

## **The Adaptive Army Post-Afghanistan: The Australian Army's Approach Towards *Force 2030***

John Caligari

The Army after Afghanistan will be different to the Army of today, but not only because of the lessons from fighting in Afghanistan. The Army over the past fifteen years has been cultivating its intrinsic intellectual and cultural approach to adaptation. This has been and will continue to be necessary to engender the right approach to adapting in order to rapidly field all military responses required by government. In addition, the Army must select the right force generation objective. For too long, possessing a greater number of one-off capabilities outweighed the ability to sustain a consistent effort. The Australian Defence Force's (ADF) commitment to Afghanistan has reminded the Army that it needs to more carefully consider the force generation objective of sustaining the effort for a long period—reversing the trend of breadth at the expense of depth. And the Army must continue to pay careful attention to the significant investment it has in the Defence Capability Plan (DCP), and ensure it is delivered effectively.

By combining this approach to adaptation with the renewal and enhancement program<sup>1</sup> directed in the *Defence White Paper 2009: Force 2030*, the Army is increasing its capacity to respond, to adapt, and to sustain operations in an increasingly unpredictable and complex environment. However, there are risks in this approach to which the Army must be alert.

### **An Intrinsic Intellectual and Cultural Approach to Adaptation**

The most important factor in shaping the Army after Afghanistan will be the further development and enhancement of an intrinsic intellectual and cultural approach to adaptation.

When Lieutenant General Hickling became Chief of Army in the late 1990s, he shifted the Army to a more intellectually sound approach to modernisation and development. The Army started working on describing the 'golden

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<sup>1</sup> The program, known as the Strategic Reform Program, is represented in the Defence Capability Plan (DCP) as a consequence of work done in Defence toward setting the conditions for *Force 2030*.

thread of logic' and a methodology of experimentation that would substantiate requirements for a particular structure or capability, at a level far beyond just professional military judgement. The Army's force development staff devised a conceptual and experimentation framework that enabled them to identify, explain, and justify the need for change. Lieutenant General Leahy employed this approach and the experimentation tools effectively when he argued for the armoured capability of the Army today. He encouraged debate and collaboration in the company of those with whom the Army might not have normally discussed its thoughts on development of its future. This intellectual approach also supported the argument for the raising of two additional battalions.

Today, the Australian Army looks to develop and modernise through its *Adaptive Army* Campaign. Early achievements included significant changes to the higher command and control arrangements of the Army, wherein the Army aligned its two-star commands to its two most important tasks: preparing the Army for 'a' war; and preparing designated forces for 'the' war (that is, for the present, principally Afghanistan).<sup>2</sup> With the experience of ten years in Afghanistan, this top-level example of adaptation responded to the most pressing challenge, and set a tone that has resonated through the rest of the Army. The culture of good ideas being presented and listened to is becoming a routine feature for soldiers at many levels. The Army has based its methodology for the Strategic Reform Program on this approach and is already yielding good results in reforming process and behaviour.

The Army will use this intrinsic intellectual and cultural approach to adaptation to make necessary future changes to its form and function, and ensure it remains at its most capable in the contemporary environment. Although this approach is developing well, it takes time for the approach to embed, but the Army is on the right road. The next real test will be in the quality of the Army's input to the Force Structure Review in 2013.

## **Army's Force Generation Objective**

Correctly identifying Army's Force Generation objective is fundamental to ensuring the Army adapts as necessary to changing circumstances and the environment. That objective must be the Army's readiness to deploy with an effective contribution to the joint force for the widest range of contingencies, and to be able to sustain its effectiveness for a prolonged period.

After the Vietnam War, the Army focused on having in its response 'golf bag' as many different types of 'clubs' as it could, to be sure it had forces with the

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<sup>2</sup> In readying its forces, the Army makes a distinction between preparing specifically for operations in current theatres—colloquially known as 'the' war—while acknowledging that the complex and uncertain nature of the current and future strategic environment requires the Army to be ready to commit forces to 'a' war—that is, any new mission that may exist anywhere along the spectrum of conflict, between humanitarian assistance and general war.

right collective skills and capabilities to defeat the widest array of threats and to cover the full spectrum of operations. This focus produced a broad range of specialised forces but without the depth required for effective force rotation. The Army has had, for example, light, mechanised, parachute and motorised forces, and even more specialisations within that, such as for amphibious, jungle and airmobile operations. This approach meant that the first force elements to deploy were pretty close to being perfect for the designated mission. Yet, the forces to follow required significant effort in equipping and training if they were to be as effective.

Fortunately, events did not require the Army to seriously sustain these deployments, so lack of depth did not present itself as a problem. The first real recognition of this issue of prolonged sustainment came with the development of the Land Combat Sustainment Model by Major General Abigail as the Land Commander in 2001. The scale of the Army's deployment to East Timor in 1999 initiated serious thinking about the implications of 'an Army of ones', which did not have the capacity to generate forces of equivalent standard and capability for a sustained campaign.

