
Good News for Army

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Sensible and much needed capability enhancements, although largely unacknowledged in the press, are to be introduced to improve the Army's ability to operate in combined arms groups in complex environments. The Hardened and Networked Army and Enhanced Land Force programs are continued and there will be no major structural changes to the Army. This is good news for Army. Not so good are the plans to rebalance the mix of full-time and part-time force elements and the assumption that the Australian Defence Force will have the choice of tailoring operations to avoid ground operations against heavily armed adversaries located in crowded urban environments.

Paragraph 9.28 of the White Paper says it all. "While no major change to the size and structure of the Army is warranted, a range of capability improvements are."¹ Given the current extensive operational commitments of the Army, the underway growth program and the uncertain strategic environment this is a sound decision. This is good for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and good for the Army.

The White Paper enhances the combined arms capability of the Army through investment in selected land force capabilities and the confirmation that Army will be structured to deploy ten battalion-sized combined arms battlegroups. The White Paper decisions for Army focus on its survivability, fire support, mobility, communications, battlefield lift and its ability to operate in combined arms groups in complex environments. In these areas the White Paper gets good marks.

It does not score so well in the discussion on tasks for the Army where its efforts to constrain the types of ground operations the ADF might be employed in will both limit deployment options and increase the risk for deployed forces. Another area of concern is the foreshadowed plan to rebalance the mix of full-time and part-time land force elements. If these efforts don't work and the strategic environment does not markedly improve further increases in the size of the Regular Army may be required.

A Joint Force

So far commentators and journalists have focused on the White Paper as delivering enhancements to the Navy and Air Force. Little mention has been made of the significant capability enhancements proposed for the Army.

¹ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), p. 74.

While the adjustments to Army might not rate the front page, no service operates on its own. The overall impact of the White Paper has been to improve the joint capability of the ADF.

To operate either in the defence of Australia or on expeditionary operations the Army has to be deployed, supported, sustained and redeployed. While the Navy and Air Force can tend to operate without the Army, the Army cannot operate without the Navy and Air Force. Of all the services the Army most depends on the support of the others.

As East Timor showed all too clearly the ADF was unbalanced. The force had no true amphibious capability and was severely deficient in strategic lift, communications and over the shore logistics. There were problems in readiness and the ability to both comprehend and conduct the lead role in a regional intervention. White Paper 2000 began to redress these and other problems and the various updates and capability decisions that followed properly focussed on the Army to redress its hollowness and myriad other problems.

This White Paper sensibly continues the broad approach to making the ADF a more capable joint force. Ships and planes can be used in singular campaigns but they are best when used as part of a cohesive joint amphibious capability. Submarines, Air Warfare Destroyers, new frigates, landing craft, a new sustainment ship and Joint Strike Fighters combine to provide a more robust and useful joint force. A force of this nature can conduct independent and coalition sea and air control missions and protect itself as it moves to an operational area. It can also support an amphibious lodgement (noting Australia does not envisage an amphibious assault) and then, while the land force is establishing and operating close to shore, the amphibious force can provide essential combat and other support to land based operations.

Strategic Basis

The White Paper clearly states our most basic strategic interest as the defence of Australia against direct armed attack. Then, without a map in sight, it lays out a hierarchy of interests: security, stability and cohesion of the neighbourhood; the stability of the wider Asia-Pacific region; and preserving an international order that restrains aggression by states against each other and can manage other threats and risks. In a clear and appropriate link to the Prime Minister's National Security Statement of 4 December 2008 the White Paper lists these threats as weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, state fragility and failure, intra-state conflict and the security impacts of climate change and resource scarcity.²

² Ibid., p. 12.

Australia's defence policy is confirmed as being founded on the principle of self reliance in the direct defence of Australia with the capacity to do more when required.³ The White Paper sensibly contains a comprehensive discussion on defence planning and risk. It draws the conclusion that the more balanced the range of capabilities held within the ADF the more it is able to hedge and rebalance as required.⁴

As an island nation with widely distributed bases and regional and global interests a maritime strategy is the foundation of any operation that the ADF might conduct. To achieve the principal task of deterring and defeating armed attacks on Australia the ADF has to be able to deny the air and sea approaches to Australia against credible adversaries. However, this doesn't just mean the Navy and Air Force dealing with threats against the continent in the sea air gap. The sea air gap is not just water and air. It is a bridge with land at both ends.

A maritime strategy needs all three services operating together. Their relative contribution will vary by mission. Missions with a land force focus include operations to: protect our offshore territories; protect our forward operating bases; deny a staging base to an enemy; and protect our own supply lines and points of entry for operations as we work with friends and allies. All of these operations require a capable and well equipped land force. Of primary importance, but least likelihood, land forces are required to conduct operations on the Australian mainland to deal with the inevitable 'leakers' who would get through the sea air gap should a major conventional operation be mounted against Australia. Tasks with a naval and air force focus include independent and coalition sea control and air superiority missions and the projection of force in our maritime environment.

