
The relevance of current defence strategic policy in light of an altered international security environment

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Not since the 1960s have Australians been so anxious about their security, and not since the 1960s have security issues been so consistently at the centre of the national political agenda.

Aldo Borgu, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 14 August 2003

Introduction

1. The devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the tragic Bali bombings, the ongoing acts of violence being perpetrated by insurgents in Iraq, and the train bombings in Spain have resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent lives. The dramatic increase in terrorist activity over the past two and a half years has had a profound impact, globally. Citizens in many countries, including Australia, now feel considerably more vulnerable to terrorist attack than in recent history. From a military perspective, terrorism has been the catalyst for large scale US-led conventional operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, which Australia has been involved with through the ANZUS Alliance.

2. A key topic of debate raised during the Strategic Studies Module of the 2004 Australian Command and Staff Course is whether the events of the past three years, in particular terrorism, have altered the international security environment to the extent that current Defence strategic guidance requires an overhaul. The fundamental issues relate to the relevance of the national strategic objectives, the ADF's role and tasks, the structure of the ADF, the ADF's capability development priorities, and financial guidance, as espoused in *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force (D2000)* and later partially reviewed in *Defence Update 2003 (DU2003)*.

3. The area of most concern is whether current government guidance sufficiently articulates a national security strategy, particularly with respect to combating the threat of terrorism. The central argument of this paper will be that current Defence strategic guidance, inclusive of *D2000* and the *DU2003*, does not sufficiently address the threat posed by terrorism and its impact on Defence. This paper will examine the need for new national security guidance, which articulates a complete and coherent whole-of-government philosophy.

Definition of terrorism

4. As defined by the FBI, terrorism is 'the unlawful use of force against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in the furtherance of political or social objectives'.¹

5. Micro-terrorism is interpreted mostly as terrorist violence of local scope and/or of low intensity, which is contained within domestic borders. Macro-terrorism, also referred to as transnational terrorism, normally refers to highly developed, networked and/or state-sponsored terrorist organisations, which possess the ability to strike well beyond international borders where their actions are capable of a multilateral effect (i.e. not only on the target state, but also on neighbouring, allied or like states). The September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre is the best

example, as the impact of this strike, from both an economic and security perspective, reverberated strongly throughout many other nations.²

Expectations regarding national security strategy

6. A pre-eminent strategic studies speaker, whilst delivering a lecture to the 2004 Australian Command and Staff Course, was adamant that Australia does not currently have a comprehensive strategy to combat macro-terrorism.³ In the government's defence, the development of a white paper, addressing counter terrorism, is well underway, and should be published in the near future. Until its release, the utility of this white paper as appropriate strategic guidance will not be known. It is hoped that the pending white paper 'assesses the threats to our security at home and abroad, outlines the institutions and resources mobilised to meet the perceived threats, as well as the strategies to be employed to defeat terrorism'.⁴

7. Whilst there is strong support for improved counter-terrorism strategic guidance, the threat posed by terrorism should not be addressed in isolation, nor should Defence's contribution. Both issues should be important constituents of a national security strategy, which encompasses guidance covering all viable threats; conventional military operations both at home and abroad, terrorism, transnational crime, border control and illegal immigration, illicit drugs trade, cyber attacks against our economic infrastructure, pandemics, and natural disasters. Therefore, it could be argued that a stand-alone Defence strategic policy is no longer appropriate, and that Defence guidance should be rolled into whole-of-government direction. Defence's contribution to security threats other than terrorism and conventional military operations is beyond the scope of this paper.

