
An Exercise in Management: Defence Engagement in the Indo-Pacific

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This article presents an evaluation of the 2016 Defence White Paper and the role and orientation of Australia's international defence engagement. It will argue that the White Paper offers some strong engagement and security-related ideas. In particular, the White Paper approach rightly places an emphasis on the significant tactical and operational—rather than strategic—advances from outreach in the Indo-Pacific region. One particular strength is in its attachment to the utility of humanitarian operations, disaster relief coordination and other aid elements. Training issues and related personnel requirements are also a specific focus. Overall, it is broadly attentive to well-adjusted capacity options and harnessing the potential benefits of defence engagement although a number of challenges remain, including a range of co-ordination demands as well as how future constraints might be addressed.

Peacetime defence engagement has emerged as a powerful growth industry in recent years. This trend is evident in the much-delayed 2016 Defence White Paper (DWP2016) that unequivocally places a premium on its role and influence as a core organising principle in force posture and future Australian defence planning. DWP2016 signposts international engagement as a fundamental defence function. It states that its four key engagement objectives will incorporate: positive contributions to ADF capacity-building, the maintenance of Australia's status "as a respected and capable security actor", the construction of "active and effective security partnerships" and improved "international security resilience" (para 5.12). The pitch is that military-to-military cooperation—such as port visits, equipment transfers, education/mentoring activities and low-intensity joint exercises and training—can help improve coordination in dealing with transnational problems, encourage patterns of amity and trust and prevent regional flashpoints from escalating.

Such a perception of defence engagement is reflective, in part, of the narrowing distinction between traditional and non-traditional challenges that threaten national interests. In recognising this narrowing, DWP2016 adds important value in guiding Australia's current enthusiasm for defence engagement. In particular, in reflecting on how to best optimise defence preparedness and the effectiveness of military soft power, the White Paper does provide a revised template that is based around goal-oriented security concerns rather than more ambiguous and transformative strategic goals. It points to a number of specific areas and contributions from defence engagement that will enhance operational readiness and help to address a

more demanding, unpredictable environment. This includes attention to timeliness and shared maritime awareness (para 5.16), a doubling of training for international military students (para 5.8) and operations within a wide web of defence partnerships to address multi-service tasks like medical treatment and aero-medical evacuation (para 4.94).

There is considerable merit in such policy alignment. The long-term potential of defence engagement activities to shape the strategic order remain highly speculative and will be subject to major set-backs.¹ Instead, there is an underlying recognition in DWP2016 to target capacity gaps and exploit new opportunities for closer security ties and operational interactions by linking capacity generation to areas such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). This is a positive step to deal with existing challenges in an aid-like fashion. HADR remains a top security agenda in which the ADF should be encouraged to take the lead in promoting operational protocols, interoperability and confidence building in the Indo-Pacific.

However, concerns remain about Australia's capability and planning choices. In particular, the outlook for new defence partnerships falls short in contextualising the full scope of defence engagement amidst competitive geo-political dynamics—a gloomy White Paper tone underwritten by US-China interactions—and the potential implications for Australia's strategic position. Additionally, questions remain about the efficient utilisation of institutional avenues to direct defence engagement and how they might be relevant to its best-practice implication—in this instance, DWP2016 missed an opportunity to draw some networking lessons and address the potential of key actors, especially Indonesia.

Finally, in focusing on where defence engagement schemes can be improved, there remains a need for a clear connection between coordination demands, resourcing and the principal instruments of defence diplomacy. The applied instruments of international cooperation and defence diplomacy—that range from ship visits to cooperation agreements to technological exchange—remain numerous. Investments in ADF training areas including in northern Australia can conceivably become a key outlet to help direct defence postures and additional partner training capacity. DWP2016 reinforces the benefits of extending investments in liaison, language and cultural training. These are all constructive components of the White Paper although there remains much room for improvement and refinement in operational principles and planning for capacity support.

¹ Daniel Baldino and Andrew Carr, 'Defence Diplomacy and the Australian Defence Force: Smokescreen or Strategy?' *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 2 (2016), pp. 139-58.

