group that has had little or no direct experience of war, do not always know the questions to ask their military advisers or even the issues on which to focus.

Western armies did not have to worry so much about the political-military interface during the Cold War because NATO took care of it. The newer type of commitment tends to be more of an ad hoc nature, and is geared to national as well as to global interests. NATO is of less direct use as a planning and command agency for these reasons. This is not to say that it is irrelevant, and recent events in Bosnia have shown that NATO remains vital in acute crises. But individual nations now require enhanced force planning, deployment and command facilities of their own. Hence the growth of joint force headquarters in individual NATO states. Because of the sudden nature of calls for peace-keeping or peace enforcement forces, these joint force headquarters have to be in permanent session, virtually full manned and ready to take charge of a major operation within days if not hours. The old system whereby a force commander was designated, and then put together a staff by raiding other parts of his army, will no longer suffice. Command and control has to take much higher priority as a standing national commitment.

On the political side of the line similar policy-shaping bodies have to be kept in action, such as National Security Councils or special committees of the Cabinet. Domestic politics, foreign policies, resource requirements and media policies all have to be integrated so that sophisticated political guidance for military operations is available at short notice. The intelligence requirements on both the political and military sides are more complex than in the days where the enemy was known and under close study the whole time. In short, armies have to think much harder about the upper levels of the command chain than was the case during the Cold War. And politicians have to understand more about what their armed forces can and cannot do in a wide variety of situations.

Handling the media has never been an easy task for armies in the field, and particularly so since the advent of television journalists in combat zones. As the capability of the media increases, and the hold of television on the public mind, and indeed the thinking of politicians, strengthens, the potential of the media for both help and harm has grown exponentially. We can all think of episodes in recent years where reporters, often acting perfectly correctly, have changed the way in which their home audiences view a particular commitment. The effectiveness of armies is now significantly dependent on their skills in relating to and helping the media representatives. And often those same media people will give soldiers a direct link to the home viewers that can strengthen their hands. The converse is also true. There is no choice but for soldiers to learn to become articulate spokespersons while taking part in demanding missions. At the same time soldiers also have to know more about when to keep the media at arm's length and how to do this without such action becoming in itself counterproductive.

The third aspect of political military relations worth mentioning is the growing need for armies to acquire political visibility, in other words to attract the attention of individual politicians, despite all the counter-attractions. This of course does not imply any direct involvement in the political process, other than to make sure that extremely busy political leaders are as aware of their soldiers' needs as they are of the requirements and activities of their other key servants of state. Politicians, with few exceptions, will not take an active interest in their army unless they are invited to do so and find it interesting. They need to be brought in to exercises, discussions, actual operations (where, as Michael Heseltine and Paddy Ashdown have shown, there can be useful photo opportunities), training and personnel administration. Relevant constituency MPs, members of parliamentary committees, and senior office holders in all of the political parties in the Parliament have to be invited in and then handled effectively. This duty belongs not only to Chiefs of Staff and force commanders: it also rests with unit and sub-unit commanders. At least a substantial proportion of politicians seems ready to find the services interesting and engaging, once they can be prised away from other commitments. But armies now have to compete keenly and effectively with other causes when it comes to gaining the attention, understanding and help of key legislators. Soldiers must hone their skills or become marginalised.

#### *4. The Implications of Technological Change*

The impact of these changes in strategic context, personnel availability and the political-military relationship is compounded by rapid change in military technology. To an audience such as this I do not have to list the major elements of the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs. Rather let me focus on some of the recent discussion which has ensued in Europe and the United States on what conclusions should be drawn from our rapidly changing technological context.

One of the most provocative and best thought through of works recently published is Douglas Macgregor's *Breaking the Phalanx: A New Design for Landpower in the 21st Century*. His essential thesis is that the old pattern of massed armies, in which the separate arms and services co-existed with a substantial degree of independence, needs to be replaced by a more closely integrated formation, the Joint Task Force. Where is the originality in this idea, you may ask, as we have all heard about joint warfare and joint task forces for some time now? Macgregor, a cavalry Colonel in his mid-forties, has taken this idea further than most of its exponents in terms of thinking through the consequences of moving, or of failing to move, towards a new model for armies of the 21st century. The analysis is done very much from a United States' point of view. The key questions of the book, in Macgregor's words, are these:

Is landpower essential to American strategic dominance? Can the Army's elected and appointed leaders shape warfighting organizations that are skilled enough, smart enough, and enduring enough to manoeuvre within a joint framework through the treacherous environment of contemporary and future conflict? How do political and military leaders ensure crisp execution of complex operations and winning performance in battle without restricting human potential and the American soldier's individual brains and initiative?<sup>1</sup>

The debate in the United States, probably the most advanced in the world in terms of grappling with the implications of new technology, is focussed on the development of an army whose purpose is much more ambitious than that of any allied army. Indeed the issues of digitisation and battle space dominance have become so salient for the future of combat power that one wonders whether any other force would be remotely capable of standing up to the US Army as it might be structured and equipped under the Force XXI concept. But let us not forget how, in the Korean and Vietnamese wars, determined enemies simply transformed the nature of each conflict in ways in which the superior combat power of the United States Army was frustrated. The Chinese threatened an escalation in manpower terms which would have tipped the United States into a global war that it did not want. The Vietnamese accepted continuing inability to win on the battlefield in return for undercutting the essential basis of political support for America's war effort at home and abroad by making the war look unwinnable.

