
The Closing of the Australian Military Mind: The ADF and Operational Art

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This article argues that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has failed to keep abreast of conceptual developments and debates regarding operational art that have occurred in peer English-speaking militaries. This situation amounts to an unacceptable 'closing of the Australian military mind' which requires intellectual remedy. A revival of Australian operational art is necessary because in the globalised conditions of the early 21st century, the ADF is faced by a simultaneous requirement to be a global 'security contributor' and a regional 'security leader'. These parallel roles reflect the manner in which Australia's geopolitical position is being transformed through the emergence of a complex global-regional nexus in statecraft and strategy. The military requirements stemming from Australia's evolving global-regional interface must be met by the development of a new and dynamic ADF middle-power model of operational art. Australian operational art must seek to reflect a middle-power conceptual framework and should consciously seek to integrate two emerging ADF functions: *alliance force-provision* based upon global 'missions of choice' and *lead nation force-generation* based upon regional 'missions of necessity'. In order to develop a relevant middle-power construct of 21st century operational art, the ADF must embrace a number of reforms. These reforms include adopting a functional approach to operational concept development, improving joint doctrine, developing comprehensive campaign planning and introducing significant reforms into the joint professional military education system.

Operational art is at the centre of our thinking on the conduct of war. Operational art is the skilful employment of military forces to attain strategic goals through the design, organisation, sequencing and direction of campaigns and major operations. It translates strategy into operational and ultimately, tactical action.

Australian Department of Defence,
Joint Operations for the 21st Century, June 2007.

Since the late 1990s, the Australian profession of arms has neglected the development of operational art as an educational seed bed for developing future senior joint force commanders. The essential debates on the role of operational art in the battlespace of the 21st century that have occurred within the US, British and Canadian militaries over the past decade have not, to date, been formally evident within the contemporary Australian Defence Force (ADF). Weaknesses in the ADF's understanding of the theory and practice of operational art as the intellectual basis for future higher command have been camouflaged by tactical success in performing global missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the conduct of regional peace enforcement operations in East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

The pattern of recent global operations has highlighted the ADF's traditional role as a junior alliance partner and small-force provider in US-led coalition operations. In the latter missions, ADF military commitment at the tactical level has been used by the Australian Government to serve politico-strategic interests. Recent regional contingencies in East Timor and the Solomon Islands have involved the ADF in a more significant exercise of responsibility at the operational level. However, such missions have been shaped by a series of manpower-intensive stability operations that tend to sit uncomfortably with the ADF's highly technocratic, network-centric approach to warfighting as outlined in the 2007 publication, *Joint Operations in the 21st Century*.¹

Little attention has been paid within the ADF to developing operational art that reflects the unique and evolving global-regional nexus that characterises Australian statecraft and strategy in the 21st century. It is a nexus between European history and Asian geography and between American politico-strategic alliance and Asian politico-economic engagement. A complex mixture of globalism and regionalism is likely to be a permanent feature of Australia's 21st century geopolitical landscape. In a fast-moving world of globalised security, interwoven economics and intersecting information networks it will become increasingly difficult for Australia to neatly separate globalism and regionalism. Indeed, the co-existence of the Australian-American alliance with new security arrangements in both North-East Asia (with Japan) and in South-East Asia (with Indonesia) illustrates the parallel influence of globalism and regionalism in Australian foreign policy and security. In the future, the global-regional nexus of statecraft and strategy must be increasingly conceived as a single matrix and its oscillations and concurrencies carefully managed and balanced by the government in order to serve the national interest.²

In military terms, a consideration of Australia's global-regional nexus in statecraft and strategy has the illuminating effect of revealing the historical dichotomy in Australian warfighting practice between a high degree of tactical expertise on the one hand and a tradition of inexperience at the operational level of war on the other. Over the next decade, this dichotomy needs to be addressed by developing an innovative operational art for senior officers that is based on viewing Australia as a middle-power with global-regional military commitments that must be synthesised within a coherent framework of both capability and performance.

¹ Strategic Policy Division, *Joint Operations in the 21st Century* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2007).

² For the global-regional interface in Australian statecraft and strategy see Michael Evans, 'Overcoming the Creswell-Foster Divide in Australian Strategy: The Challenge for 21st Century Policy-Makers', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 61, no. 2 (June 2007), pp. 193-214; and Michael Evans, 'Towards an Australian National Security Strategy: A Conceptual Analysis', *Security Challenges*, vol. 3, no. 4 (November 2007), pp. 113-130.

This article is divided into four areas of analysis. First, it examines the current status of operational art in the 21st century paying careful attention to its applicability to middle powers such as Australia. Second, the paper examines the historical influence of junior partner alliance warfare in Australian warfighting, an approach that has created a strong tactical bias in military practice. Third, the paper examines the ADF's approach to developing a distinctive Australian operational art over the last decade. It is argued that ADF operational art is conceptually weak and has been characterised by the combination of an intellectually restrictive framework and the domination of technocratic considerations that have diminished its value as a process for developing generalship. In the fourth and final section of the paper, a case is made in favour of developing a new and more intellectually rigorous middle-power model of Australian operational art. Such a model is necessary to manage the complex military requirements of the global-regional nexus and to provide an essential foundation for the study of senior command.

Operational Art and its Relevance to Middle Powers

In order to understand the place of operational art in the Australian profession of arms and to analyse its meaning and relevance to the future ADF, it is necessary to undertake a brief analysis of the operational framework of warfare. Since the late 20th century, the three levels of war (strategy, operations and tactics) have formed a unifying way for the English-speaking Western profession of arms to view modern warfare. During the 1980s and 1990s, leading English-speaking militaries such as those of the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia all adopted the operational level of warfare and the operational art into their doctrine. At the time, the formal adoption of an intermediate operational framework represented a conceptual revolution in the English-speaking military world.³ Leading Western military theorists such as B.H. Liddell Hart and J.F.C. Fuller had long tended to view 'operations' as a form of 'grand tactics'. What mattered was the two-level classical paradigm of strategy and tactics defined by a quest for Napoleonic-style decisive battle.⁴ The classical paradigm has been well-described by the Russian military theorist G.S. Isserson as representing "the strategy of a single point" under which victory was sought by the use of tactical mass on a linear battlefield.⁵ In the early 1980s, the American theorist, Edward

³ The literature on this process is enormous. For good overviews see Clayton R. Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare* (London: Routledge, 1991); B.J.C. McKercher and Michael A. Hennessy (eds.), *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996); Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); and Anthony D. Mclvor (ed.), *Rethinking the Principles of War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005).

⁴ Walter Darnell Jacobs, 'The Art of Operations', *Army*, vol. 12, no. 4 (November 1961), pp. 60-64; Wallace P. Franz, 'Grand Tactics', *Military Review*, vol. LXI, no. 12, (December 1981), pp. 32-34.

⁵ James J. Schneider, 'The Loose Marble—and the Origins of Operational Art', *Parameters*, vol. 19, no. 1 (March 1989), pp. 85-98.

Luttwak, identified the lack of an operational level of war as a major conceptual weakness in Western military thinking and linked its absence to US defeat in the Vietnam War.⁶

The adoption of an intermediate operational framework in the 1980s firmly aligned the English-speaking world's military theory with the major changes in 20th century warfare—namely industrial technology, mass armies, extended fronts and the emerging information revolution. In combination, these factors had rendered 'single point' strategy based on tactical battles obsolete. The modern operational level of war emerged as the new means for linking strategy and tactics through distributed campaigning. The practical expression of military activity at the operational level came to be represented by the operational art which can be defined as

a component of military art concerned with the theory and practice of planning, preparing, conducting, and sustaining major operations and campaigns aimed at accomplishing operational or strategic objectives in a given theatre.⁷

The main function of operational art is to translate strategy by means of operational design into tactical actions that are coherently arranged by a commander in time, space and purpose. At its core, operational art is about the synchronisation of distributed operations conducted through manoeuvre in depth. To this end, operational manoeuvre differs significantly from classical manoeuvre. In classical manoeuvre, a commander usually moves tactically to gain positional advantage for the act of battle. In contrast, operational manoeuvre is about "relational movement in depth" that maximises a commander's freedom of action throughout a theatre of operations.⁸ It is important to note that the operational level of war and the operational art, while closely associated, are not necessarily synonymous. The operational level is defined by its connecting *position* between strategy and tactics and is often conceived in terms of the ascending hierarchy of the levels of war. In contrast, the operational art is cognitive and creative in character and is defined by the *function* that it performs in uniting strategy with tactics through the act of campaigning.⁹ As will be seen, this distinction is important to an understanding of the ADF view of operational warfare.