Past Problems and Policy Overreach

In close conjunction with the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP), Australia's peacetime military engagement has been regularly deployed for the stated purpose of enhancing goodwill, boosting security and stability, building interoperability and personnel skills, and mitigating the risks of strategic competition and major interstate conflict. Chapter Five of DWP2016 is devoted to international engagement, the promotion of capable defence relationships and commitments to future collaborative arrangements in areas such as joint exercises and training. The pursuit of military contributions activities are structured in line with core functions across the entire Defence portfolio to support the Strategic Defence Objectives (para 5.7). Importantly, a nuanced approach is taken to the strategic influence of the practice and defence engagement. One major criticism of the 2013 White Paper was the sweeping nature of how defence engagement was defined, its projected impacts and the overstated nature of what it meant in terms of long-term transformative benefits. In particular, the 2013 White Paper had directly stated that Australia's defence international engagement was "both a strategic necessity and a strategic asset" in that could be used to directly influence the way a country thinks about its national interests and when they use force.² In short, a strong emphasis and expectation was placed on defence engagement supporting long-term strategic goals to restrict future threats and shape the international order. Key players, such as the former chief of the Australian Defence Force General David Hurley, were also fond of describing defence cooperation as a form of "strategic engagement".³

Several critics identified this trend, arguing that the 2013 White Paper needed to identify more credible objectives and propose careful limits. Michael L'Estrange questioned the focus of an ad-hoc defence cooperation agenda that did not match "means with ends".⁴ Others like Nick Bisley queried the benefits of defence engagement in strategic terms. "Australian defence diplomacy programs need to have realistic ambitions. Its promise is greatest in practical activities providing foundations for improving specific bilateral relationships that are part of a larger strategic picture."⁵ These have not been new observations. Des Ball and Pauline Kerr claimed in 1996 that Australia's general approach to defence engagement was badly mischaracterised and failed to have "a clear and coherent set of policies,

² Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013: Defending Australia and its National Interests* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013), p. 56.

³ Michael, L'Estrange, 'International Defence Engagement: Potential and Limitations', *Security Challenges*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2013), pp.23-34.

⁴ Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, 'Interviews: General David Hurley', *The Diplomat*, 13 March 2013.

⁵ Nick Bisley, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Defence Diplomacy in Asia', (2015), Defence White Paper Submission 250.

balanced objectives, and means of implementation which are carefully tailored to the political and resources constraints”.⁶

In contrast, a strength of DWP2016 is its focus on instrumental practices that revolve around intermediate security issues and the development of functional patterns in cooperation with a strong capacity-building element. Maritime security cooperation is promoted as a cornerstone in these engagement efforts (para 5.38). And, as mentioned, the benefits of operations are consistently presented through the development of training, exercise and operations in the area of HADR—a prominent area that has great potential to navigate often divergent regional political and organisational demands. Although only one part of a range of defence activities to encourage partnerships, it can be argued that this realignment towards HADR is a welcome return to a less presumptive as well as durable approach to address regional security concerns.

The 2016 White Paper delivers a case that HADR is an indispensable driver of ADF military posture, narrows in on burden sharing and focuses on Australia’s prominent role in policy initiatives and operational examples that entail a transnational scope. Perspectives tend to focus around collective security and security resilience. It also acknowledges areas for improvement with, in part, intentions to advance information exchange, intelligence sharing and shared maritime domain awareness. It signals options about how to best support the impact of defence engagement practices by earmarking investments like training and education. This long-term, preventative approach to defence planning has to be reconciled with visions of the ADF as an adaptable, agile expeditionary maritime force.

Security Contingencies and HADR

As part of defining how defence engagement is related to broader policy conceptions, it had been a dramatic leap of faith by Australian officials in the past to conclude that defence engagement might then significantly alter the fundamental direction of a particular bilateral relationship—and, by implication, change the region’s strategic orientation or resolve disagreements over hegemonic leadership. A dampening of such expectations and a sharpened focus at operational and tactical levels required that advocacy avoids oversimplified prescriptions about the benefits of inter-personal military relationships and contacts including the ability of military ties to overcome ingrained strategic differences, domestic sensitivities and divergent threat perceptions in the region.

