



## Bibs and dribbles

The Minister for Defence's initiation of a 7-person Business Improvement Board (BIB) to review non-operational procedures and decision-making processes in the Department of Defence is a useful step forward. But many hoping for real reform will adopt a wait-and-see attitude given the very long history of failure with previous reviews.

That the Minister has apparently already made up his mind (on unknown grounds) to preserve intact the diarchical structure of the department is not a good sign. Any serious review would need to examine this structure even if only to consider rebalancing it where it is clearly unbalanced, in danger of overbalancing or is otherwise less than optimally configured.

As the ADA has long noted, the current structure only works because at the most senior levels its leaders have to work so hard to make it function, often at substantial cost to their own health.

Any serious review of the Department of Defence also needs to examine the obvious problem that adequate Ministerial supervision of such a large organisation is now plainly beyond any one Minister. Even the Morshead Review in 1957 noted that any integrated department required at least three Ministers. The structure will fail dramatically the next time, as has occurred before, a lazy Minister is appointed to the portfolio.

A key question for the BIB to address is surely why the overall structure has needed so many major reviews since its introduction in 1974 — with them occurring every 2-3 years or so since 1981. Root and branch reform is really needed not more dribbling out of minor and eventually ineffectual change. ●

## Round two in our region's incipient Haiti

East Timor's mestizo elite, especially many of those who spent the period of Indonesian occupation in exile, have much to answer for. The unworkable constitutional model they implemented has to go. Not only did it bring a virtual one-party state and inevitably civil war, it has since proven unable to sustain an effective constitutional or political settlement. A proper national election is urgently needed.

English not Portuguese needs to be the official language on both linguistic neutrality and longer-term economic competitiveness grounds. Using the Australian dollar officially as well as unofficially would also help. The country does not need an army. One useful piece of focused aid might be for Australia to fund East Timor's education budget for a decade or two.

Indonesian paranoia about supposed sophisticated Australian plotting behind the creation of East Timor and the current crisis are simply laughable on two key grounds. First, that Australia is guilty of such plotting. Second, that it has the strategic maturity to do it well. Indeed many of East Timor's current and ongoing problems would have been prevented by an Australia prepared to be more strategically ruthless during the 1999 crisis. ●

### Highlights:

- Reviewing the Department of Defence yet again
- Round two in East Timor
- Rationalisation of the ADF helicopter fleet
- Fixing the Seasprite debacle
- The new Defence Capability Plan
- Preserving a sense of perspective about atrocities
- Irony Corner: Howard, Beazley, and White again

## Helicopter rationalisation

The 19 June announcement that the MRH-90 utility helicopter has been chosen to replace the ADF's ageing Iroquois, Sea King and Blackhawk helicopters is a welcome one. It confirms the arguments first put forward in *Defence Brief* back in July 2004 and sustained over several subsequent issues of *Defender* and *Defence Brief*.

Despite the spin and conspiracy theories regularly peddled by defence industry vested interests about supposed Army Aviation Corps recalcitrance, the decision has really been widely welcomed across the helicopter fraternity in both the Navy and the Army — and in both Services generally. The decision also signals the way forward for eventually replacing the Seahawks (currently planned for around 2017), and if need be the Seasprites, with the common airframe of the NH-90 (maritime warfare variant).

The introduction of a common and more capable utility helicopter across the defence force is a sensible measure. It substantially reduces the number of different types of helicopter in the ADF and could eventually halve them. It best suits future rotary-wing operations from the new, medium-sized, amphibious ships that will enter operational service at the same time as the new MRH-90 capability is due to mature. Major benefits in training, through-life maintenance, safety commonality and probably personnel retention will also be achieved. The biggest gain, however, is the serious potential for integrated operational doctrine and improved joint operational effectiveness, especially in how the ADF uses modern helicopters in operations throughout our regional archipelagic environment.

The next logical move is a joint helicopter formation, as has occurred in the British armed forces, to ensure that commonality of platforms truly leads to an integrated approach to command, operations, supporting doctrine and through-life maintenance and logistical support.