Today, it is widely accepted amongst Western military theorists, that skill in the operational art is not determined by the tactical outcome of encounter

⁶ Edward J. Luttwak, 'The Operational Level of War', *International Security*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 61-79.

⁷ Milan N. Vego, *Operational Warfare* (Newport, RI: US Naval War College, 2000), p. 2.

⁸ James J. Schneider, *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1992), p. 34.

⁹ Richard N.H. Dickson, *Operational Art in a Middle-Power Context: A Canadian Perspective* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, US Command and General Staff College, 2004), p. 8.

battles, but by an ability to mould an array of diverse tactical actions into a coherent ensemble of military force that serves policy and strategy. In modern warfighting, operational art depends on a suite of command skills: the skilful blending of multiple tactical actions; the exploitation of spatial and temporal depth rather than movement along decisive points; and upon an understanding that the destruction of mass and materiel in the field is but a means toward a broader goal of inflicting disruption on an enemy command and control system.¹⁰

Although the operational art is now well ensconced in much of Western military doctrine, it has not been without its critics. In recent years, there has been a sharp debate in Western circles over its future efficacy in an era in which a 20th century linear battlefield has been replaced by a 21st century non-linear battlespace. This debate has arisen for two main reasons. First, some theorists believe that the impact of new information technologies is merging the levels of war so permitting a return to an older 'strategy-tactics' paradigm. Second, operational art's roots in 'large wars' have raised questions in professional military circles concerning its enduring value in an age of 'small wars' that are defined by non-state actors and asymmetry. For Western middle powers such as Australia and Canada that have adopted an operational framework, but who possess strong countervailing tactical traditions and small defence establishments, the questions surrounding operational art's continued applicability in the first quarter of the 21st century are of particular relevance.

BLURRING THE LEVELS OF WAR: THE IMPACT OF EMERGENT TECHNOLOGIES ON OPERATIONAL ART

In recent years, information technologies have dramatically increased interpenetration between the previously discrete levels of war. In particular, the creation of a volumetric battlespace that simultaneously encompasses breadth, depth and height in operations has led some Western military theorists to predict the end of the levels of war and the irrelevance of both the operational level of war and the operational art. Critics such as Douglas Macgregor, David Jablonsky and Antulio J. Echevarria argue that the different requirements that once existed at the three levels of war have now been changed by the precision revolution and by advances in information technology.¹¹ Because of these advances, it is possible for the strategic level of war to influence tactical action directly. A digital battlespace makes it possible for a central strategic headquarters to employ multidimensional

¹⁰ See Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*.

¹¹ David Jablonsky, *The Owl of Minerva Flies at Twilight: Doctrinal Change and Continuity and the Revolution in Military Affairs* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1994); Douglas A. Macgregor, 'Future Battle: The Merging Levels of War', *Parameters*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Winter 1992-93), pp. 33-47; Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Rapid Decisive Operations: An Assumptions-Based Critique* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2002).

tactical means that can compress close, deep and rear battles into one continuous and simultaneous strike.

Precision technology effectively collapses a distributed operation into a virtual 'strategy of a single point' in which an array of enemy forces can be obliterated. Simultaneous 'interdependent maneuver' that delivers rapid movement and fires is now possible across all the three levels of war.¹² Accordingly, higher commanders can be empowered as omniscient 'electronic Napoleons' directing battle from computer screens so decreasing, or even eliminating, any need for either an operational level or for an operational art. In the words of David Jablonsky:

With time compressed over extended space and with that immense space rendered comprehensible by a technological *coup d'oeil*, an entire theatre can become a simultaneous battlefield where events, as in the days of Napoleon, may determine national destinies.¹³

While there can be little doubt that the levels of war are compressing and interpenetrating under the impact of networked technology, this process does not mean that the need for operational art has been eliminated.¹⁴ Technology has not changed the incalculable human aspects of warfare. Nor has it changed the capacity of enemies to adapt to new conditions and to employ a range of asymmetric strategies including insurgency and urban warfare that diminish the effectiveness of information age systems. Current operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq indicate that operational art remains highly relevant in structuring and sequencing tactical elements within an operational campaign design. Indeed, the 'lost victories' of the 2001-2003 US-led 'first-phase' campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively, are a cautionary warning of reliance on strategy empowered by information-age tactics. The initial phases of both campaigns demonstrate the problems that can occur in war when the careful synchronisation of strategy, policy and operations is overtaken by technocratic theories of 'shock and awe' powerfully leveraged through new global battlespace information systems and precision weapons.¹⁵

Technology also fails to address the key question of how, in the absence of an operational level, it is possible to reconcile the co-existence of high-level command with low-level control in a diverse complex, three-dimensional battlespace.¹⁶ Despite the role of information technology in creating an

¹² Echevarria II, *Rapid Decisive Operations: An Assumptions-Based Critique*, pp. 13-14.

¹³ Jablonsky, *The Owl of Minerva Flies at Twilight*, p. 65.

¹⁴ Vego, *Operational Warfare*, p. 622.

¹⁵ For recent critiques of US over-reliance on high-technology over military art, see Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006); and Thomas K. Adams, *The Army After Next: The First Post-Industrial Army* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006).

¹⁶ Major General J.B.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), p. 533.

increased interpenetration between the three levels of war, operational art continues to perform a vital function in preventing war from descending into a flurry of disconnected engagements governed only by the calculus of tactical attrition.¹⁷ In short, an intermediate operational level of warfare remains vital both for uninterrupted planning and effective higher command.

ASYMMETRY AND OPERATIONAL ART FOR MIDDLE POWERS

Since the end of the Cold War, the rise of smaller, asymmetric conflicts has raised the question whether Western middle powers allied to the United States in global military activity—notably Australia and Canada—actually require an independent operational level. Since most Australian and Canadian military activity tends to occur at the strategic-tactical interface the notion of an operational framework may not be relevant in a middle power context. To date, the debate over the operational art for middle powers has occurred in the militaries of Canada and Britain rather than in the ADF. The Canadian military theorist, Richard Dickson has outlined the parameters of the debate:

It could be argued that middle-powers [such as Canada and Australia] are incapable of exercising operational art, and perhaps do not require an independent operational level at all. In this case, their small, tactically focused militaries would only require an understanding of operational doctrine to the extent that permits them to integrate tactical forces into larger [US] alliance or coalition operations, and to effectively participate in coalition headquarters (HQ)—a requirement limited to a small number of senior commanders and staff officers.¹⁸

However, the idea that an operational level is not needed and that operational doctrine should be confined to the needs of alliance interoperability has not been embraced by the Canadian and British armed forces. On the contrary, both militaries have adopted the view that operational art is qualitatively different from strategy and tactics and represents a unique form of cognition for advanced militaries.¹⁹ It is a cognition that is applicable across the entire spectrum of conflict from low to high-intensity conflict and one that is not tied to the size of a force or of its command echelon. As Canadian military theorists note, it is the objective, not the mass a combat force generates—or the level of its command—that determines whether operational art will be applied in a mission. Operational

¹⁷ Vego, *Operational Warfare*, pp. 624-25.