At the same time, a better targeted, more nuanced policy approach to deal with competing requirements will be needed. These engagement efforts

⁶ Desmond Ball and Pauline Kerr, *Presumptive Engagement: Australia’s Asia-Pacific Security Policy in the 1990s* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996), pp. 99-101.

feed into force structure options that must be prepared to respond to security requirements at a great distance in a maritime zone whenever required. In this sense, the attention given to burden-sharing and capacity building in DWP2106 through training, education and technology—in major areas like HADR, search and rescue, and maritime patrol surveillance with a range of international partners—does offer a sensible manifesto to better link activities through operational concepts and desired outcomes. A major strength is in its recognition that regional cooperation in HADR has grown considerably and will play a major part in patterns of future collaborative security engagement and peacetime regional support.

Unfortunately, Australia and the region must prepare for more disasters. “Whether these events are geophysical, meteorological, hydrological or climate related, scientific research shows that the number of these natural disaster events is increasing both in frequency and intensity”.⁷ Examples indicative of the types of interagency and interstate cooperation needed and that have affected an array of regional actors include the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004, flooding in Pakistan in 2010, the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu in 2015, the earthquake in Nepal in 2015 and assistance in Fiji after Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016 (see para 5.94).

In cataloguing the multifarious operations the ADF has conducted since 2005, the most common type of contribution is HADR.⁸ The DWP is bullish in positioning Australia to be a leader in strengthening formal linkages, sharing knowledge of experiences and building processes and exchange among regional militaries to encourage reciprocity and integrated life-saving responses to regional crisis and problems. As detailed by David Brewster, “disaster management and peacekeeping are low-hanging fruit—while they sit at the ‘soft’ end of the spectrum of security cooperation, they can be very useful ways to develop personal relationships and inter-operability and provide an opportunity to generate significant goodwill”.⁹ HADR will continue to shape thinking about how to plan security cooperation activities while being equated with both preparatory exercises and soft power goals.

In terms of the tangible benefits gained through such international engagement programs, Major General Rick Burr has argued that defence operations offer an obvious “return on investment [where] a vital element of any HADR response is the coordination of the many contributors in what is

⁷ Bill Tweddell, address at the opening of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Disaster Risk Management Workshop, Manila, 15 October 2014.

⁸ Albert Palazzo, *Forging Australian Land Power: A Primer*, Army Research Papers, no. 7 (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2015), pp. 8-9.

⁹ David Brewster, ‘The Australia–India Framework for Security Cooperation: Another Step Towards an Indo-Pacific Security Partnership’, *Security Challenges*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2015), p. 46.

typically a complex, chaotic environment”.¹⁰ Others have similarly stated that “defence assets have exceptional direct utility” to deliver significant benefits in conducting disaster relief and management.¹¹ Of course, opportunities for Australia to extend such operational deployments will likewise play a partial role in justifying military funding and budgets to Australian taxpayers for acquisitions like the two Canberra class amphibious ships and upgrading the Navy’s surface connectors and its multi-mission Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) ships.

Given the nature of this theatre, the combination of typhoons, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and other natural phenomena provides a constant potential for deploying forces to reduce loss of life and immediate suffering in the wake of such events ... History demonstrates that amphibious forces have utility across a wide range of mission areas and circumstances, especially in a region where the seas are connective tissue among prosperous maritime partners and developing nations.¹²

So the physical footprint of defence engagement in HADR does have many notable elements to like about it. From a force structure perspective, amphibious ships and forces remain highly suited for conducting support and coordination in the Indo-Pacific. And although “relief operations might be a harder sell in some quarters compared to high-end war fighting capabilities ... the fact remains that they tend to happen more often than forcible-entry assaults”.¹³ Further, it has measurable benefits in goals like logistic support and resupply when focused on relief operations or stabilisation and construction programs. It has proven applicability in building connectivity in civil-military partnerships to deal with the threat of Mother Nature as well as a range of other non-traditional security concerns such as counter-piracy and transnational crime that affect a large number of states. These powerful adaptive dimensions that enhance security—and indirectly generate confidence and goodwill—should continue to be encouraged and supported.

A vital element of ADF contributions to build regional capability in HADR is that they are relatively non-controversial. They are overwhelmingly process and goal-orientated, present a pragmatic pathway to better inform civilian-military harmonisation and actively foster preparatory information and exchange in the exercise of forward and contingency planning. Such operations are identified with providing transferable skill sets for diverse deployments. DWP2016 does offer room for thoughtful debate about Australia’s comparative advantages in building momentum to meet non-

¹⁰ Rick Burr, address to Australian Strategic Policy Institute Army’s Future Force Structure Options conference, Canberra, 25 June 2015.