8. Paul Dibb has stated that the ADF is generally not the government's principal counter-terrorism response option.⁵ The mistimed employment of the ADF, and the associated use of potentially lethal force might be politically or socially unacceptable, or it might unnecessarily escalate the situation. For this reason the government is normally inclined to explore other options before activating the ADF. Defence is one of many spokes attached to the 'national security hub', with other key examples being information (i.e. intelligence and surveillance), political, diplomatic, economic, and law enforcement. It is anticipated that a national security strategy would use this 'hub and spoke' approach to ensure that, above all else, a viable whole-of-government approach was advocated.⁶

9. With particular reference to Defence's contribution to counter terrorism, the key expectation is that, at a minimum, the following issues would be sufficiently addressed in any strategic direction:

- a. the status of counter-terrorism as a Defence priority;
- b. Defence's role and tasks regarding domestic and international counter-terrorism threats, be it in the form of conventional military operations or otherwise;
- c. the impact counter-terrorism obligations would have on force composition and capabilities, and readiness and mobility;
- d. the pivotal functions performed by the ADF's information network, both individually and as a component of the national framework, with a particular focus on intelligence, surveillance and communications; and
- e. the key counter-terrorism international alliances and regional engagement initiatives.

The utility of *D2000* as a strategy to combat terrorism

10. The specific threat posed by terrorism receives only minimal exposure in *D2000*, which is indicative of the security environment four years ago. Counter-terrorism did not rate a mention as an

ADF capability priority, however, the document did state that, 'the ADF maintains counter-terrorist capabilities for resolving situations that are beyond the capacity of our police forces'.⁷

11. *D2000* outlines that military operations other than conventional war, such as peacekeeping operations, moreso than non-military threats such as terrorism, will impact significantly on the ADF over the next decade and beyond.⁸ Furthermore, the document implied that non-military threats such as illegal immigration, drug smuggling and attacks on information systems rated above terrorism.⁹

12. Amongst the key themes of the document is that the fundamental determinant regarding the structure of the ADF should be the need to maintain a warfighting capability for the defence of Australia and its interests. A force of this nature could readily be adapted to contribute to military operations other than war and non-military security issues, but the reverse is not true.¹⁰

13. Taking into account the absence of counter-terrorist direction in *D2000*, and the enormous impact of macro-terrorist events, which occurred in 2001 and beyond, it was only logical that the Australian Government revisited its guidance concerning this nation's strategic interests and objectives. It was intended that the release of *DU2003* would satisfy this requirement.

The utility of *DU2003* as a strategy to combat terrorism

14. *DU2003* recognised that the overarching principles set out in *D2000* remained sound, although 'some rebalancing of capability and expenditure will be necessary to take account of changes in Australia's strategic environment'.¹¹ *DU2003* identifies that two of the most significant features in our changing security environment are 'the emergence of new and more immediate threats from terrorism and increased concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction'.¹² *DU2003* also addresses, albeit insufficiently, four important issues relating to counter-terrorism. Firstly, the *Update* mentioned the steps already taken by the government to improve security, both domestically and internationally, such as enhancements to Defence's counter-terrorist capabilities, the refocusing of intelligence efforts, and the establishment of key regional Memoranda of Understanding with Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.¹³ Secondly, *DU2003* emphasises the requirement to incorporate operational flexibility and adaptability into our strategic policy to accommodate the fact that Australia now resides in a less certain security environment. Thirdly, *DU2003* goes some way to promoting the need for an improved whole-of-government approach to combating terrorism, and finally, the government acknowledges that the threat of terrorism cannot be managed by one country alone. To that end, a specific bilateral or multilateral, regional and global approach is required, which is assumed to refer to alliance agreements.¹⁴

15. Unfortunately, the expectation that *DU2003* would adequately address the shortcomings of *D2000* was not fulfilled. *DU2003* did not provide the anticipated guidance regarding the impact terrorism has had on Australia's strategic objectives or the principal roles of Defence. The observation that *DU2003*, like *D2000*, fails to provide an appropriately robust and unambiguous counter-terrorism strategy may well be supported by the fact that the government is currently developing a specific white paper on the subject matter.