¹⁸ Dickson, *Operational Art in a Middle-Power Context: A Canadian Perspective*, p. 2.

¹⁹ See Allan English, Daniel Gosselin, Howard Coombs and Laurence M. Hickey (eds.), *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives, Context and Concepts* (Kingston, Ontario: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005); and Markus Mäder, *In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence: The Evolution of British Military-Strategic Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era, 1989-2002* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

art is about the function and effectiveness a given force brings to bear in fulfilling strategic objectives.²⁰

The Canadian outlook towards operational warfare is shared by most British military theorists. For example, A.S.H. Irwin has argued that “large scale is not a prerequisite for the exercise of operational art”.²¹ Any military activity that contributes to the pursuit of a declared strategic aim can be considered to be operational in function. Indeed, the three main essentials of operational art—the linking of strategic aims with tactical actions, the synchronisation of operations in depth to sustain freedom of action and the focus on systemic disruption—are all dependent, not upon scale, but on function.²² In short, in advanced Western armed forces, skill in the operational art continues to remain a compelling professional capability for senior commanders to master. Without an operational framework, middle powers such as Canada and Australia are not capable of pursuing sovereign interests. In this respect, the cautionary warning of one leading analyst of the Canadian way of war is highly relevant to the Australian profession of arms:

Unless the Canadian Forces abandon any pretense of national sovereignty and distinct military autonomy, and are content to simply be absorbed as a few brigades, squadrons and vessels into grand coalitions, a serious search for first principles is overdue. Otherwise there can be little apparent justification for an expensive military establishment.²³

The Tactical Tradition in Australian Warfighting

Having outlined the character and relevance of operational art to the contemporary ADF, it is now possible to assess the role of operational cognition in Australian warfighting. In general terms, the Australian profession of arms has been heavily influenced by tactical, rather than by operational level factors. Historically, most of Australia’s 20th century military experience took the form of junior partner alliance warfare. This experience precluded the evolution of knowledge of the operational level of war and of expertise in the operational art.²⁴ An exception to Australia’s traditional role as a ‘dependent ally’ was the 1914 Australian campaign to seize German possessions in New Guinea and South West Pacific at the outset of World

²⁰ Dickson, *Operational Art in a Middle-Power Context: A Canadian Perspective*, pp. 31-38; Colonel James Simms, ‘Keeping the Operational Art Relevant for Canada: A Functional Approach’ and Colonel Pierre Lessard, ‘Reuniting Operational Art with Strategy: A New Model of Campaign Design for the 21st Century’, in English, et al, *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives, Context and Concepts*, pp. 293-312 and 331-63.

²¹ Brigadier A. S. H. Irwin, *The Levels of War, Operational Art and Campaign Planning*, The Occasional No. 5 (Camberley: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1993), pp. 3-5.

²² Dickson, *Operational Art in a Middle-Power Context: A Canadian Perspective*, pp. 34-35.

²³ William McAndrew, ‘Operational Art and the Canadian Army’s Way of War’, in McKercher and Hennessy (eds.), *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War*, p. 98.

²⁴ Michael Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance: Australia’s Strategic Culture and Way of War, 1901-2005*, Study Paper No. 306 (Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2005).

War I.²⁵ However, this independent campaign was soon eclipsed by the need to contribute tactical forces to the wider Empire effort in Europe and the Middle East—a need that began with Gallipoli in 1915.

The junior partner expeditionary role assumed by Australia during World War I set a pattern for Australian military contributions and higher command being performed at the tactical level. For example, during World War I, General Sir John Monash proved to be a brilliant corps commander. However, because Monash was subordinate to Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig he did not control the 1917-18 Allied campaign on the Western Front. Similarly, General Sir Harry Chauvel, commander of the Desert Mounted Corps in the Middle East was subordinate to the campaign planning of General Allenby. As David Horner puts it, in World War I

Australian officers had no experience of operational command, except by observing higher commanders at a distance or, in the cases of Chauvel, Monash and his Chief of Staff, Blamey, being responsible for the tactical implementation of the wider campaign plan.²⁶

During World War II, the tactical, expeditionary mode of junior partner alliance warfare continued. An exception was General Sir Thomas Blamey's role as Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces composed of twelve divisions. In this role, Blamey did assume operational-level responsibilities in the South-West Pacific campaign against the Japanese. In 1943-44, Blamey commanded the Allied campaigns in New Guinea in what has been described as "the high point of Australia's experience of operational level command".²⁷ However, these operations always remained subject to the broader campaign design determined by the Allied Supreme Commander, General Douglas MacArthur, as well as to the flow of American logistical resources. For these reasons, the US-Australian nexus at the operational level remained weak and underdeveloped for much of the South-West Pacific campaign with MacArthur setting the conditions under which Australian commanders operated.²⁸

In the 1950s and 1960s, the tactical tradition of Australian generalship continued in the 'forward defence' Cold War era campaigns in Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. There were, again, rare exceptions that allowed Australian commanders to serve at the operational level of war. For example, Air Vice Marshal Frederick Scherger served as Air Officer

²⁵ Ross Mallett, 'The Preparation and Deployment of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force', in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds.), *Battles Near and Far: A Century of Overseas Deployment* (Canberra: Army History Unit, Department of Defence, 2005), pp. 21-32.

²⁶ David Horner, *The Evolution of Australian Higher Command Arrangements*, Command Paper No. 2. (Canberra: Australian Defence College, 2002), p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁸ David Horner, *High Command: Australia's Struggle for An Independent War Strategy, 1939-45* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), chaps, 11, 13 and 17.

Commanding Malaya between 1953 and 1955. However, for the most part Australia's role as a junior partner in contribution warfare meant that command was essentially exercised at the tactical level. For example, from 1965 until 1972, successive Commanders of Australian Forces in Vietnam were tactical commanders who, while being strategically responsible to Canberra, were operationally subordinate to a US corps commander.²⁹

Until the operation in East Timor in 1999, Australia's experience of the operational art was confined, then, to two campaigns: the small 1914 German New Guinea campaign and the more significant, but nonetheless circumscribed, 1943-44 Allied campaign in New Guinea. Throughout the second half of the 20th century and into the early 21st century, the legacy of junior partner, tactical-level alliance warfare continued to remain a powerful influence on the modern ADF and has been manifested in operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2002, the country's foremost political analyst, Paul Kelly was moved to identify the Australian way of war exclusively in terms of a strategy-tactics paradigm:

For half a century [since World War II] the Australian way of war has been obvious; it is a clever, cynical, calculated, modest series of contributions as part of US-led coalitions in which Americans bore the main burden. This technique reveals a junior partner skilled in utilising the great and powerful while imposing firm limits on its own sacrifices.³⁰

Developing an Australian Approach Towards Operational Art, 1987-2007

The evolution of a distinct Australian approach to operational art began with the ADF's adoption of both the operational level of war and of the operational art in 1987-88. In terms of developing an operational framework for warfighting, the twenty years between 1987 and 2007 can be divided into two distinct periods. In the first period between 1988 and 1998, the ADF attempted to develop a distinct Australian approach to the operational art based on expertise in continental-wide campaigning. After 1999, a second period began in which operational art was neglected. Between 1999 and 2007, development of an operational framework of war was affected by the combined fluidity of the new globalised security environment, by a flurry of Australian offshore global and regional deployments and by the ADF's decision to elevate the development of a 'technology bias' to a central place in its concept development. As a result, in 2008, twenty years after the formal adoption of the operational art into doctrine, the ADF continues to lack a firm conceptual foundation for the development of higher command beyond the traditional Australian strategy-tactics interface.

²⁹ Horner, *The Evolution of Australian Higher Command Arrangements*, pp. 20-23. See also R.W. Cable, *An Independent Command: Command and Control of the 1st Australian Task Force in Vietnam*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 134 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 2000).

³⁰ Paul Kelly, 'No Lapdog, this Partner Has Clout', *The Australian*, 28 August 2002.