It is right that there has been debate around the strategic rationale for what some have called Rudd's Navy. However, whether hedging against the Chinese, or aimed at dealing with any regional instability because of rivalry and tension as a result of China's political, economic and military growth, the White Paper has enhanced Australia's maritime capabilities. The White Paper discussion on risk partly explains why it is done, notwithstanding the assessment that while high intensity wars among the major powers cannot be ruled out, they are not likely over the period to 2030.⁵

Intra-state conflict has been judged by the White Paper to be an enduring feature and the most common type of conflict in the period to 2030.⁶ These are the operations we are involved in now and the ones we are most likely to conduct in the future. Indeed it is difficult to see how we might not be

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶ Ibid.

involved, on a continuing basis, in failed or failing states protecting our interests and advancing our values. Our troops must be well resourced for these missions now and in the future.

In what many commentators have called hybrid wars, or war among the population, the ADF must be able to move and sustain the Army across our continent, in the region or across the globe to conduct counter insurgency, stabilisation, peacekeeping, humanitarian and disaster relief operations. The judgement of the White Paper is that, "Operations in such environments will tend to be personnel-intensive, and require a significant physical presence on the ground".⁷

Until civil agencies are able to make more substantial contributions to a whole of government effort these types of activities are likely to remain an enduring task for the Army. Commendable efforts are being made to improve the capacity of the civil effort but there is much yet to be achieved. The fact that the Army remains in East Timor almost 10 years on from the original operation shows the difficulty of getting civil involvement and the right mix of security, stability and development in an operational area.

Naval and Air Forces can make a valuable contribution to intra-state conflict where they are most likely to play a supporting role to the land force. Only a truly joint force with a land and civil component, on the ground, can achieve the necessary degree of protection, support and persuasion to achieve a lasting solution to our most likely form of future conflict.

Principal Tasks and Contestable Assumptions

Chapter Seven of the White Paper sets out the principal tasks that the government requires of the ADF. A matter of considerable concern is that the White Paper then makes a series of contestable assumptions regarding our ability to control the dynamics of a conflict and tailor operations such that we do not fight in a manner that sees a high rate of attrition and mass casualties among our forces.⁸ An assumption of similar contestability is that it is not the principal task of the ADF to be generally prepared to deploy "in circumstances where it has to engage in ground operations against heavily armed adversaries located in crowded urban environments."⁹

Geography aside the White Paper could be improved in this area. Of course we would seek to avoid mass casualties but one of the lessons of recent deployments is that it is difficult to control the tempo and scale of operations. We might deploy in what is expected to be a short term 'low intensity' or permissive environment which could quickly escalate into a much more dangerous and persistent situation. The enemy gets a say and it would be

⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

absolute folly to assume that he will not react with increasing levels of force to counter our deployment. Somalia began as a humanitarian operation but quickly escalated with both the mission and nature of the conflict changing after deployment occurred.

An enduring feature of modern warfare is that it is increasingly conducted in urban terrain and that the enemy has ready access to lethal weapons and equipment. The White Paper appears to be wishing away the reality of the most likely threat and likely tasks with the intent of constraining force capabilities. Any constraint of this nature would seriously limit the options the ADF could provide to government and increase the risk to deployed forces. Forces should deploy with a generous margin of overmatch to limit the risk.

In seeming recognition of this contradiction the White Paper states that in operations such as those underway in Afghanistan, Australia would only deploy after the government had satisfied itself that our forces were adequately prepared and equipped to ensure successful operations with the least risk to our deployed forces.¹⁰ The required levels of preparation and equipment cannot be quickly achieved. To be ready for future deployments an investment is required now. The strong discussion on managing strategic risk and hedging in Chapter Three of the White Paper seems to have been ignored in relation to the Army.

Force Levels and Preparedness Goals

The White Paper states that in return for the resourcing to be provided, the ADF, when fully built, must be able to maintain prescribed levels of operational capability.¹¹ These missions are required to be done without further significant mobilisation of other national resources. The statement of missions, potentially to be conducted concurrently, has been a feature of recent White Papers and provides a focus for the ADF and a key performance indicator for the government.

The primary mission allocated to the Army is to deploy and sustain a brigade group able to engage in combat operations in our primary operational environment for a prolonged period of time. At the same time the Army is tasked to: deploy a battalion group for the same task; maintain other forces in reserve; provide tailored contributions to support wider strategic interests; support counter terrorism efforts; assist civil authorities and support emergency response efforts; and provide humanitarian and disaster relief assistance to our neighbours.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 88.

