

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

***THE FUTURE***  
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I wish to talk about what we are doing in the Army at the moment. My starting point is the post-Vietnam era and the sorts of considerations we had to make when we started to look at the realities that emerged after President Nixon's announcement of the Guam Doctrine in 1969. Nixon stated that nations had to be responsible for their own defence within their own regions and the United States would only engage in their defence at the higher levels. When we came back to Australia, moving away from the forward defence policies that had taken us up to the Vietnam War from the Second World War, and we looked around us, we discovered that we had no defence infrastructure. Certainly we had some Second World War infrastructure, mainly mobilisation and industrial infrastructure in the southeast, but we lacked a proper command and control system. We had no effective intelligence systems. We had no effective surveillance systems. We did not have a range of air bases in the north, nor did we have naval bases which could project power along the maritime approaches to the continent. All of those things were important when we had to think about defending ourselves in a self-reliant way in a regional context.

And so we were confronted with a very significant problem of where we were going to get the resources from to do this sort of work. It meant a readjustment in the organisation of the total organisation. It also entailed a very quick realisation that unless we got into harness with the Navy and the Air Force and indeed the civil community, we were not going to be able to do this.

Now, as the historical record shows, the harmony required has not always existed between the services; and it has taken a long time for us to reach a satisfactory level. Throughout this period, of course, we in the Army have fiddled around with the Army structure—first of all combat development guides and Army development guides and so on—seeking some sort of a consensus amongst ourselves, which we could then pass up the line into the joint and politico-strategic environment and get a measure of consensus on the way we should go.

The truth of the matter was that development of force structure priorities within the Department of Defence was a very difficult issue throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It created a lot of acrimony within the organisation. The mechanisms were discordant, to put it mildly, and it was not until the end of the 1980s that we actually produced a Joint Staff, which was capable of conducting a Joint Force Structure Review, which would then determine a framework for the development of the Defence Force.

I was closely involved in this process. I took over from John Coates in 1989 as Assistant Chief of Defence Force Policy. My first task was to address the issue of the higher ADF staff arrangements and processes. This was a difficult task, I might add, but I was given the period from March to May to produce a plan because there were a number of political deadlines associated with it, and as a consequence of that we determined the need to develop a long-term plan for the development of the Defence Force, with a clear set of Defence priorities within which the rest of the staff would be able to get on with the process of developing the force structure, equipment and command and control systems that went with that.

I became Chief of Defence Force Development in 1990 as a consequence of that review, and in 1991 we commenced our first Joint Force Structure Review, the primary purpose of which was to produce a ten year development plan to provide that long-term framework. When we got into this process, we had to question each of the Services about their development basis.

What were they developing their force structure on? When it came to Army, I have to tell you that what Army came forward with was not very convincing.

The idea that we have to have a divisional structure because it is the divisional structure that allows us to develop all the capabilities that we need, is not a very persuasive argument in this sort of forum. But that was the basis on which we had developed the Army throughout the 1970s and 1980s. We got away with the Force Structure Review by virtue of the fact that there was agreement that the Army had to move to the north in order to move along with the bases in the north and we also got away with it to some extent by the development of the Ready Reserve as an offsetting process, as a way of producing force structure on a much broader basis and cheaper cost.

But there was still a lot of unfinished business out of that Force Structure Review, and we still lacked the means to convince people in the defence environment that our force structure priorities were something that they should finance with gleeful certainty that this would be the way for the future, and it was not until after the 1994 White Paper which actually foreshadowed an Army Force Structure Review that we conducted the Army in the 21st Century Review.

I was involved in this from quite an early time. My instructions, so far as they were appropriate at that stage to those involved, were that whatever we did, it had to be bold and innovative, otherwise it would not be able to capture the agenda. But of course it had to be totally relevant to the defence view coming out of the strategic guidance and in that sense had to be part of a joint approach to the development of force structure for the defence of the country, and indeed to enable us to operate with allies both in the region and further abroad in international endeavours.

So the Army 21 Review was carried out not as an Army review but as a Defence review and it was carried out under the steering group of the Vice Chief of the Defence Force and the Deputy Secretary Strategy and Intelligence. Of course there was a very large Army profile in this process and of course whatever we came up with had to have real substance in it. It had to go through a process of analysis and wargaming, and at the same time it had to embrace a broad cross-section of the army in the process so that at the end of the day whatever was agreed at the top had some solid foundation in the army itself.

What did we come up with? Well, essentially we came up with a requirement for a standing army of 53,000. A 53,000-person army consisting of seven Task Forces and a Special Forces group. The idea of these task forces was that they were not simply designed to defend northern Australia, they were designed to operate in the 21st century and to take advantage of the emerging technology which we were becoming increasingly aware of through our association with American and European developments in these things.

What is a task force? I hear people talking about Brigade Groups and I guess we are comfortable with Brigade Groups, but this actually steals something from the idea of a task force. A task force can be anything from 2000 people to 10,000 people. It is an organisation which is inherently flexible. We sent a task force to Vietnam. Essentially, everything that we have sent overseas since the Second World War has been a task force. It has been something put together specifically for the mission it had to carry out. It was not something based on established doctrine or organisation, although elements of it might have been. It was an organisation task-organised. The key elements of it are the command support systems which not only allow it to take on additional elements to adjust its fundamental structure, but also empower the organisation to draw on the joint command and control systems—and also the combined systems where we are operating in an alliance arrangement—and to draw power up from the field and push it into the command and control system. That essentially is what a task force is about. It is essentially designed to be commanded at a one-star level but could be commanded at two-star level.

Those are the structures we have come up with and that is the path we have set ourselves on. We are, of course, going through a process of trial and evaluation to work out exactly what those ingredients of the task forces should look like in the future environment and how those command support systems should work and how the command and control systems should be put in place. And indeed the logistic support which goes with these very flexible and mobile task forces is a complex issue. We have been through a process of analysing that. We have come to the conclusion that we can end up with a lighter and more mobile set of logistics, but I tell you that the logistics concepts we have produced mean that the first and second-line logistics units are taking on inherently the sort of characteristics which we used to attribute to combat and combat support units. The distinctions become less defined. Those sorts of organisations, of course, are designed to operate off the civil infrastructure and also to operate in an expeditionary climate with allies as well.

We are currently going through a process of redefining all our training structure to match the demands of this high technology structure. From Christmas this year, we will see the beginning of the Combined Arms Training and Development Centre at Puckapunyal, with the arrival of the School of Artillery there, colocating with the School of Armour, and eventually all combined arms combat team leaders will be produced out of this organisation. A Combined Arms Training and Development Centre includes a Combined Arms Training Wing and a Doctrine and Development Centre. The essence of the Doctrine Development Centre is to produce a battle laboratory environment which has the capacity to produce a synthetic environment which can integrate with the field training environment and which is translatable into the field.

Now why are we doing all of these sorts of things? Many of the issues that have driven us along this line were touched on by Professor O'Neill in his keynote address. I would simply add that a forum such as this is valuable because it puts our endeavours in the context of the past and tells us where we have come from and what is the essence of our existence.