THE FIRST PERIOD: DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA DOCTRINE, THE BAKER REPORT AND DECISIVE MANOEUVRE, 1987-99

The end of Australia's military involvement in the Vietnam War was followed by two and a half decades of relative calm that spanned the years from the early 1970s until the late 1990s. During this period defence policy became focused upon the defence of the Australian continent using the enduring features of geography as a force planning guide. The new geo-strategic doctrine was expressed in the short-hand term 'Defence of Australia' (DOA), a concept first indicated in the 1976 White Paper but only formalised in the 1987 and 1994 White Papers.³¹ From the mid-1970s onwards, the newly constituted ADF turned towards the task of developing a greater capacity for self-reliance based on a capacity to conduct continental defence operations.

It was against the background of a DOA strategic framework, that the ADF began to move away from the strategy-tactics paradigm that had dominated its military history. In 1988, Australia adopted both the operational level of war and the operational art into its doctrine.³² However, from the outset, the operational needs of theatre-level warfare and campaign planning within the ADF were less concerned with understanding the holistic issue of operational art for a 'spectrum of conflict' than with the peculiarities of meeting continental defence.

For the ADF, the decade from 1988-98, was dominated by the need to create continentally-focused joint command structures. The requirement for a 'three levels of war' matching headquarters system (strategic, operational and tactical) was first recognised in the November 1987 Baker Report on ADF command arrangements.³³ From an operational perspective, the main significance of the Baker Report was that it led in 1988 to the creation of the position of Commander Joint Forces Australia and to the formation of Northern Command. These initiatives were followed in January 1997 by the creation of an ADF continental-wide joint operational-level headquarters in the form of Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQAST).³⁴

The new operational-level headquarters was tasked with the mission of developing Australian operational art through the production of a theatre-level concept of operations along with a set of indigenous Australian warfighting concepts to guide joint and combined campaign planning. To

³¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Defence* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976); Commonwealth of Australia, *The Defence of Australia 1987*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987); Commonwealth of Australia, *Defending Australia: Defence White Paper 1994* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994).

³² Australian Defence Force, *Joint Operations, Command and Control of Australian Defence Force Operations* (Canberra: Headquarters Australian Defence Force, 1988), pp. 2-3, 2-4.

³³ Brigadier J.S. Baker, *Report on the Study into ADF Command Arrangements* (Canberra: HQADF, 1987).

³⁴ For the evolution of these command arrangements, see David Horner, *Making the Australian Defence Force* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 112-28.

assist in this task, the Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre (ADFWC) was assigned to HCAST in order to develop a conceptual framework for what the first Commander Australian Theatre, Major General Jim Connolly, called “the application of combat power at the operational level of war”.³⁵ In January 1998, HCAST published *Decisive Manoeuvre*, which defined the operational art in standard Western terms as

the skilful employment of military forces to attain strategic goals through the design, organisation, sequencing and direction of campaigns and major operations.³⁶

The publication went on to outline a set of warfighting concepts to serve as “building blocks of the Australian operational art”.³⁷ As an overarching warfighting construct, *Decisive Manoeuvre* was defined as:

The conduct of synchronised operations using assets from and within any or all environments to defeat the adversary by positioning in time and space the most appropriate force to threaten or attack critical vulnerabilities, thereby unHINGING the centre of gravity and obtaining maximum leverage.³⁸

Decisive Manoeuvre was deeply rooted in the ‘dry archipelago’ defensive imperatives of Australian geo-strategy as outlined in the 1987 and 1994 White Papers. Consequently, conceptual development was conditioned by what HCAST described as

the unique equation of distances and limited resources which make the problem of operational reach in the Australian environment one experienced to the same degree by no other nation.³⁹

Given its origins in continental defence doctrine, *Decisive Manoeuvre* was essentially a defensive construct so heavily constrained by problems of resources and distance that it openly conceded the strategic initiative to an adversary.⁴⁰ Compensation was sought by focusing Australian operational art on counter-stroke manoeuvre warfare. As the publication put it:

The reality is that Australia’s ability to provide comprehensive defence is so limited that any attempt to provide for all eventualities will be doomed to failure, not only because defensive forces would be too thinly spread, but because the diversion of resources to the protection effort would cripple the ADF’s capacity to conduct offensive action. This is one of the key factors

³⁵ Major General Jim Connolly, ‘Foreword’, in Department of Defence, *Decisive Manoeuvre: Australian Warfighting Concepts to Guide Campaign Planning: Interim Edition* (Canberra: Defence Publishing and Visual Communications, 1998), p. iii.

³⁶ Department of Defence, *Decisive Manoeuvre: Australian Warfighting Concepts to Guide Campaign Planning: Interim Edition*, p. 1-2.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 1-3.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

which drives the ADF's requirement to develop and pursue campaign plans based on manoeuvre concepts.⁴¹

Manoeuvre in the Australian theatre context was defined as

the projection and employment of forces through movement, in combination with fire or fire potential, to achieve a position of advantage in respect to the adversary in order to achieve the required end-state.⁴²

Australian operational art based on *Decisive Manoeuvre* was supported by a series of core and supporting concepts notably the ideas of decision superiority (superior use of knowledge) force preparation and timely force projection (to avoid an attrition campaign), tailored sustainment and coordinated precise engagement (precision strike) and effective interoperability (for coalition operations).⁴³ Campaign planning tended to emphasise force preparation in order to match both force projection needs and the realities of operational reach and sustainment. Since the ADF was viewed as having "insufficient integral force projection capability" to fully support a continental campaign *Decisive Manoeuvre* emphasised the importance of logistics, the value of civil infrastructure and the need for timely rotation, reinforcement, and reconstitution of forces in the field.⁴⁴

From the outset, the new operational warfighting concepts were restrictive in scope and did not seek to address the spectrum of conflict that was evolving in the 1990s. Instead, the concepts were described as being based on "planning against a clearly identifiable adversary".⁴⁵ Indeed, a major feature of Australia's attempt to develop an indigenous approach to the operational art was the clear separation of expeditionary warfare from continental defence. As *Decisive Manoeuvre* puts it:

The remit of the Warfighting Concepts is at the same time extensive and clearly limited. They apply to situations in which Australia must act alone or where this country is involved in an alliance or coalition campaign [in which] Australia has a major influence on the nature of that campaign ... Our national interests may well dictate that Australian forces will once again be despatched further afield to operate at the tactical level within the framework of an alliance campaign. *In this case the concepts would not be directly relevant.*⁴⁶

The narrowness of *Decisive Manoeuvre* as an operational framework meant that there were conceptual weaknesses in the way both the operational level of war and the operational art were viewed within the ADF. The most critical weakness was the fact that the warfighting concepts outlined were not viewed in integrative or holistic terms as providing the basis for a form of

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 5-5.

⁴² Ibid., p. 3-2.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 1-4, 1-5, 2-2, 2-3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 5-2, 5-3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 1-2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 1-2. Emphasis added.

operational art that could potentially address the dichotomy in Australian military practice between tactical-level experience and operational-level inexperience. Instead, the operational art was employed to clearly separate and to differentiate between what were explicitly conceived to be, in effect, two different 'ways of war': the traditional tactical expeditionary experience and the new continental operational-level defence imperative. As a result, a segmented and restrictive thinking dominated the inaugural attempt at developing Australian operational art. Operational analysis was focused on a single overarching scenario: the conventional defence of continental Australia—the least likely contingency facing the ADF.

As a template for the development of operational art, *Decisive Manoeuvre* was rapidly overcome by events. Even as the inaugural warfighting concept was being finalised, the Howard Coalition Government had released *Australian Strategic Policy 1997* which began the decade-long process of shifting strategic guidance away from an exclusive focus on DOA towards a maritime concept of strategy and offshore operations.⁴⁷ By the time a second edition of *Decisive Manoeuvre* emerged in October 1999, the ADF was involved in the intervention in East Timor—an operation neither foreseen nor expected by strategic guidance.