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Roles and tasks

16. *DU2003* broadly mentions that due to a diminished threat there is less likely to be a need for ADF operations in defence of Australia. Furthermore, it is the government's view that if the current threat of international instability continues, due to prime factors such as macro-terrorism, there are

likely to be increased calls on the ADF for operations, both conventional and otherwise, in Australia's immediate neighbourhood and beyond.¹⁵

17. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) shares a similar outlook to government by indicating that future military operations undertaken by the ADF are most likely to be expeditionary, and joint and coalition in nature, which will involve a wider range of contingencies.¹⁶ This is consistent with another comment made by ASPI that the 'US now has a far greater willingness to act against any perceived threat to its security', which has potential implications for the US's main allies (UK and Australia).¹⁷

18. In light of the current positions maintained by government and ASPI, there appears to be a need to review the overarching guidance concerning Australia's long-term strategic objectives and the principal tasks of the ADF, which are espoused in *D2000*.¹⁸ Furthermore, there really is no firm guidance pertaining to the potential role of the ADF regarding the threat of terrorism in Australia.

Force structure and readiness

19. Professor Dibb's position on force structure accords with the government's stance that 'any rebalancing of the ADF will not fundamentally alter the size or structure of Defence'.¹⁹ However, the government indicates that there is likely to be an increased emphasis on readiness, mobility, and interoperability, but does not elaborate further.²⁰ On one hand ASPI maintains a similar view concerning force structure, while on the other it clouds the issue by stating 'that operational flexibility and adaptability should become the primary force structure determinants, based on the potential complexity of future coalition operations and the need to provide niche capabilities'.²¹ ASPI's comments imply that a paradigm shift is necessary, which would suggest that restructuring is required.

20. None of the parties are sufficiently clear as to what extent the structure of the ADF should alter. The likely main cause is a lack of clarity regarding the status of counter-terrorism as a Defence priority, and the role Defence should play as a pivotal contributor to national security imperatives.

Capability development

21. As outlined in *DU2003*, the government's position is that there will need to be a review of future capability development priorities, taking into account that a substantial budgetary increase is unlikely. Although an initial review of the Defence Capability Plan was undertaken in 2003, Professor Dibb is critical that a more thorough re-examination has not taken place. However, he qualifies this by stating that it 'would be a grave mistake to respond to the serious issues of the moment by risking the high-technology plans for the ADF of the future'.²²

22. An important observation is that the effective use of information is at the heart of Australia's defence capability, which appears to be the only universally agreed topic on this subject. Accordingly, the government has incorporated significant enhancements to its intelligence, surveillance and communications capabilities.²³ This stance is in alignment with ASPI's view that the frontline in combating terrorism is intelligence.²⁴

Financial guidance

23. The present Defence annual budget sits at around 1.9 per cent of GDP. Professor Dibb states that the current budget is insufficient to fund a force capable of protecting the nation and the region, as well as contributing to coalition operations further afield. Professor Dibb is adamant that a budget

'train smash' is looming. Ideally, Professor Dibb indicates that a budget in the vicinity of 2.8 per cent GDP, which represents an increase of roughly \$9 billion, would be more appropriate, but he acknowledges that this is unlikely to occur.²⁵ Alan Dupont supports the view that it is unlikely Defence will receive an increase, and that any reconfiguration of the ADF will have to be carried out within existing budget parameters.²⁶

Summary of the national security policy situation

24. At present, we are faced with a potentially outdated Defence White Paper, a Defence Update accused of lacking substance, and a pending Counter Terrorism White Paper unlikely to shed any real light on the matter.²⁷ The nature of current guidance is piecemeal and arguably incomplete. Domestically, what further complicates the situation is the division of powers and the allocation of responsibilities between commonwealth, state and local governments. Furthermore, while the Attorney-General's portfolio has become the national security entity, the identification of an appropriately equipped lead agency for the purpose of assuming overall command of national security incidents is not apparent. Derek Woolner from the Australian Defence Studies Centre indicates that while the National Security Cabinet would play an instrumental role in managing a security incident, it would not lead it.²⁸

25. To improve the situation, the issue of national security should be addressed as an entity to ensure that a cohesive, efficient and appropriately led whole-of-government approach is developed. This philosophy should encompass the likes of Defence, and Foreign Affairs and Trade strategic policy, which are currently autonomous. Australia is in need of a national security strategic policy which, as a minimum, addresses the full spectrum of domestic and international security threats, outlines a national security framework, appoints a lead agency, assigns responsibilities to the interdependent parties involved, and identifies international alliances and regional engagement initiatives.

