



Defence update 2005

The mid December launch of the 2005 Defence Update, *Australia's National Security*, by the Prime-Minister and the Minister for Defence signals further significant progress along the road to alignment of Australia's strategic policy with the structure of the defence force required to carry it out, and the resourcing needed (within reason) to achieve this degree of strategic harmony.

This update replaces the thin and somewhat pedestrian 2003 version and further develops the thinking expressed in the 2000 Defence White Paper (which has been showing its age).

The update cannot be divorced from its party-political context but an over-emphasis on this aspect has tended to cloud the judgements of many commentators. Some fans of current developments in Defence thinking have suggested that the update finally buries the defence-of-Australia dogma that so inhibited strategic thinking throughout the late 1980s and much of the 1990s. Several proponents of the dogma have, naturally enough, suggested the opposite.

The update really does neither. What it does do is achieve a better balance in answering the basic questions about what we need the defence force to do, and how we can best configure it for both the more likely tasks required of it now and the less likely but potentially more catastrophic ones that could occur in the future. The DOA dogma, through its geographic emphasis, was primarily focused on the latter. The update retains this recognition that the defence of Australian territory is fundamental, but also emphasises the continuing importance of defending Australia's broader national interests – particularly in light of the current degree of international strategic fluidity.

Some commentators have chosen to describe this in terms of a broader international rather than a narrower regional focus. It could be more accurately described as a continuation of the post-DOA move towards an overall maritime strategy within our region – incorporating a truly joint-Service approach to strategic mobility – that has been evolving since the 1997 strategic review.

As the update was accompanied by the plan to harden and network the Army (see overleaf), some observers have also concluded it represents a bold move away from the 2000 White Paper's conclusion that the ADF should not develop 'heavy armoured forces' for contributions to coalition forces in high-intensity conflicts. This interpretation is mistaken and stems, at least in part, from serious misunderstandings about what 'heavy armoured forces' and 'high-intensity conflicts' actually are.

At the launch the PM noted 'we will need to commit ever-increasing amounts to defence in the years ahead', and that 'defence does not come cheaply and should not come cheaply'. His personal view was that the annual real increases in defence funding would need to be continued beyond 2010. The update and these remarks are welcome recognition that decades of under-investment and strategic inconsistency must be reversed.

Highlights:

- Strategic update 2005 signals a coherent approach
- Appointment of a new Deputy Secretary (Strategy)
- Hardening and networking the Army makes sense
- Who might be the next Minister for Defence?
- Sydney's beaches – policing not politics is needed
- Irony Corner: The Cronulla effect on civil liberties debate

Horses for courses not jockeying needed

The recent promotion within the Department of Defence of Mr Michael Pezzullo to be Deputy Secretary (Strategy) prompts some interesting questions about the roles of professionalism and governance in the department. It also highlights wider public policy issues about the higher management of Australia's defence.

Mr Pezzullo is a capable generalist public servant and one who has worked closely with both sides of politics. His overall experience and his academic and professional credentials in the development and implementation of higher defence strategy, however, would be less than numerous officers in the defence force. Furthermore, this appointment follows that of another public servant into the subordinate position of Head, Strategic Policy Division.

None of this, of course, is the fault of Mr Pezzullo. At least three other occupants of the deputy secretary strategy position since its creation in 1974 would fall into the same category. Rather his appointment poses the obvious question why this important position is exclusively dedicated to a public servant rather than also open on merit to senior ADF officers as well. After all, if positions in areas previously held by career military officers can be so readily and so often re-allocated to public servants, how come it rarely ever works the other way?

One of the few real institutional reforms of the 1997 Defence Efficiency Program was the splitting of the old Strategic and International Policy Division so the IP tail would not wag the strategy dog, and the appointment of a military officer to head Strategic Policy Division. The first incumbent was Major General Peter Abigail, now the director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. The position was later abolished on the spurious grounds it was not required, Very soon after it was reconstituted as a First Assistant Secretary-level public servant.

The problem with leaving defence strategy formulation in the hands of, at best, generalists is that their knowledge (where they have some) is purely theoretical rather than a mix of through-career academic study and practical application. Field Marshal Lord Wavell noted in his famous Lees-Knowles lecture series at Cambridge in 1939: 'A knowledge of the mechanics of war, not the principles of strategy, is what distinguishes a good leader and a good strategist from a bad one'.

The staffing of our national defence planning efforts has some quite strange contradictions. We require, for example, most ADF officers seeking higher rank to qualify in strategic studies at the Joint Command and Staff College. If they seek the highest ranks (especially above two-star level) we also require them to further qualify at the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies or an overseas equivalent institution. And yet we continue to entrust the development of our national strategic policy to generalist public servants who not only are not required to gain such professional and academic qualifications, but who often do not even possess them anyway or regard it as even important.

This situation of institutional apartheid defies practical logic, is incompatible with the correct constitutional and professional roles of the Public Service and the defence force, and is just plain inexcusable in this day and age. The next Minister for Defence should commission an independent formal inquiry into this increasingly bizarre contradiction and then fix it.●

Preparing for the next war not the last

Soldiers are often glibly accused of preparing to fight the last war rather than the next one. The Government's official statement on hardening and networking the Army has indeed provoked this reaction. This time, however, the backwards-looking nostalgia has been aroused among the coterie of bureaucrats and academic commentators now displaced from serious influence in the Department of Defence.