During the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) mission in 1999, HQAST was sidelined in command and control terms—although it retained some important logistical and sustainment responsibilities—for the duration of the mission. The INTERFET commander Major General Peter Cosgrove reported to the Chief of the Defence Force through the Head of Strategic Command. At the time, it was argued within the ADF that this measure was necessary because contributing countries to the coalition were committing troops not to HQAST but to INTERFET. This may well have been the case, but the decision to bypass HQAST revealed a penchant in the ADF for viewing the operational level and operational art in separatist and mechanical terms in a conflation of the levels of war with the levels of command.⁴⁸

Significantly, HQAST's second edition of *Decisive Manoeuvre* abandoned the use of the term operational art altogether.⁴⁹ The subject ceased to have autonomy as a distinct military cognition and instead was subsumed under the rubric of "professional mastery". Operational art did remain extant in ADF doctrine in the form of a chapter in ADFP 6, *Operations*.⁵⁰ However, in

⁴⁷ Department of Defence, *Australia's Strategic Policy 1997* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 1997).

⁴⁸ See Horner, *Making the Australian Defence Force*, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁹ Headquarters Australian Theatre, *Decisive Manoeuvre: Australian Warfighting Concept to Guide Campaign Planning: Second Interim Edition* (Sydney: Headquarters Australian Theatre, 1999).

⁵⁰ Australian Defence Force, *Operations*, ADFP 6 (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 1998), chap. 3.

practice the ADF's attempt to develop a unique Australian operational art was replaced by a more mechanical endeavour in the form of an 'ADF Operational-Level Warfighting Concept' for campaign planning.⁵¹

THE SECOND PERIOD: FLUID SECURITY ENVIRONMENT, FLUX IN STRATEGIC GUIDANCE AND THE RISE OF THE 'TECHNOLOGY BIAS', 1999-2007

Between 1999 and 2007 Australian weakness in operational art was exacerbated by two other factors: the fluidity of the new globalised security environment and a corresponding flux in strategic guidance and by the decision by the ADF to situate operational-level concept development at the strategic level where it was viewed from an overwhelmingly technocentric perspective. The impact of the changing security environment can best be appreciated by the fact that between 1999 and 2005, Australia deployed a total of 68,000 ADF personnel globally, including contingents to East Timor, Bougainville, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Solomon Islands. Not surprisingly, this flurry of expeditionary operations tended to eclipse much of the content of the December 2000 Defence White Paper entitled *Defence 2000*.⁵² The latter, while conceding the possibility of offshore deployments—had like its predecessors in 1987 and 1994 continued to focus its main attention on DOA issues. The consequent inadequacies of strategic guidance under the pressure of military events led to the publication no less than three *Defence Updates* in 2003, 2005 and 2007 respectively.⁵³

From an operational perspective, the most significant aspect of the three *Defence Updates* was their evolving focus on the need to create an ADF with the capacity to meet the growing demands of the global-regional nexus in Australian strategy. As the 2007 *Defence Update* puts it, Australia is at once a 'security contributor' to global stability and a 'security leader' in the immediate region.⁵⁴ In terms of the latter role, the ADF must be equipped with sufficient capabilities to "lead, shape and engage" and to "be the leading power in our immediate region in bringing together military coalitions that will shape positive security outcomes".⁵⁵ The evolution of a global-regional nexus outlined in the three *Defence Updates* was accompanied by a shift in responsibility for ADF concept development away from the operational level in HCAST towards the strategic level in Australian Defence Headquarters

⁵¹ Headquarters Australian Theatre, *Decisive Manoeuvre: Australian Warfighting Concept to Guide Campaign Planning: Second Interim Edition*, p. 1-3.

⁵² Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2000).

⁵³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's National Security, A Defence Update 2003* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2003); Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2005* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2005); Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2007* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2007).

⁵⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2007*, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

(ADHQ). By 2001, ADHQ had assumed responsibility for developing a series of operational warfighting concepts embodied in three publications published between 2002 and 2007. These publications were *Force 2020* (2002), *Future Warfighting Concept* (2003) and *Joint Operations for the 21st Century* (2007).⁵⁶

Overall, these publications continued to emphasise the Australian manoeuvreist approach to warfare first outlined by HQAST in 1998. However, ADHQ situated its conception of manoeuvre in the Revolution in Military Affairs-Transformational architecture of network-centric warfare rather than in the cognitive framework of the operational art. Indeed, *Force 2020* formally introduced a conscious Jominian geometric 'technology bias' into Australian warfighting concept development based on using networking and effects-based operations to create a "seamlessly integrated force".⁵⁷ ADF combat effect was to be leveraged by creating three grids: a sensor grid (for detection); a command and control grid (for decision-making) and an engagement grid (for precision engagement).⁵⁸ As a result much of the ADF's concept development since 2002 has lacked the cognitive discrimination to address the operational realities of the global-regional nexus in Australian strategy. An insufficient attempt has been made to undertake a careful analysis of the differences between *elements* of power (the combination of liberal democracy, political economy and culture) and the *instruments* of power (the combination of soft and hard power, interagency and military force) necessary to secure national interests.

In 2003, *Future Warfighting Concept* introduced Multidimensional Manoeuvre (MDM) as a new overarching concept to guide the ADF from being a joint to an integrated force over the next two decades. MDM was heavily underpinned by a strategic planning framework of networking and what was described as "national effects-based approach" aimed at attacking an adversary's will and his critical vulnerabilities.⁵⁹ Although *Future Warfighting Concept* introduced a series of joint warfighting functions (force application, force deployment, force protection, force generation and sustainment) these tended to be viewed in terms of mechanical campaign design for a technocentric framework of war rather than serving as intellectual seedbeds for the practice of operational art.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Department of Defence, *Force 2020* (Canberra: Public Affairs and Corporate Communications, 2002); Department of Defence, *Future Warfighting Concept* (Canberra: Policy Guidance and Analysis Division, 2002); Department of Defence, *Joint Operations for the 21st Century* (Canberra: Strategic Policy Division, 2007).

⁵⁷ Department of Defence, *Force 2020*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Department of Defence, *Future Warfighting Concept*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20. See also the heavy emphasis upon network-centric warfare in two supporting publications, Department of Defence, *Explaining NCW: Network Centric Warfare* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2005); and Department of Defence, *NCW Roadmap 2007* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2007).

The official 'technology bias' continues to shape the ADF's operational approach to warfighting. In mid-2007, *Joint Operations for the 21st Century* formally designated MDM as the Future Joint Operating Concept (FJOC) around which the ADF of 2030 is to be constructed as "a hardened, networked, deployable joint force" capable of performing across the full spectrum of operations.⁶¹ In terms of execution, MDM is viewed mainly from the perspective of applying "tailored strategic responses to create desired effects" through the national effects-based approach of military and non-military means first outlined in 2003.⁶² *Joint Operations in the 21st Century* goes on to observe:

MDM creates effects through operational designs that focus lines of operation on specific and achievable objectives, applying the principles of NCW [Network-Centric Warfare] and integrating joint warfighting functions. The underlying concept of MDM operations can be described as 'reach, know and exploit.'⁶³

While networked technology and its effects are highly important in warfare conducted in an advanced battlespace, the ADF's elevation of the 'technology bias' over the cognitive needs of the operational art have created a number of weaknesses in the current warfighting posture. First, MDM emphasises the importance of the operational-level *locus* rather than its *function* of warfighting. What matters is the *where* of the operational level concept as opposed to the *how* of fulfilling operational art. Indeed, the process of FJOC development since 2002 suggests that, in the ADF, an operational approach refers primarily to scope or scale in an efficient division of effort and does signify a unique cognition in warfighting.