Given the current size and capability of the Army and the requirement that these missions be conducted concurrently, guaranteeing these levels of capability will be extremely difficult. It is sensible for government to demand a contract with defence but it needs to either set an achievable task or ensure that adequate resources are provided to both acquire the right capabilities and keep them at an appropriate degree of readiness. This is difficult to do and in previous White Papers there has not been a good record of matching resources to tasks. Problems have been most apparent in the ability to sustain and rotate combat support, combat service support and other scarce enabling capabilities across multiple theatres over extended periods of time. This White Paper appears to be no better than previous ones in this regard.

Reserves

In order to provide depth, surge long lead time capabilities and sustain prolonged operations by the Army, the White Paper proposes to make more effective use of the Reserves.¹² It commits to a better integration between full-time and part-time service and to removing the factors which can impede the contribution that part-time forces can make to ADF capability.

By seeking more from the Reserves the White Paper inherently acknowledges the need for more boots on the ground in contemporary and future operations. But in the absence of the ability, or resolve to further enlarge the full-time Army it seeks to reach a solution by asking more of the Army Reserve. There is also mention of making better use of civilian skills and ex-Regular personnel and workforce sponsorship. These schemes are commendable. But are they achievable?

Recently there has been an appreciable international trend towards a greater use of contractors in an Area of Operations. To better utilise contractors and sponsored reserves on operations will require the passage of appropriate legislation, the availability of spare capacity in the civil workforce and civilians willing to deploy into an operational area. There is more work to be done in this area.

In this regard the recent Australian Government decision to develop a civilian force to be able to deploy and assist in disaster relief, stabilisation, reconstruction and capacity building projects is to be encouraged. But as Anthony Bergin and Bob Breen observe there is more work to be done to achieve a 'Team Australia' approach to overseas emergencies. In particular they see a need to, "specify responsibilities, accountabilities, authority, legal obligations and resources".¹³

¹² Ibid., p. 74.

¹³ Anthony Bergin and Bob Breen, *Rudd's Army: A Deployable Civilian Capacity for Australia*, Policy Analysis Paper, no. 43 (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2009).

In recent years the Army Reserves have, to their great credit, provided fully trained forces for operations and have performed most commendably at home and abroad. They have made a substantial contribution to the recent achievements of the ADF. But as the National Audit Office report of 8 May 2009 clearly shows there are some real limitations as to what the Army Reserve can do. Despite a range of strategies to boost Reserve numbers they remain well below authorised strength and the levels of individual readiness and parade attendance are well below optimum.¹⁴

Given current social and economic conditions and underlying demographic changes it remains to be seen how much more capacity can be realised from the Reserves. The White Paper plans for the part-time force are high risk. The relationship between the part-time force and the government works two ways. At first glance government seems to be assuming too much from the part-timers. The implementation plan required, from Army, by the end of 2009 will be difficult to frame and implement especially as the resources are to be provided through the re-investment of reform efficiencies.¹⁵ As the plan is developed, Defence would do well to consider what further incentives can be offered to attract Reserve service. A revised and updated version of the Ready Reserve Scheme could be considered. This could build off the very successful Gap Year scheme and if linked to education credits could support the government's broader education revolution.

Capability Enhancements

Without a formal Defence Capability Plan and firm budget allocations it is difficult to determine the detail of the capability enhancements for Army and the adequacy of the budget allocations. However, the White Paper does provide some very encouraging indicators of what capabilities are proposed for Army. On the surface the picture looks good. A positive outcome is that the White Paper seems to have, in at least one instance, short circuited the formal National Security Committee process by deciding and announcing a capability decision which might normally have spent longer in the committee process. This is the decision to purchase two batteries of 155mm self propelled artillery systems.

LAND FORCE SURVIVABILITY, MOBILITY AND COMMUNICATIONS

There are three core projects which focus on the survivability, mobility and communications of the Army. The first is the decision to acquire a new fleet of around 1,100 deployable protected vehicles.¹⁶ This confirms the importance of LAND 400 and is a key outcome of the White Paper. It should be applauded. These vehicles will replace the M113, ASLAV and Bushmaster fleets. While there is, as yet, no obvious vehicle contender the

¹⁴ The Auditor General, *Performance Audit, Army*, Audit Report, no.31 2008–09 (Canberra: Australian National Audit Office, 2009), pp. 13-14.

¹⁵ Department of Defence, *Force 2030*, p. 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

intent to provide enhanced firepower, protection and mobility for the force is welcome. Given the complex and lethal nature of the modern battlefield there is no choice other than to provide adequate protection to deployed forces. What will be difficult is to find a vehicle family that matches the need for protection with the size and weight characteristics that make it deployable and useable.