Conclusion

26. The international security environment has altered markedly since the September 11 attacks of 2001. The emergence of new and more immediate threats from terrorism, and increased concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have become priority issues, which have already had a significant impact on Defence, and the broader government community.

27. The central argument of this paper has been that current Defence strategic policy does not sufficiently address the threat posed by terrorism and its impact on Defence. There continues to be debate, particularly by pre-eminent strategic thinkers such as Paul Dibb, Alan Dupont and Aldo Borgu, as to whether the changes in the international security environment warrant an overhaul of Defence's strategic policy. The belief is that, as a minimum, elements of *D2000* are out of date, and that *DU2003* lacks any real substance. Furthermore, few people hold any real aspirations concerning the utility of the government's pending Counter Terrorism White Paper. A recommended alternative to this fragmented approach is that a national security strategic policy is developed, which addresses the full spectrum of domestic and international security threats; espouses a whole-of-government approach; and provides direction concerning key inter-agency roles and responsibilities.

28. The security of Australia's sovereignty and its interests is reliant on an ADF, which possesses a set of capabilities that will be flexible enough to provide government with a range of military options across a spectrum of credible threats, in accordance with national priorities. At present it is felt that the ADF is being hamstrung by a lack of strategic clarity. Until this issue is resolved, the accuracy of key Defence issues such as roles and tasks, force structure, future capability development imperatives, and financial guidance will remain clouded.

Endnotes

1. Maryland Emergency Management Agency, Domestic Preparedness Division, US, viewed 25 Apr 04, <www.mema.domestic-preparedness.net/glossary.html>.
2. Maxmilián Strmiska, Autumn 2001, 'Current Challenges to Conceptualisation and Typology of Terrorism', *Central European Political Studies Review*, viewed 25 Apr 04, <<http://www.iips.cz/seps/clanek.php?ID=60>>.
3. Visiting Lecturer's details suppressed due to Chatham House Rule.
4. *The Australian*, 30 March 2004, Article by Patrick Walters—'White Paper to outline security threat'.
5. Professor Paul Dibb, 2003, Blake Dawson Waldron public policy lecture—*Does Australia Need a New Defence Policy?* p. 3.
6. Visiting Lecturer's details suppressed due to Chatham House Rule.
7. Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000—Australia's Defence Policy*, p. 13.
8. *Defence 2000*, p. viii.
9. *ibid.*, p. 13.
10. *ibid.*, p. 12.
11. Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's National Security—A Defence Update 2003*, pp. 5–6.
12. *loc. cit.*
13. *ibid.*, pp. 9, 14 and 24.
14. *ibid.*, pp. 5–6 and 13.
15. *Defence Update 2003*, p. 9.
16. Aldo Borgu (ASPI), August 2003, Address to the Royal United Services Institute of QLD—*Structuring the ADF for Australia's New Strategic Environment*, p. 4.
17. *ibid.*, p. 2.
18. *Defence 2000*, pp. xi–xii.
19. Professor Paul Dibb, pp. 2–3.
20. *Defence Update 2003*, p. 6.
21. Aldo Borgu (ASPI), p. 7.
22. Professor Paul Dibb, pp. 2–3.
23. *Defence 2000*, p. xv.
24. Aldo Borgu (ASPI), p. 4.
25. Professor Paul Dibb, 2003, p. 6.
26. Alan Dupont, October 2001, Article—*Australia: Security needs overhaul to counter new menaces*, p. 1.
27. *The Australian*, 30 March 2004, Article by Patrick Walters—'White Paper to outline security threat'.
28. Derek Woolner, Centre for International Strategic Analysis, September 2002, *Article—What Next?*, p. 8.

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