¹¹ Nicholas Floyd, ‘Dropping the Autopilot: Improving Australia’s Defence Diplomacy’, *Policy Brief* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 25 November 2010), p. 7.

¹² Denny Wetherald cited in Mitchell Sutton and Serge DeSilva-Ranasinghe, ‘Meeting Emergent Demands’, *Asian Defence and Diplomacy*, September/October 2015.

¹³ Peter Dean, ‘All Ashore: The Utility of Amphibious Operations’, *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 17 December 2012, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/all-ashore-the-utility-of-amphibious-operations/> [Accessed 24 March 2016].

traditional challenges. At the same time, it remains critical to ensure assessments about the capabilities of partners examine how particular projects might be maintained by the host government.

A demonstration of complementary purposes within defence engagement is the search for the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370. DWP2016 rightly cites this as a case where the ADF played a significant role in leading and provided broad support and expertise (para 5.15). The search effort, coordinated by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), included cooperation between the United States, Japan, China, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. This multinational operation pointed to the value of the ADF 'capability edge' although—unnoticed in the White Paper—it underscored the complexity of Indo-Pacific cooperation in diplomatic and political terms. Nonetheless, the international collaborative mission highlighted Australia's leverage to become a focal point in contingency planning and expanding inter-service jointness with partners in the Indo-Pacific. The flipside is that the operation and dialogue was not without impediments and recriminations.¹⁴ For this reason, the goal to mitigate and respond to security contingencies should always be attuned to the intentions and concerns, as well as the capabilities, of regional partner nations.

Strategic Cleavages and Choices

In its assessments and evaluations, some conceptual ambiguity in DWP2016 does remain. It is not completely devoid of past sanguine claims about defence engagement operating at the strategic end and variables like more open military communication channels acting to change the relationships between potentially conflicting states. Australia's strategic weight and ability to exert influence is also reaffirmed by building on its ties to its economic and trade links (para 5.5) while cooperation and peacekeeping with partners in places like the Middle East is premised with "where it is in our interest to do so".¹⁵ Encouragingly though, such periodic aspects are well-complemented with caveats including that defence engagement will be closely coordinated with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (para 5.6).

Engagement mindsets in supporting different fields of peacetime military cooperation must be based upon an appreciation of tactical and operational inputs, limitations and how to migrate risks in capability-generation efforts. At the same time, whom Australia seeks to influence, as well as the expectations attached to defence engagement and ideas of collective security, will continue to take place in an arena of shifting diplomatic

¹⁴ Carl Thayer, 'Flight MH370 Shows Limits of ASEAN's Maritime Cooperation', *The Diplomat*, 18 March 2014.

¹⁵ Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 15.

tensions, sensitivities over national sovereignty and political mistrust. In particular, the interactions between the United States and China based around intensified strategic differences, as well as varying regional perceptions about (and responses to) China's ambitions in the South China Sea and assertiveness in maritime territorial claims.

To this end, the highest priority on DWP2016 is unequivocally supporting the US role of "underpinning the stability of our region" in a rules-based order (para 2.7). In addition, it signals a commitment to increase military-to-military exercises, personal exchanges and other security-related interactions to enhance trust and facilitate transparency with China (para 5.64). There is much to like about strengthening relationships with China and the United States simultaneously. Yet a fly in the ointment is that defence engagement will need to remain watchful about the extent of ingrained tensions and hedging strategies in the region—particularly given disagreements over hegemonic leadership and existing storm clouds in the 'new great power game'. The end result is that any push for enhanced defence partnerships does remain exposed to wider strategic (as well as economic) fluctuations, resource competition and military build-ups based around potentially incompatible interests that include the flashpoint waters of the South China Sea. As Benjamin Schreer noted:

The Asian power shifts therefore make Australia a more attractive defence cooperation partner for the regional major powers, opening up new avenues for defence engagement. At the same time the 'China dimension' behind some of those activities can't be wished away. That's the bad news—defence engagement in a competitive region necessarily entangles us in major power plays.¹⁶

Policy makers will need to take into account how burden-sharing with the United States can be best balanced with the benefits of more enhanced defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific, so as to not exacerbate existing security dilemma dynamics. If confronted by rising nationalism in the region, defence engagement activities and initiatives may be a tougher road than might be expected. Given the pull by many states towards hedging to both the United States and China and restrictions imposed by considerations for sovereignty as well as divergent threat perceptions, various kinds of defence engagement will remain limited, superficial or unviable. Efforts to pursue an enhanced web of defence cooperation might not be easily divorced from geo-strategic brinkmanship, the pressures and undercurrents of competitive defence modernisation and related counter-measures.

