

**‘CONTROL AND PROTECT’:
A DEFENCE STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

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Military conflicts can be categorised as either wars of necessity or wars of choice. This is a critical distinction which can quickly give rise to uncomfortable thoughts. Without exception, wars lead to injustice and depravity. They also invariably generate unintended consequences, which may turn out to be worse than the alleged *causus belli*.

A case can be made that of the many conflicts in which Australians have fought only the Second World War was a war of necessity. In other words, it was our free choice to participate in World War I, Malaya, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Sixty thousand Australian deaths from a conflict that was supposed to be won by Christmas 1914 is all that needs to be said about the unintended consequences of the Great War, while it will be years before we understand the full repercussions of the campaigns against ‘terror’ in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Traditional Australian Defence Strategy

Since federation, Australian defence strategy has oscillated between two main forms, expeditionary campaigns and the defence of Australia, with the former being the dominant model. Within that broad framework, Australian forces commonly have been subsumed as a component part of a larger coalition force, a fate which in general has rendered irrelevant any Australian voice in shaping higher strategy. Moreover, and without denigrating the courage and professionalism of the service-men and -women concerned, frequently that fate has also rendered irrelevant Australia’s warfighting efforts. For example, it may be displeasing to hear but it is nevertheless true that in Vietnam and Iraq the operations conducted by Australian Army, Navy and Air Force contingents were of no consequence whatsoever to the ultimate outcome.

Indeed, within the expeditionary model generally – a category that covers some nine decades - few instances can be found in which Australian forces have played an independent and/or decisive role. In other words, an inference of political tokenism as the *raison d’être* for our expeditionary campaigns – that is, for our wars of choice - would be justified.

Expeditionary Wars of Choice

The defining characteristic of the expeditionary model is that armed forces from one or more nations are deployed to the territory of one or more other nations. One man's 'expedition' is, of course, another man's 'invasion'.

The deployment of invasion forces immediately alters the dynamics of war. By definition, the land component of those forces will have to fight amongst the people of the invaded country, a circumstance which almost invariably creates profound social, cultural and political tensions. In turn, those tensions may fundamentally affect the concept of 'victory'. Military operations in themselves rarely provide a satisfactory answer to the often extraordinarily complex socio-political issues that they unleash; on the contrary, consistent with the vexed tradition of unintended consequences, they may well make things worse. The US-led war in Vietnam provides a salutary case study.

American expectations of a quick victory underwritten by apparently overwhelmingly superior military power were soon frustrated by the enemy's remarkable resilience and the strong popular support for the Viet Cong throughout South Vietnam. As American and Australian strategists slowly began to gain some vague inkling of the powerful political and cultural forces that were at the heart of the struggle, they launched a massive civil aid program intended to win the hearts and minds of the local population. But the delusion that foreign armies could fight a war amongst the people when more often than not those people and the enemy were one and the same invalidated that program from the outset. Neither senior army officers nor their political leaders seemed to comprehend the stunning contradiction inherent in sending soldiers into a village one week to build schools, wells and market places, then several weeks later sending other soldiers into the same village to kill and maim its residents or to destroy their livelihood.

A Uniquely Australian Defence Strategy

Neither the expeditionary model nor the defence of Australia model is suitable for the 21st century. As the respected American soldier-scholar Colonel Douglas Macgregor has noted, the former is now a crude remnant of a bygone era in which predominantly white, predominantly European, predominantly Christian armies could stampede around the world invading countries their governments either didn't like or wanted to control. And as the debate which followed the

release of the defence policy paper *The Defence of Australia 1987* indicated, the latter is unduly passive.

The start point for any defence policy determination should be the classic strategic continuum of 'Shape-Deter-Respond'. In Australia's case, our unique geostrategic circumstances reveal the paramount importance of shaping our environment and detering threats. That is, our focus should be on the top end of the continuum rather than on the lower end, as is the case with the expeditionary model. 'Respond' should be a final resort, not a preferred first option.

The emphasis on 'shaping' and 'detering' also resolves the excessively defensive posture implicit in the defence of Australia model.

Defined as 'control and protect', Australia's strategy for the 21st century provides an effects-based solution to our security needs and signifies that we will:

- Control our strategic environment,
- Protect our values, and
- Protect our friends and allies.

Militarily the strategy would exploit our comparative advantages instead of responding to those of our opponents. Drawing on our key advantages of high quality people, advanced technology, and the ability to fight with knowledge superiority and precision, from a distance, the strategy reflects how we want to operate, not how our enemies want us to operate. Thus, the Australian Defence Force would be operating asymmetrically.

'Control and protect' directly addresses Australia's 21st century circumstances because it:

- Supersedes both the expeditionary and defence of Australia models,
- Unambiguously distinguishes between wars of necessity and wars of choice,
- Minimises the risk of unintended consequences,
- Does not invent threats,
- Recognises that there are things we cannot do, or should not do, and
- Is not an adjunct to someone else's policy.

Summary

Neither of Australia's two traditional defence postures is relevant to 21st century values, politics, demographics, or security developments. They should be replaced by 'control and protect', a strategy uniquely suited to Australia's comparative advantages, and to its present and future.