Second, the ADF's current FJOC is too narrowly focused on a polyglot of information-centric theories that revolve around 'taking down' an opponent quickly. It is an approach that is well suited to aerial stand-off strike operations, but not to the complex task of translating joint operations into meaningful strategic success in a protracted multiservice campaign in which time and space may be differentiated by a complex environments defined by such factors as urbanisation and a demographic rather than a technocentric battlespace.⁶⁴ In many ways, the 2007 FJOC is emblematic of the ADF's intellectual neglect of operational art and represents, to paraphrase Allan Bloom, a 'closing of the Australian military mind'.⁶⁵ Conceptual thinking is rooted in the technology, rather than the anatomy of, war and fails to reflect

⁶¹ Department of Defence, *Future Warfighting Concept*, p. 8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁴ See Michael Evans, *City Without Joy: Urban Operations into the 21st Century*, Occasional Paper No. 2 (Canberra: Australian Defence College, 2007), pp. 19-31.

⁶⁵ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). In this celebrated study, Bloom argued that intellectual debate in the United States was increasingly occurring in a narrow, technocentric context and thus lacked the wisdom derived from deeper and broader learning derived from the great disciplines.

the likely reality of armed conflict over the next decade or more. The FJOC is flawed by the ADF's insufficient consideration of a variety of ways to apply joint military force in the pursuit of broader political aims. It is by no means clear that an NCW-Effects Based Operations approach will be adequate or capable in fulfilling Australian policy aims in conflicts in which General Sir Rupert Smith's haunting concept of 'war amongst the people' is a predominant feature.⁶⁶

It is not inconceivable that over the next decade the ADF might find itself involved in just such 'war amongst the people' missions in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines alongside a continuing commitment in Afghanistan. The technocentric network *coup de main* model espoused by MDM is therefore likely to be difficult to apply across a spectrum of conflict and ultimately must be regarded as representing only one way of conceptualising the future of armed conflict. In short, MDM needs to be replaced, or at the very least revised, by the development of a sophisticated middle-power approach to operational art that addresses the military implications of Australia's global-regional nexus.

Addressing Australia's Global-Regional Nexus: Alliance and Lead Nation Models of Operational Activity

As an advanced liberal democracy with a large economy but limited demography, Australia is a prototypical *mezano* or middle power. It is a country that possesses worldwide and regional interests alongside a political influence that belies both its relatively small population and its limited capacity to generate hard power. Australia's domestic prosperity depends on secure foreign trade and broader international stability ensuring that a commitment to 'forward security' to protect its interests abroad will always be to the fore in diplomacy and strategy. In most of the above circumstances, Australia is similar to Canada—a nation that shares a similar strategic history as a 'dependent ally'.⁶⁷

However, Australia differs from Canada in one key respect: the character of its global-regional interface. Canada's geopolitical position as part of US-dominated North America means that the country is able to focus overwhelmingly on the global strategic needs of its particular interface. Given US proximity, there is no significant regional military role for Canada

⁶⁶ General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

⁶⁷ For Australian and Canadian concepts of middle power status, see Carl Ungerer, 'Australia's Place in the International System: Middle Power, Pivotal Power or Dependent Power?', in Carl Ungerer (ed.), *Australian Foreign Policy in the Age of Terror* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008), pp. 23-51; and Arthur Andrew, *The Rise and Fall of a Middle Power: Canadian Diplomacy from King to Mulroney* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1993). For an analysis of similarities in Australian and Canadian strategic history, see John Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

and the country is in a position to adopt a one-dimensional military strategic response to its global-regional interface. In sharp contrast, to Canada, Australia's global-regional interface is not tempered by the strategic proximity of the world's only superpower and is fully two-dimensional in character and, therefore, much more complex to balance. Australian forces are likely to be employed in both global tactical-level alliance operations and in regional missions that may require strategic-operational leadership of a coalition. As a result the ADF needs to develop a distinct middle-power approach to its military art in general and to its operational art in particular—an approach that clearly reflects the strategic reality of its global-regional nexus. A middle-power construct of operational art requires careful and rigorous thought focused on the two models of Australian operational activity that have emerged in the 21st century: the alliance force-provision operational model and the lead-nation force generation model.

In the first quarter of the new millennium the ADF must develop operational art that seeks to integrate the functions of its two models of military activity: an *alliance force-provision operational model* based upon global 'missions of choice' and a *lead nation force-generation operational model* based upon regional 'missions of necessity'. Both models represent different, but nonetheless, authentic expressions of the likely future of the Australian way of war. Both models require greatly improved conceptual linkage through realistic middle-power operational thought that clearly understands the features of both models.

The alliance model represents a variation on the traditional Australian way of war practised since 1945, namely that of a 'small-force provider' at the strategic-tactical interface. In the globalised security conditions of the 21st century, much of recent Australian alliance warfare has been concerned with participating in global missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the force-provider model, the allocation of forces to an ally or coalition is seldom an exercise in operational warfare. Strategic control from Canberra is usually more important than operational thought or operational design and tactical presence may be as important as tactical performance. Indeed, alliance or coalition objectives may be political-diplomatic rather than military-strategic. In the alliance model, the most significant feature is that force provision is based on choice with participation being about protecting national interests within an allied campaign plan. The strategic-tactical levels of warfare are what matter with any deployed headquarters often performing as a facilitation mechanism.

In contrast to the familiar alliance force-provision model, the regional lead nation force-generation operational model has evolved since the intervention in East Timor in 1999 and is, in military terms, more complex. The regional model reflects the likelihood that the ADF may have to function either independently or in coalition at the operational level employing a self-designed campaign plan. The regional force generation model recalls

elements of the 1914 Australian campaign in German New Guinea, the 1942-45 South West Pacific campaigns against Japan and the 1999 East Timor peace enforcement intervention. In a regional operational model, the ADF is likely to be a lead-nation in any South-East Asian crises and to be called upon to perform as a significant force-employer at the operational-level. Campaign-design is likely to have to concentrate upon the pursuit rather than the protection of, sovereign national objectives. In a lead-nation regional scenario, the ADF will require a far more rigorous and systematic strategic-operational approach than the *ad hoc* strategical-tactical methods employed in global alliance warfare.

In the future, ADF concept development should not consider the two operational models as being mutually exclusive. Both are expressions of an evolving 21st century Australian way of war that reflects the nation's broader global-regional interface. As a result, both types of military activity require systematic analysis through the agency a middle-power joint operational art. The latter while acknowledging the need for a technological capability edge, should seek to integrate the conceptual requirements of both operational models. Moreover, much greater emphasis must be placed upon mastering the intangibles of the art of war, especially the human dimension.

Schooling Future Senior Commanders: Toward a Middle-Power Model of Australian Operational Art

There are four measures Australia needs to undertake in order to develop a credible middle-power approach towards operational art that underpins future higher command. First, operational art must be developed as a means of improving integration between the alliance and lead-nation models of Australian military activity. Second, to assist in such integration, ADF doctrine needs to be amended to clearly reflect the tenets that the operational art is not about size, but about function, and must also address the conceptual issue of the merging levels of war. Third, the ADF needs to develop comprehensive campaign planning that embraces not simply technology but the complex needs of multinational, interagency and coalition operations across the spectrum of conflict. In particular, more attention must be paid to stability operations. Fourth, the institutional neglect of military art within the ADF needs to be urgently addressed by reforming the curriculum of the joint professional military education system (JPME) at the Australian Defence College.

INTEGRATING THE TWO AUSTRALIAN MODELS OF MILITARY ACTIVITY: A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO AUSTRALIAN OPERATIONAL ART

In the future, the ADF approach to the operational level of war and to the operational art must be based on improving integration between the *alliance force-provision operational model* and the *lead nation force-generation operational model*. The ADF needs to develop a holistic approach to operational art that is at once sufficiently orthodox to ensure interoperability

with major alliance partners, flexible enough to cover all likely missions and reflective of middle-power geopolitical reality.