The fallout is that it remains imperative that defence engagement planning in the backdrop of shifting geopolitical circumstances does not inhibit elasticity for future policy choices and remains clear-cut about how to best link

¹⁶ Benjamin Schreer, 'Australia's Defence Engagement in the Context of Asian Power Shifts', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 26 July 2013.

activities with Australia's national interests. No matter how well intended the policy, beefed-up defence cooperative efforts do have the potential to be misconstrued or trigger alarm bells between various regional actors. Contributions to a diversified engagement approach might demand a candidness without qualifications by Australian policymakers on regional differences that, for example, may upset China. But it might also require seeking more independence within the alliance context based on whether and to what extent Australia differentiates its own positions from that of the United States. As Bates Gill encapsulated, DWP2016, while not expressed explicitly, "is clearly embarked on a strategy of 'engage but hedge' with China" while such an approach "is also the most complicated and demanding".¹⁷

Channels for Defence Engagement

Another core related issue is whether the Australian Government should preference or prioritise formal multilateral or bilateral defence engagement opportunities within the Indo-Pacific region. DWP2016 provides a laundry-list of institutional and bilateral, trilateral and multilateral avenues for future cooperation. The White Paper does contain a deliberate regional focus. It is correct in indicating that collaborative defence engagement should have an upgraded geographic emphasis. This includes with India, Singapore, Japan and South Korea and less-developed partners such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and Timor-Leste. As mentioned, the US relationship remains the centre point in this focus although considerable space is assigned to working with China. Other outlets like the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), the ASEAN Regional forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) are fully supported.

However, despite the importance of working towards empowering multilateral systems and agendas, different political motives and diverse strategic imperatives do provide many stumbling blocs that limit the prospects and potential for enhanced multilateral defence cooperation within collective groupings. Given a congestion of actors within a broad operating environment, the pitfalls in trying to create and uphold inclusive 'rules of the road' are axiomatic and demand careful investment of resources, both financial and intellectual, to incorporate ideas about the peacetime usage of military-to-military cooperation and infrastructure. To this end, the 'norm entrepreneurship' model might offer policy makers in Australia a directive framework to frame discourse and assess possibilities for action and institutionalisation in a regional community context.¹⁸

¹⁷ Bates Gill, 'Balance the key in China defence alliance', *The Australian*, 2 March 2016.

¹⁸ Andrew Carr and Daniel Baldino, 'An Indo-Pacific Norm Entrepreneur? Australia and Defence Diplomacy', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2015), pp. 30-47.

Progress in several functional areas of defence engagement will be more likely to occur, at least in the short to intermediate term, on a sub-regional and bi-lateral basis. For instance, working more closely with India, in line with the Framework of Security Cooperation (signed in November 2014), to improve the opportunities for people-to-people links at the operational and tactical levels has strong potential and merit (para 5.69). Singapore is another important cog and the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (signed in June 2015) could create a stimulus to expand ADF involvement and support through its Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC) (para 5.51). But disappointingly, DWP2016 adopts a middle-of-the-road methodology with no notable design to establish stronger patterns of reciprocity and jump-start our relationship with Indonesia.

Astutely, the 2016 White Paper affirms that the modernisation of the Indonesian armed forces and Indonesia's mounting influence are "positive developments" (para 2.83). Yet aspirations for a deepened relationship with Indonesia are poorly aligned with priority areas and creative channels of defence engagement that will demand cohesive whole-of-government support. While some may claim that Australia might not be a 'natural' partner with Indonesia, there is little guidance about how Australia proposes to take a measured and incremental approach to enhancing a fractured security relationship. And in thinking about what could induce Indonesia to expand defence engagement with Australia, Indonesia's maritime ambitions regarding issues like illegal fishing, curbing piracy and coastal zone management continue to offer a solid basis for future cooperation in mutually vital maritime corridors.