It has become increasingly obvious by the early 21st Century that our predominantly light infantry-based Army of mid 20th Century standards could not make the grade in regional conflicts, or even against the types of weapons now commonly available to guerilla or criminal groups. The hardening and networking initiative recognises this. Its acceptance as Government policy also tacitly acknowledges, without really admitting, the serial neglect of the Army over the last quarter-century.

Even after the changes (around 2010-11) the Army's nine manouvre units (yes it is only nine) will still include only five armoured or mechanised units. Only one will have tanks and none will be equipped with a proper infantry fighting vehicle.

Such obvious limitations surely put paid to the delusion that hardening and networking is supposedly to fit the Army to join major US-led conventional operations on distant battlefields.●

Reshuffle – more straws on the wind

If, as now seems certain, Senator Robert Hill retires as Minister for Defence a ministerial reshuffle offers several options for political and administrative renewal.

First there are the political and individual possibilities. It probably will not happen because Peter Costello would unfortunately view it as a downwards step (which it really is not) but a move from Treasury to Defence would better prepare him for becoming Prime-Minister eventually. As previously discussed in *Defence Brief* he has had experience in only one of the three key portfolios of state (Treasury, Foreign Affairs and Defence) long considered as the key stepping stones to effective national leadership. Australia is, after all, at war and likely to be so for some time. While these wars are not matters of national survival, and impinge little on the day-to-day national consciousness, they are still far more important issues than much of the humdrum political to-ing and fro-ing that so occupies our political class and those who report on their doings.

Second, the Minister of Defence needs to be a senior member of the government. There are advantages and possible disadvantages among the leading candidates to replace Senator Hill. The strengths of Senator Nick Minchin were discussed in the October issue of *Defence Brief*. Another contender is Tony Abbott, generally regarded as a capable hand in other difficult portfolios and a politician with a long and philosophical interest in defence and foreign policy issues. To some, his policy activist reputation will reawaken nightmares about Peter Reith's unduly partisan approach as Minister for Defence. Another way of looking at it might be that Abbott's candour, youth and vigour would resonate with the defence force.

Other potential candidates are Industry Minister, Ian MacFarlane, and Education Minister, Brendan Nelson. The former has a good reputation and his industry experiences would come in handy in Defence. The latter was actually Parliamentary Secretary for Defence in 2001 but few in defence circles remember this. Of more concern, as *Defence Brief* has previously noted, is that since leaving the Defence portfolio Dr Nelson has apparently even been known to acknowledge no interest in defence issues in a personal sense or as a Cabinet Minister. He might surprise if appointed but the auguries are not good.

Finally, as *Defender* and *Defence Brief* have noted for some time, the impending reshuffle offers an excellent opportunity to reform the ministerial management of Defence by appointing two full-time junior ministers. This is well overdue, having been first recommended by an official inquiry as long ago as 1957.●

Cronulla – louts, grog and lack of cops

The events at Cronulla beach on 11 December have rightly brought public condemnation of the violence involved. Some of this condemnation has alleged sinister machinations by right-wing extremists but it seems more likely that the protest degenerated due to more prosaic reasons. These include youthful crowds, uncontrolled alcohol consumption, a hot day, inchoate community anger, poor organisation by the demonstration's sponsors and, last but not least, miscalculations by the NSW Police Service about their dispositions and the degree and nature of policing required.

While a complex mix of political, cultural, ethnic, religious, and locality-centric and lifestyle-based social factors underly the difficulties in sharing Sydney's beaches fairly, the prime cause remains a simple lack of effective policing. There is a growing public loss of confidence in the police, justified or not, especially concerning safety and security in public places.

The original motivation for the demonstration in Cronulla stemmed from a longstanding and worsening public order problem on local beaches, culminating in the brutal and unprovoked bashing of two early-teenage volunteer lifesavers by a large gang of thugs.

Two factors in this mix have potentially wider national security implications. First, there need to be more front-line police in NSW to prevent street crime problems, and indeed organised crime, centred on ethnic or religious identity metastasizing into a national security problem.

Second, while some will prefer to ignore or downplay it, the gang that bashed the lifesavers was based strongly on ethnic and cultural identity. Similar intimidation by such groups on Sydney's beaches and elsewhere is a growing problem. The iconic status of beaches in Australian popular culture means that the perceptions of this problem are as important as the realities on both sides of the cultural divide involved.

In normal times such factors in themselves would not necessarily be serious. There is a risk now though that the ethnic, religious and denominational components of the particular identity embodied in such gangs could prove fertile recruiting ground for Islamist extremists.●

Irony corner

The public order measures introduced in NSW following the incidents in Cronulla and other locations involve major infringements on collective and individual civil liberties. They were introduced swiftly, applied immediately, affected many, and included no sunset clauses or review schedule. The much more muted, and indeed largely non-existent, response from civil liberties advocates stands in somewhat stark contrast to the degree and nature of comment, by those same advocates, concerning the less far-reaching counter-terrorist measures introduced by the federal and State governments throughout 2006.●

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