Today, towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a renaissance in Australian operational art is possible. The restrictive conditions of the 1980s and 1990s—when DOA guidance forced operational art into the straitjacket of continental defence—have been overtaken by the realities of globalised security and offshore global-regional deployments. An ADF military strategy once built on the ‘enduring nature of Australia’s geographic circumstances’ has gradually over two decades been supplanted by a new paradigm that increasingly reflects the globalised spectrum of conflict with its requirement for flexible strategy and versatile forces. As a result, the ‘enduring nature of Australia’s geographic circumstances’ has been supplanted by what might be described as ‘the enduring geopolitical intersection of Australia’s global-regional circumstances’.⁶⁸ For Australia, geography has now become the grammar, not the logic of, strategy and geopolitics has become the guiding policy for the future.

Strategic guidance has yet to codify this new situation in terms of a national strategy but operational art and campaign planning need to reflect the new *de facto* realities of the security environment. The ADF needs to accept that both the alliance force-provision operational model and the lead nation force-generation operational model now represent strands of a single, albeit, emerging, 21st century Australian way of war—a way that reflects the special intersection of the country’s global-regional interface. Under new strategic conditions, the lead nation force-generation model can now be firmly focused on regional contingencies in a way that was never possible under DOA conditions. In consequence, it is now necessary to revive Australian operational art in order to underpin the multiple requirements of future higher command, interoperability and self-reliant campaign design.

A new Australian approach to operational art must aim to translate the requirements of Australia’s global-regional interface into a comprehensive operational rationale for the use of military force for global ‘missions of choice’ and regional ‘missions of necessity’. The default force design template should be based on the ADF’s ability to field a self-contained Joint Task Force designed for regional ‘missions of necessity’ but one that is also capable of fulfilling global commitments that transcend the traditional strategy-tactical alliance model if this is required by policy-makers. Any realistic approach to operational art must seek improved integration and linkage, if not a synthesis, between the alliance and lead-nation operational models of military activity. This is a conceptual challenge that confronts the ADF with the dual need to simultaneously address its legacy of inexperience

⁶⁸ For analysis of this shift, see Evans, ‘Overcoming the Creswell-Foster Divide in Australian Strategy: The Challenge for 21st Century Policy-Makers’, pp. 193-214; and Evans, ‘Towards an Australian National Security Strategy: A Conceptual Analysis’, pp. 113-130.

in lead-nation operational activity while seeking better operational-level linkages in more traditional alliance missions.

One approach to pursuing such integration and synthesis is for the ADF to clearly conceive of Australian operational art in terms of *function* rather than in terms of *locus* and *size*. In order to try to link lead-nation force-generation operational model with the alliance force-provision model the ADF should pursue an operational art that reflects a functional approach to enhance saliency, flexibility and freedom of action.⁶⁹ In the alliance force-provision model in particular, an approach to operational art based upon the notion of functions assists in deciding which operational-level structures and strategic-level interfaces may be required in a specific deployment. In terms of aligning the alliance model with the lead-nation model, functions such as the operational level of command, operational level structures (including combat support and sustainment), operational level infrastructure (including forward operating bases, and support bases) and the function of campaigning can and should be tied to joint force commanders wherever possible.

In both alliance 'missions of choice' and regional 'missions of necessity' ADF task force commanders need to become used to the exercise of cognitive judgment, risk assessment and control of forces on the ground under media scrutiny as a means of fulfilling strategic goals. For a small force such as the ADF confronted by both *security contributor* (mainly global) and *security leader* (mainly regional) roles, a functionally-based operational art provides both flexibility and a practical way of determining which operational functions are required across the ADF's likely conflict spectrum.

REFINING THE ROLE OF OPERATIONAL ART IN ADF DOCTRINE

In order to give Australian operational art the stronger functional character that is needed to transcend the 'security contributor/security leader' divide, the ADF's joint doctrine requires revision. The current definition of Australian operational art is derivative of American thought rather than being adaptive in character. ADFP-6, *Operations* states,

operational art is the skilful employment of military forces to attain strategic goals through the design, organisation, sequencing and direction of campaigns and major operations.⁷⁰

There is no qualifying statement in Australian operational doctrine that focuses on middle-power military function rather than size.

⁶⁹ On the application of a functional approach to operational art, see Dickson, *Operational Art in a Middle-Power Context: A Canadian Perspective*, pp. 45-53; Simms, 'Keeping the Operational Art Relevant for Canada: A Functional Approach', pp. 293-312; and Lessard, 'Reuniting Operational Art with Strategy: A New Model of Campaign Design for the 21st Century', pp. 331-63.

⁷⁰ Australian Defence Force, *Operations*, p. 2-1.

Significantly, and in contrast to the ADF, the Canadian Forces have sought a more functional doctrinal approach to operational art by stating that, while operational art is the skill of translating strategic direction into operational and tactical action, such action

is not dependent on the size of the committed forces, but is that vital link between the setting of military strategic objectives and the tactical employment of forces on the battlefield through the skilful execution of command at the operational level.⁷¹

This caveat clearly emphasises notions of function and linkage in operational art in a manner that is missing in current ADF doctrine.

Another weakness in ADF joint doctrine is the lack of consideration of the compression of the levels of war under the impact of technology. Advances in technology increasingly require operational art to be conceived in terms of transcending the three levels of war and conflict. Although ADFP 6 *Operations* speaks of the levels being “interrelated”, the discussion of this challenge is not logically extended to visualise the three levels of conflict as a ‘chain of three links’ with the imperative for the operational art to be applicable across the levels because of merger and overlap.⁷² In addition, there is a lack of sophisticated analysis in ADFP-6 *Operations* of the correlation between the levels of conflict and the levels of command and between the operational level and the process of jointness. These joint doctrinal weaknesses may be one of the reasons why Australian operational concept development since 2002 has so little reference to operational art and why it has officially adopted a technocentric approach. There is an absence of a flexible, functional connection between the operational level as a joint synchronisation locus and the integrating role of operational art.

COMPREHENSIVE CAMPAIGN PLANNING: A ‘SMALL FORCE MANOEUVRE’ APPROACH

A functionally-based middle power approach to operational art carefully grounded in joint doctrine needs to be accompanied by comprehensive campaign planning. Under the current MDM construct ‘end-states’ are outlined in a mechanical and technocentric character that tends to encourage the ‘tacticisation of strategy’ through networked strike operations. MDM contains little reference to the kind of complex campaign termination conditions and sequels that reflect the way policy now operates in a real-world battlespace that is dominated by multinational, interagency and coalition conditions.

⁷¹ Canada, *Canadian Forces Operations*, B-GG-005-004/AF-000, (Ottawa: Department of National Defense, 2000), p. 3-1. See also Allan English, ‘The Operational Art: Theory, Practice and Implications for the Future’, in English et al (ed.), *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives, Context and Concepts*, pp. 7-10.

⁷² Australian Defence Force, *Operations*, p. 2-1.

In the future, the ADF requires a more comprehensive campaign planning approach focused on how the threat, or use of, military force can fulfil not just strategy but also shifting policy objectives. Systemic operational design must seek to guarantee the achievement of policy and any future ADF model of campaign design must acknowledge the wider purpose of military operations and seek to coordinate operational-level systems in a multi-agency framework. Moreover, in an ADF of less than 60,000 personnel, there is surely a role for the type of 'small-force manoeuvre' theory pioneered by the British operational theorist, Richard Simpkin. In his writings, Simpkin anticipated the character of the 21st century spectrum of conflict when he argued for operational art to consider a 'continuum of force' (conventional and unconventional) approach in which large-force manoeuvre, small-force manoeuvre and insurgency were seen as adjacent rather than separate elements.⁷³

Small-force manoeuvre theory, then, conceived as a function of operational art promotes an approach to campaign design that is integrative of diverse military elements. A small-force manoeuvre template is currently missing from the ADF's approach to operational warfare which has become overly focused on the coordination of high-technology assets to achieve campaign success. In particular, the concentration on NCW since 2002 has overshadowed a parallel need for comprehensive ADF operational design across the spectrum of conflict that meets the special demands of Australia's strategic global-regional interface.