The shape of the Army has changed significantly since then, and is continuing to adapt to address the twin objectives of readiness and prolonged sustainment requiring force rotation. In the past eight years, the Army has been managing the growth of two additional infantry battalions and supporting force elements under the *Hardened and Networked Army* and *Enhanced Land Force* initiatives. These additional battalions have deepened certain capabilities towards attaining an Army of 'twos'. Moreover, the change to the Army's higher level command and control mentioned earlier has drawn together individual and collective training into a single Army Training Continuum under one two-star commander, now Commander Forces Command. With each change, opportunities for further adaptations present themselves. The combination of changes in attitude and in command and control has led the Army to recognise the opportunity presented by moving to a thirty-six-month force generation cycle. This new cycle will support better preparation of forces for 'a' war, while maintaining consistently high quality forces on current operations.

In a further adaptation, through the *Adaptive Army* Campaign, the Army is presently exploring the implications of standardising its three regular combat manoeuvre brigades,<sup>3</sup> and the second-order implications for the three supporting brigades<sup>4</sup> and the Army as a whole in its force generation context. This significant change is being planned under the codename Plan Beersheba. It is expected that this adaptation will make the Army's business

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<sup>3</sup> That is, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Brigades currently based in Darwin, Townsville and Brisbane.

<sup>4</sup> These are the 16<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade, the 17<sup>th</sup> Combat Service Support Brigade and the newly-formed 6<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Brigade.

of raising, training and sustaining all its forces more effective and efficient. It will also significantly simplify the introduction into service of new equipment, systems and structures. But most importantly, it will better enable the Army to generate 'like' forces for rotation on prolonged operations. This will become even more relevant as the Army grapples with how to sustain its part in the new amphibious capability, to achieve an amphibious ready element deployed on a continual basis.<sup>5</sup>

### **Achieving Force 2030**

The Army has a very large stake in the current DCP that needs to be managed carefully to ensure it effectively delivers the capabilities required. The integration of these systems as they achieve operational capability is of paramount importance to the Army. It is also important that as the need to adapt is identified, particular focus is placed on ensuring the capability requirements of the future are injected at the right place and time in the Force Structure Review process to gain appropriate recognition in the DCP.

Acquiring and introducing capability into service is a long process: technology, the environment and circumstances change over time, and require considered and constant monitoring by all stakeholders to ensure the right outcome. During the first phase of the *Adaptive Army* Campaign, the Army created a division in its Headquarters to manage this aspect of the Army's modernisation. The most important task being undertaken by this new Division is to establish priorities for the Army's development, and to ensure these priorities guide and integrate the Army's systems. To achieve *Force 2030*, three integration centres have been established in the past twelve months across multiple Defence divisions to ensure these priorities are addressed in the capability manager's (i.e. the Chief of Army's) best interest. They are *Diggerworks* (integration of clothing and equipment onto the soldier), the *Land Network Integration Centre* and the *Combined Arms Fighting System Integration Centre* (integration of all systems to produce an effective combat team). The integration effect of these three centres will be fundamental to the development of the Army after Afghanistan.

### **Risks to Success**

There are a few risks to the picture painted above.

The first risk involves the Army failing to recognise the time required to take full advantage of this intellectual and cultural approach to adaptation. Impatience when appreciating the full gamut of implications and consequences of ideas being considered for adapting the Army may result in inappropriately rushing the process. Moving too quickly leads to having to deal with too many unintended consequences. This risk results from a

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<sup>5</sup> This is the direction that Chief of Army and Chief of Navy have jointly given to respective Services for examination.

natural tension between the measured achievement of organisational objectives, and Army officers who have a predisposition for action and a desire to achieve too much inside their current posting tenure.

The second risk to the Army is the inability of other processes in Defence—over which the Army has little control—to adapt, in step. Many changes the Army might consider essential still need to conform to Defence interests, or are changes that only other Groups in Defence can effect. The Army will need to ensure that the Defence Organisation stays sufficiently informed to recognise the significance of what the Army is attempting to achieve, and is convinced that Army's intentions are in the best interests of the Defence of Australia and are therefore acknowledged as Defence priorities.

The third risk relates to the Army's failure to adapt at a rate that its stakeholders consider as appropriate and essential. One of these stakeholder groups is the Army's own soldiers, who have been given an expectation that when there is widespread acknowledgement of a need to adapt and everyone recognises a given adaptation as feasible, acceptable and suitable, the Army will deliver.

## **Conclusion**

The Army has come a long way since Lieutenant General Hickling revamped the Army's approach to modernisation, and embarked on a shift in culture toward harnessing the knowledge of its people and applying that to an intellectual approach to capability development. The Army has adapted significantly in the years since the 'golden thread of logic' was identified. It has adjusted its design objective from one of having multiple 'golf clubs' to an agile Army that can do a consistently good job by concentrating on foundation warfighting skills and being able to sustain a prolonged deployment with like forces. The first moves of the *Adaptive Army* Campaign have set the conditions for comprehensive force generation, and have aligned the Army's form and function to better deal with the integration of the significant magnitude of capability that the Army is bringing into service through the DCP in building the *Force 2030*.

An organisational climate that instils adaptive behaviour, and a command and control structure that is optimised to generate and sustain responses to *any* rather than *all* future contingencies, will be the hallmarks of the Army after Afghanistan.

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