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Submission: Thinking differently about Defence

The stated aim of the ADF is to defend Australia against 'armed attack'.

Traditionally 'armed attack' is taken to mean a deliberate act of armed aggression by a foreign power on Australian soil targeting Australian people and our infrastructure. This has not occurred for over 60 years.

Even if the definition of 'armed attack' encompasses the threat of a terrorist attack, we have to date been largely incident free.

But if we broaden our definition of 'armed attack' to encompass the frequent attacks of nature through bushfire, cyclone, flood, drought, hailstorm and even the occasional plague, our national 'defence' of Australia is sadly lacking.

Attacks of nature have the potential to cause the greatest property loss and damage, environmental destruction, loss of livelihood, significant personal distress, community dislocation and all too often, the tragic loss of life.

Yet this aspect of defence is not the province of the Australian Defence Force. The ADF cannot assist unless it is called upon to do so by the relevant State Government.

While border security and management of Australian territorial waters are the province of Customs and Immigration, lately the ADF has played an upfront role in the surveillance and policing of our waters.

If we can accept it is legitimate for the ADF to have a role in the 'defence' of Australia against illegal trafficking (of drugs, people and fish), then it is legitimate to extend the role of the ADF to the 'defence' of Australia against attack from the forces of nature - particularly as Australia's weather patterns become more extreme?

State Emergency Services are stretched to the limit, continually under-funded and lacking in available personnel (despite the overwhelming commitment of volunteers). Yet the range of natural disasters Australia encounters year-in year-out is the norm of our climate. These attacks aren't going away any time soon.

Though the ADF can be called in by a State Government when risk is high and the available State resources are stretched, this is not a designated priority of the ADF. The ADF's current focus is geared to the 'defence' of Australia against an armed attack by a foreign power. What type of training are ADF personnel given in fighting bushfires, flood levee construction or evacuation of people under threat during a natural disaster? Is it anything like the training that is mandatory for SES volunteers?

If the ADF were to become the National Emergency Services Force, what might it look like in practice? Perhaps something like:

- Basic training to Senior First Aid Certificate level, followed by an introduction to each of the various 'disaster scenarios' the National Emergency Service is likely to encounter - bushfire / cyclone / flood / search & rescue / earthquake with an emphasis on the skills needed across all of scenarios: assessing the extent of the disaster, establishing lines of communication and control, medical triage and assistance, evacuation protocols, administration centre operations, and victim and trauma management.
- Recruits would be expected to serve a minimum 12 months in Emergency Services and to train for a specific disaster scenario such as bushfire or flood.

- Specialist Units would be set up under the National Emergency Services Force to cover:
    - o Emergency evacuation (in Australia and overseas)
    - o Disaster response (in Australia and overseas) - including the ability to establish temporary accommodation, to set up water treatment and supply, to provide medical assistance and to establish emergency communications and identification processes
    - o Peace keeping and international policing would have their own specialized units - with the personnel trained for actual peace keeping - not just be expected to modify combat skills for peace keeping duties
    - o Coastal and border surveillance - with several subgroups depending on the type of surveillance to be undertaken (eg fishing or people smuggling)
    - o A Search and Rescue unit - geared to managing the search function both on land and across our coastal waters
 There would still be a need for
    - o A Tactical Response (SAS equivalent) unit - skilled in responding to siege &/or covert operation situations
    - o A Defence Intelligence unit - that undertook surveillance of communications and security operations - the equivalent of the current Defence Signals Directorate, and
    - o A Strategic Defence unit, where armed engagement is considered a National priority - such as in Afghanistan - and where Australia decides it has a role to play as part of a joint UN force.
  - Finally, there would be a specialist unit geared for re-orienting and deploying the Emergency Services forces as an armed defence force should circumstances warrant it - ie, if ever there was a real direct threat to Australia.
- Under this structure, recruits would be able to opt for their preferred area of specialized skill after they have completed 12 month initial training.

This model still requires elements of the current ADF eg, naval and airforce capability - for coastal surveillance, search and rescue, and to transport personnel and resources to the scene of any activity - either here or overseas. Likewise a national emergency services force would utilize the existing skills of the ADF in disaster response as deployed following the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 - but without military overtones.

What is different about this model is its underlying principles and values.

Whereas the current ADF appears to be based on principles that:

- armed aggression means an armed response.
- combat readiness is the best means of deterring armed aggression against Australia.
- Australia can only fulfill its place as a middle ranking power in the world if it is able to actively participate in the international theatre of war whenever this is considered in Australia's interest.

In contrast the National Emergency Services Force model is based on the following values:

- The ability to protect one's country 'at home' against all forms of attack is a higher priority than the ability to participate in a theatre of war elsewhere in the world
- Limited resources are best directed to the areas of greatest need
- Armed response is not necessarily the best response to every form of armed aggression

I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

I agree to my submission being quoted in the Community Consultation Report