Defence cooperation should be limited to Indonesia's legitimate security needs. The enhancement of joint patrols and improved naval and air interoperability in targeted areas are a logical place to build confidence and work together as much as practically possible. There also remains a clear rationale for closer outreach through Australia-Indonesia Defence Alumni Association (IKAHAN) with the intention to better incorporate partner aims and responses. At the same time, although acknowledging it is facing its own internal obstacles, initiatives should include thinking about how to support improvements to Indonesia's new Maritime Security Agency—(BAKAMLA)—and its capacity to conduct law enforcement and maritime operations. The latter especially catered towards technical cooperation and training courses in oceanography as well as the development of early warning systems to anticipate future natural disasters. Peter Leahy has even suggested that the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Co-operation (JCLEC) should be used as a model for enlarging HADR and prompt a joint

maritime task force through a new 'Jakarta Centre for Maritime Co-operation'.¹⁹

Smart Power Investments

In looking at the broader methods that underpin strong defence relationships, increased investments in the DCP are heavily directed towards more liaison, exchange, training and mentoring with partner forces to respond to security contingencies. In practice, skills in foreign languages, scholarships and pre-deployment cultural training can play a central part in reducing misperceptions engaging across cultures. Further, local participation and local knowledge in defence engagement activities is indispensable to build legitimacy and help navigate cultural barriers. As summarized by John Blaxland in reflections on Indonesia:

Australia's security is intimately linked with that of Indonesia, so the relationship needs careful management, attuned to the different cultural predispositions and respectful of their mores and their proud and independent heritage. The ADF needs to enhance its level of cultural awareness and regional language skills. With modern technology and methods, much of this can be done economically on a distributed basis.²⁰

DWP2016 promises to build intellectual capital and offer training and professional military education partnerships, including staff college exchanges, mobile training teams and English language classes (para 5.36). Inviting Indonesian instructors to the Australian Command and Staff College should be part of this position. Additionally, it states that the overseas presence of Defence personnel will gradually increase over time (para 5.10). The need for bolstered regional information-sharing to enhance situational awareness and technical cooperation to better process and verify this information might be a constructive area in how such increases in numbers posted overseas might be directed. By comparison, given the enormous variety of cultures, languages, customs and technology trends which are found across the Indo-Pacific, professional ADF personnel, especially senior staff, will simply not have the time or capacity to learn all that is needed. As such, a refinement of focus, not only at the national level but within the ADF will be needed.

Other Resourcing and Operational Issues

Operating principles in defence integration and engagement efforts will need to be matched with effectiveness and economy of means. Such an alignment will continue to work within a framework that aims to project Australia's military capabilities in a way that is underwritten by a confidence

¹⁹ Peter Leahy, 'Meeting the Defence and Security Challenges over the Next Two Decades: An Australian Perspective', *United Service*, vol. 66, no. 3 (Spring 2015), p. 25.

²⁰ John Blaxland, 'Australia Must Rise Above its Small Power Pretensions', *The Drum*, 3 May 2013.

in the professionalism and accountability of our armed forces and an expansion of programs focused on recruiting and retaining people with the necessary science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills.

DWP2016 does identify that the ADF must undergo significant reform to make it a better amalgamated organisation and improve the integration of foreign and defence policy and corresponding decision-making and execution (para 7.5). While the employment of defence diplomacy in itself cannot result in direct strategic outcomes, it may help to contribute to broader strategic goals via integration with various aspects of Australia's regional outreach, not least DFAT (not only diplomatic and cultural but also its trade and aid sections) as well as other departments with relevant expertise and capacity. Although, hard choices still need to be made in managing a potentially overloaded defence engagement agenda. As a start, the US experience might offer some frameworks to enhance cooperation effectiveness with their creation of a 'Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Security Co-operation' position. This role entails responsibility for 'aligning security cooperation resources to defence strategy' alongside supporting inter-agency consultation to reduce wasteful duplication and institutional stove-piping.

Other investments to enhance ADF burden-sharing include facility upgrades in a range of ADF bases (para 4.79). The advance of infrastructure components—including the idea of a defence regional engagement centre based in Darwin—could provide a key focal point to help strengthen capacity-building and capability development in HADR missions.²¹ Darwin's ability to provide access and open space will also play a valuable role in the employment, for example, of extended joint and combined amphibious training exercises and operations (para 4.81). Certainly, Defence's presence and investment in northern Australia is commensurate with the White Paper's commitment to build regional knowledge, to improve defence techniques and procedures and enhance the potency and range of its maritime capabilities.