In the age of MRA, thinkers such as Macgregor would contend, such an enemy strategy would not work. A US Army structured, equipped and trained to fight as he prescribes, would make the price of opposition so terrible for any enemy that the longer term options of escalation or of a decisive political counteroffensive would no longer exist. And he may be right. Equally a major enemy might prove capable of bearing a huge cost and outlasting the staying power of the American public. However it is beside my purpose in this analysis to pursue those questions in the context of the US Army. Like America's European allies, the Australian Army has to grapple with some more modest issues.

Will the Australian Army be able to play its expected part in allied operations designed to strengthen international order, or to save a failing state from the consequences of its internal divisions? Will the Army as an integral part of the Australian Defence Force, be able in the worst case to defend Australia's national interests against an aggressor without substantial allied help? How much new technology will be needed to enable the Army to meet these objectives? How should the Army be structured? How should it be trained? These issues are all faced squarely in the Army 21 debate and I do not need to go over them again here.

But from the perspective of coalition operations, given that the US Army is moving ahead rapidly on the technology front, its allies in Europe and the Pacific do not have much option. If they fail to develop compatibility with the new American systems, they will be relegated to a flag-showing role at most. Interoperability demands that there should be a substantial commonality not only in procedures and operational methods but also in capabilities. We do not have the option of remaining undigitised. We may perforce have to leave the provision of theatre command and control systems to the Americans but we must all be able to connect with theirs, take in the huge flow of information that will be provided though it, and contribute in turn much as if we were a comparably sized part of the US Army. To do less is to guarantee relegation to an utterly inconsequential role. In terms of national defence, failure to utilise the information revolution could well be equivalent to giving the game away if an aggressor had already moved to exploit it for himself. Australia already has a useful lead in this field in regional terms. We can continue to make it very difficult for anyone else to use force directly against Australian interests if we stay intelligently ahead of the field in east and southeast Asia.

Many of the characteristics of the Information Age Army can be of great assistance in offsetting the traditional disadvantages of Australia's geo-strategic situation. The potential battle space is huge. The numbers of men and women who can be committed to its defence are very small. The needs for intelligence, strategic and tactical, and mobility are paramount. Weapons systems have to be highly accurate and powerful because for political and economic reasons we cannot carry out the saturation operations which the old technology requires to be effective. The only issues really for debate are the fields in which we wish to develop competence, the speed with which we move and the degree to which we will be dependent on the United States for any particular operational capability.

On the first two of these, the fields and the speed of development, it will not hurt to follow the US at some distance because it is bound to make some errors, expensive ones, in the process of developing new technology for operational purposes. It is in the process of equipping the 'land warriors' of the 4th Division with a suite of sensor, communications and computing equipment likely to cost over \$US250 million per divisional set. The first fit, tried in August 1997 in a brigade exercise, proved cumbersome in the extreme, with man loads of up to 100lbs, battery lives of the order of two hours, and connecting cables trailing everywhere. One of the platoon commanders described the kit as 'like wearing an octopus'. But when it worked it was wonderful. Troops had excellent vision by night and by day. They could detect others at considerable distances by radiation and movement. They could assemble and report a vast amount of information through their laptops. They could manoeuvre independently over great distance, swiftly, and stay ahead of their less well-equipped enemy's capacity to respond and retaliate. Despite all the initial problems of digitising an infantry division there is no doubt that the US Army will press ahead, in company with the other three American armed services, and embark on the development of a force which is considerably smaller than that of the Cold War, but with much greater combat power.

The question of dependence on the United States is essentially a political one, but it also has military aspects which will be familiar enough to anyone with experience in Korea or Vietnam. We are bound to differ in some points of operational doctrine, and in what we expect of our soldiers. We have to experiment and think hard about where the trade-off points are, and where our political preferences in extreme circumstances are likely to lie. Again, Australia faces problems similar in many ways to those to the European allies of the United States, and has much to gain by closely studying their approaches and progress.

### Conclusions

In conclusion let me return to my opening concern: the man in uniform, or in the 21st century context, the person in uniform. The effectiveness of military forces the world over is still determined largely by the skills and bravery of their soldiers. Admittedly the equipment, the organisations, the doctrines and the political-military interface are all extremely important, but the central element remains the thinking human being, often tired, cold, frightened, hungry, alone and confused. People are still the most vital components of modern armies. Individual forces are rooted deeply in their national societies and produce their soldiers in different ways. Much of the technological development of the era ahead will have to be left to the Americans, but they do not have any necessary advantage in developing superior people for military service. All of us as allies and partners in helping the US to maintain respect for international law contribute on much more level terms when it comes to developing soldiers and commanders. We can do this more effectively as part of a team effort, in close contact and dialogue with each other.

The Australian Regular Army has enhanced Australia's reputation. Small, thinly stretched and starved of funds as it has been in the past, it has none the less gone ahead and won confidence at home and abroad. It would be nice to think that in 50 years time, when the centenary of the ARA is being marked, Australia will still be one of the small group of preferred partners that other states want alongside them when trouble threatens. The key element will remain those plain, russet-coated captains who know what they fight for and love what they know.

### Endnotes

1. Douglas A Macgregor, *Breaking the Phalanx: A New Design for Landpower in the 21st Century* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1997), p 3.