The second core project is the continued commitment to provide around 7,000 support vehicles to replace the current deployable support vehicle fleet of wheeled transport and logistic vehicles.¹⁷ This is LAND 121. It is disappointing that the White Paper did not specifically mention the degree of protection to be provided to these vehicles. Protection for all our troops using deployable vehicles is essential and non-negotiable. Project OVERLANDER has had a troubled history and needs to be given a new sense of purpose and focus.

The third core project can be grouped around Network Centric Warfare outcomes. It combines JP 2072, LAND 75 and LAND 125.¹⁸ It is also very welcome as it will equip the force with enhanced communications and battle management systems. This may finally see the achievement of the much vaunted Network Centric Warfare capability right through the mounted and dismounted force. Combined with individual soldier enhancements such as upgraded weapons, surveillance equipment and body armour these are significant enhancements to combat power. A real focus now needs to be applied to the development of the communications architecture and the timely acquisition of equipment across the entire force.

These projects have long been anticipated and are essential for the future of the Army and its ability to provide forces that can conduct successful operations with the least risk to deployed forces. In combination the funds required to see the successful implementation of these three projects alone could well be in excess of \$25 billion. For those who measure success in dollars allocated, this sum in itself proves that the Army has done well out of the White Paper.

Given the lethality of the modern battlefield, the adaptiveness of the current enemy and the short technology refresh cycle these projects need a new flexible acquisition model. It is not acceptable to wait for a full, formal acquisition cycle to deliver. Rapid acquisition and continuous upgrades are required and Defence Materiel Organisation and Army must develop procedures to ensure our soldiers have the best equipment as soon as it is available.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁸ Ibid.

BATTLEFIELD LIFT CAPABILITY

Battlefield lift is not only the responsibility of the Army. The acquisition of two additional C-130J aircraft and the replacement of the Caribou fleet will add depth and reach to the force. When combined with seven new CH-47F helicopters there will be increased flexibility and capacity. The CH-47F is a good choice. They will improve interoperability with the United States and assist operations in the region and further afield. The MRH-90 will also enhance the force although the sharing arrangements with the Navy may need to be reviewed. While certainly delivering training and maintenance efficiencies the provision of only 30 helicopters to Army may well restrict flexibility and troop lift. While the helicopter has a greater theoretical capacity than the Blackhawks they replace, this has yet to be proven in practice.

OPERATIONS IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

It is very encouraging to see the focus on enhancing Army capabilities to operate in proximity to civilian populations. Australian soldiers already have a well earned reputation for being able to operate in complex environments. The most likely future operations will see our forces continue to deploy to failed and failing states in predominantly urban areas. This is war among the population. Enhancements to intelligence, information operations, imagery analysis, cultural adaptiveness and language capabilities will greatly assist our ability to work in these difficult and demanding environments.

It is essential that soldiers have a range of response options available to them. It is no longer appropriate to resort to lethal force as the first and only option. Indeed our soldiers are performing well because they understand that in many situations not applying lethal force is perhaps their best option. Up until now soldiers have had few alternatives. The decision to acquire an enhanced suite of non-lethal weapons will provide these alternatives.¹⁹ The equipment should be introduced rapidly and matched with appropriate doctrine, sound operating procedures, rules of engagement and thorough and realistic training.

SPECIAL FORCES

The Special Forces are among our most capable and flexible forces. They can be used across the full spectrum of operations from strategic strike to surveillance, counter terror and training for host country forces. The decision to continue to provide them with a capability edge is warranted and recognises the contribution they are making to current operations.²⁰ The recognition of the need to continually update their equipment and systems should not however, be reserved only for the Special Forces. The same commitment is required for the entire force. The enhancements for the Special Forces are largely a repetition of previously announced projects

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

although the acquisition of 'stealthy' methods of inserting forces into target areas will warrant close attention.

Show Me the Money

From a strategic and capability point of view the White Paper is a solid and responsible document. It is difficult to find fault with it. It will provide future governments with the options to deal with an uncertain strategic environment. If financed it will deliver much needed capability improvements across the ADF and will result in a more balanced joint force.

Everybody seems to have got a slice of the action. Maybe this is the problem. The real issue is whether or not the capability foreshadowed in the White Paper can be delivered. There are two issues. The first has a lot to do with our national economic future and the funding arrangements for Defence. The second involves the ability of Defence to deliver the level of savings required under the proposed reform and cost savings programs. In the absence of firm budget allocations and a confirmed Defence Capability Plan the White Paper has to be seen as a bit of a sleeper. It looks good, but what it will look like in the morning when we wake up?

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