THE OPERATIONAL ART AND ADF JOINT PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

A middle power operational art reflecting functionality, doctrinal rigour and rooted in comprehensive campaign design will falter if, in the future, it is not institutionalised in the ADF's JPME system. It is no use developing concepts and doctrine if they are not regularly subjected to rigorous intellectual scrutiny by uniformed professionals. The appropriate domain for this scrutiny to occur is within the JPME system. Yet, one of the most serious problems facing the Australian profession of arms in the new millennium is the unreformed character of the ADF's joint military education system. Australian JPME has failed to give proper attention to the study and development of military art and higher command preferring instead to concentrate upon strategic policy and defence management issues.

These deficiencies are reflected in a 2005 Kokoda Foundation Report which concludes,

⁷³ Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Century Warfare* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1985), chap. 20; and Richard Simpkin, 'Manoeuvre Theory and the Small Army', *British Army Review*, no. 78 (December 1984), pp. 5-13.

the Defence officer education system currently fails to achieve the high levels of excellence required. It also lacks flexibility and adaptability, and it does a very modest job of inculcating such key characteristics in those sent to participate in its courses.⁷⁴

Joint military education has certainly not encouraged participation in such essential professional debates as the development and application of operational art by a middle power; the role of operational art across the levels of war; the future of the levels of conflict in the face of battlespace technology; the reconciliation of high level command with low level control; and the place of strategy in relation to policy and operations. The lack of these professional debates is symptomatic of an officer corps that has not been sufficiently exposed to the rigour of studying military art.

In the current JPME system, intellectual activity remains resolutely fixed at the strategic-tactical interface. There is, for example, no significant theoretical analysis of operational art presented in the Joint Operations Component in the Australian Command and Staff College (ACSC) course and there appears to be no continuum between operational art, policy analysis and strategic art evident in the curriculum of the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (CDSS). Moreover, in the current ADFWC Campaign Planning Course, only 100 minutes are devoted to consideration of the intricacies of operational art.⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, in JPME terms, Australia's approach to the military art in general and to the operational art in particular, has clearly fallen behind that of English-speaking peer militaries, the United States, Britain and Canada. The United States has since 2005 been involved in a major reconsideration of operational requirements in JPME; the sixteen-week long British Higher Command and Staff Course (HCSC) has no counterpart in Australia; and the ADF has no equivalent of the rigorous operational art analysis undertaken in 2005-06 by the Canadian Forces College.⁷⁶ Instead of overhauling the JPME curricula of the Australian Defence College to reflect a deeper knowledge of the military art, the ADF has been content to adopt 'stop-gap' solutions such as the 2006 adoption of a special or 'remedial' campaign planning course for one and two star officers.⁷⁷ Lack of expertise in the theory of the military art represents an unacceptable professional deficiency in an era in which strategic uncertainty

⁷⁴ Ross Babbage, *Preparing Australia's Defence for 2020: Transformation or Reform?*, Kokoda Paper No. 1 (Canberra: Kokoda Foundation, 2005), p. 36.

⁷⁵ Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre, *Campaign Planning: Course Management Course* (Revision 3) (Newcastle: ADFWC), p. 4-1.

⁷⁶ For the United States, see Jeffrey D. McCausland, *Educating Leaders in an Age of Uncertainty – the Future of Military War Colleges* (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College, 2005); for the United Kingdom see Mäder, *In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence: The Evolution of British Military Strategic Doctrine in the Post-Cold War Era, 1989-2002*, Part II; for Canada, English, et al (eds.), *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives, Context and Concepts*, Part II.

⁷⁷ Australian Defence College, 'The Preparation of One and Two Star Officers for Joint Appointments', Draft Paper dated 3 May 2006. Copy in author's possession.

could lead to the sudden commitment of large-scale ADF forces in a major regional contingency.

The above weaknesses in JPME are mainly systemic and represent critical problems for an ADF faced with a future in which it must fulfil the future operational requirements of a regional-global interface. In this respect, a strong case can be made for linking mandatory completion of joint military education to the process of promotion within all three services. The creation of a continuum of learning is vital for the future health of the Australian officer corps. From this perspective, there is a real need for the development of operational cognition as a feature in preparing officers at ACSC. In turn, a strong foundation in operational cognition should then form the basis for operational and strategic cognition and higher campaign design at CDSS.

Solutions to the ADF's JPME malaise are obvious. They include the need to create a small, but academically well-qualified Defence College Faculty modelled on the successful King's College, London/British Joint Services Command and Staff College, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom system. A Defence College Faculty of civilian and military scholars would provide the ADF with an expert cadre of teaching war studies and military art in a cross-functional manner at both ACSC and CDSS. Another reform would be to transform the ACSC Strategic Studies component from its current status as a course concerned with arcane military history and abstract international affairs into a two-part course that concentrates upon systematic study of the evolution of modern warfare, operational knowledge and the intersection of policy, strategy and operations.⁷⁸ Further reforms should also embrace the creation of an ACSC Operational Art and Future Warfighting Elective and the introduction of a British-style HCSC course with a strong campaigning focus into the CDSS curriculum and, over time, the formation of an ADF Joint Military Studies Centre for advanced operational research.⁷⁹ The above measures are long overdue and, while they are not an automatic guarantee of future operational success, they would serve as an important means of minimising the possible risks of professional failure in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Much of Australia's 20th century military history was characterised by tactical experience and operational inexperience. This legacy has meant that, despite the formal adoption of an operational framework of war by the ADF twenty years ago, development of operational art in the Australian military

⁷⁸ Many of these issues are dealt with in a generic manner in Michael Evans, *From the Long Peace to the Long War: Armed Conflict and Military Education and Training in the 21st Century*, Occasional Paper No. 1 (Canberra: Australian Defence College, 2007).

⁷⁹ During 2008, ACSC will introduce electives on Complex Planning and Operations and on Counterinsurgency. This is a positive beginning and may lead to a fully-fledged Joint Advanced Military Studies course in the future.

profession remains fitful and unsatisfactory. The weight of an illustrious tactical past has conditioned other elements—notably restrictive DOA planning, a technocentric approach to concept development and an unreformed ADF military education system—to ensure that operational art remains an immature field of cognition within the ADF. In combination these characteristics have, in terms of understanding operational art, led to a ‘closing of the Australian military mind’—an unwillingness, or incapacity, to fully analyse the vital cognitive requirements of contemporary operational-level warfare.

Yet, in the globalised conditions of the early 21st century, the ADF is faced by a simultaneous need to be global ‘security contributor’ and a regional ‘security leader’. These parallel roles reflect the manner in which Australia’s geopolitical position is being transformed through the emergence of a complex global-regional nexus in statecraft and strategy. From a military perspective, the ramifications of a global-regional interface must be addressed by the development of a new and dynamic middle-power model of operational art that reflects the most likely ways in which the ADF can expect to employ military power in pursuit of future national objectives.

The ADF must adopt a comprehensive ‘first principles’ approach towards operational knowledge, preparation and planning. An innovative middle-power operational framework, based upon improved linkage between the ADF’s two 21st century operational models of alliance force-provision for ‘missions of choice’ and lead nation force-generation for ‘missions of necessity’, must be constructed over the course of the next decade. In the coming years the ADF will be called upon to produce generals, admirals and air marshals who can deal with unprecedented complexity and ambiguity, who can manage multiservice and multinational forces and who understand the intricacies diplomatic-political issues. The abilities of future senior commanders must be underpinned by a unique middle-power Australian operational framework, one that is at once rooted in functionalism, informed by joint doctrine, seasoned by comprehensive campaign design and made wise by joint military education.

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