Training and exercise programs should also remain directed to advancing inclusive rather than exclusive cooperation exchanges. For example, both the United States and Japan remain very active in promoting HADR response capacity. Such measures could create opportunities to constructively involve China—building on outcomes like as Exercise Kowari, a highly modest land-based trilateral military exercises between Australia, China and the United States.²² However, while such exchanges between

²¹ Anthony Bergin, 'Defence White Paper: Darwin Centre Crucial to Regional Influence', *The Australian*, 29 February 2016.

²² The trilateral exercise involved only thirty participants (ten from each country) in the survival training activity in a remote bushland NT location—in essence, a one-dimensional symbolic gesture.

the United States and China should be encouraged, they do remain heavily influenced by partner commitment and implications—especially in the context for broader strategic level changes—should not be over-exaggerated. The time is also right for ADF training programs based around the mobile provision of specialist equipment, including air lift and supplies, to be better tailored to work towards the objective (para 3.18) of supporting closer working relationships between Defence and state and territory emergency response services, although not adding the private sector to this equation was an oversight.

Finally, defence engagement reporting should strive to be more transparent when taking into account metrics that access performance and achievements. Such oversight will play an influential role in not only efforts to achieve optimal tactical and security outcomes but in rationalisations that detail the direction of procurement policy including the acquisition of offshore patrol vessels. Indeed, a significant element of outreach models is the Pacific Maritime Security Program that will provide replacement patrol boats to twelve Pacific island countries from 2018 (para 5.40). This is a follow-on of the Pacific Patrol Boat Program (PPBP) that dates back to 1979 and DWP2016 promises to expand its scope by including enhanced aerial surveillance within vital maritime corridors.

However, the PPBP had not been entirely trouble free. In 2008, an ADF report recommended against continuing the PPBP pointing to high costs and inconsistent levels of support from partner states. There had been a rundown in the equipment, the diversion of the boats for non-security tasks and far fewer avenues to employ the vessels than had been expected.²³ Ongoing concerns have been raised about the ability of recipient governments to absorb the program and the groundwork for its overall reach.²⁴ This mixed record does suggest that such endeavours do need careful oversight and planning to ensure value for money, preclude misuse and maximise their best use. In the past, efforts to measure performance standards in many of these areas have not been straightforward or forthcoming. As a previous special report on the execution of international engagement by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute noted, “it’s difficult to get a full picture of relevant costs and priorities. This is because either the data isn’t available or the relevant papers are classified”.²⁵

²³ Jonathan Pearlman, ‘Defence Calls To Scrap Pacific Patrol Vessels’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 2008.

²⁴ See Foreign Affairs, *Defence and Trade, Security Challenges Facing Papua New Guinea and the Island States of the Southwest Pacific*, vol. 2 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2010), pp. 76-77.

²⁵ Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Hayley Channer, *Terms of Engagement Australia’s Regional Defence Diplomacy*, ASPI Strategy series (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2013), p. 17.

Conclusion

The factors that influence defence engagement and modernisation programs are multi-faceted. One consistent area targeted for integrated cooperation and confidence-building in the 2016 Defence White Paper is pitched at developing appropriate defence responses to HADR. In this regard, there remains considerable scope for constructive alignments and sustainable contributions. The successful delivery and adaption of defence capabilities around effective deployment that directly supports security interests should remain a central outcome for future engagement programs in the Indo-Pacific and related initiatives in training and education. Such an onus appears entirely relevant to efforts to ensure that the ADF has an operational readiness to tackle plausible, interlocked security threats through the coordination of many contributors.

The ADF intends to cement its position as a potent regional (and technologically superior) force that engages broadly with relevant stakeholders. Certainly, opportunities for defence engagement will remain influenced by, and vulnerable to, traditional balance of power concerns and competition for influence. In planning options, policy makers will need to remain attuned not only to counter-productive action-reaction cycles but what lessons Australia can learn by comparing various bilateral and multilateral experiences and arrangements in defence engagement. Further, challenges about how to effectively bond strategy, resources and capabilities will remain. But defence engagement is not a 'strategic asset' on its own. So a valuable emphasis in DWP2016 are ideas on mobility, preparedness and the exercise of a 'post-modern' armed force to conduct engagement in multi-purpose security terms.

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