Finally, there is no truth to the rumour that the NZDF's choice of the MRH-90 was primarily driven by considerations that the rear cargo ramp would be far more efficient during the RNZAF's annual fodder drops to sheep stranded by sudden heavy snowfalls in Southland every Winter. ●

## Not very sprightly at all

The SH-2G(A) Super Seasprite project has now unquestionably assumed the title of 'debacle of the decade' (traditionally but unfairly awarded to the Collins-Class submarines) when a colourful example of defence procurement bungling is evoked by the popular press.

Commentators renowned for their unfailing 20/20 hindsight but not much else are now pointing out the obvious — that we should have just bought more Seahawks instead. Or that we should have opted for the less-capable Seasprite version that the RNZN has successfully operated for some years with its Anzac-Class frigates — and will also eventually operate with (but not carry on) its two new offshore patrol vessels. This is true but of no help in swiftly fixing the pickle the ADF is now in.

If the Super Seasprite project cannot be salvaged technically, or is not worth rescuing financially, the real long-term problem is that we will have more frigates than proper maritime warfare helicopters to deploy on them. This is tolerable when the nature of current combat operations, especially within our immediate

region, does not involve much call for anti-submarine or anti-surface warfare tasks. It is not viable in the long run because ASW and ASuW tasking could easily become vitally important during sea control operations over the next decade or so.

Not forgetting, of course, the long-term operational training requirements and the deterrent aspect implicit in the Navy properly contributing to the security of the sea-lanes on which our export-dependent standard of living greatly relies.

Even an eventual NH-90 option would take some time and would really only work on the Anzac-Class frigates and the new destroyers. The hangars on the FFG can secure an NH-90 but the fit is so tight that detailed maintenance is impossible. This is yet a further argument for the FFG replacement (circa 2015 onwards) to be a bigger ship and not another class of small, cheap, inflexible, second-rate frigates whose unnecessarily complicated refits and general operations end up costing more over their life-of-type than proper warships would have.●

## New DCP rolled out but not hard enough

**T**he new ten-year, rolling, Defence Capability Plan (DCP) which scopes and schedules defence procurement spending over the next decade realigns planning and reality and updates its increasingly patchy predecessor. There are few surprises overall and some disappointments.

While the content, logic, general reasoning and layout of the plan is an improvement on the two previous versions one big disappointment is the perpetuation of too many projects under outdated sea, land and air tags. Old-fashioned stove-piped thinking along single-Service lines, rather than modern joint-force thinking, remains entrenched in several bastions largely for reasons of self interest. There are, after all, really no such things as Navy, Army and Air Force capabilities — rather there are ADF capabilities some of which may be concentrated in one Service.

Elements of the Department of Defence bureaucracy have traditionally discouraged joint command structures and wider joint-Service initiatives. This has usually been driven by fears that their supposed role (and bureaucratic power) as a neutral arbiter between squabbling Services is lost when the ADF instead forges ahead and leave the old inter-Service rivalry behind. It should be noted that one of the big improvements in the DMO in recent years has been a move away from such thinking.

Some of the worst offenders with stove-piped thinking, however, are found in defence industry. Much of this is simply due to old-fashioned attitudes and lack of vision, particularly among those former Defence officials and retired ADF officers whose operational knowledge is by no means current. Some of it is due to commercial preferences for the familiar over the real, even though future profitability and technical viability is risked.

It is therefore somewhat of a pity that the opportunity was not taken with the new DCP to rationalise and modernise the structuring and numbering of projects to better reflect a modern joint-Service approach to integrated ADF capabilities.●

## Sense of perspective needed on atrocities

**W**ars are intrinsically horrific in themselves and in their consequences and are only pursued by democracies when all other options seem worse. In any war, in the military force forces of any civilised country, the deliberate killing of the enemy or civilian non-combatants outside the authorised rules of engagement is murder and not war. Accidents, fratricide and collateral damage due to unavoidable military necessity also occur but by definition are rarely if ever deliberate. The inevitable mayhem of combat is minimised or alleviated where possible by sound leadership, firm battlefield discipline, good training, high morale, good tactical intelligence,

developed cross-cultural awareness skills and careful target discrimination. This is particularly needed in complex, multi-ethnic, inter-communal, counter-insurgency battlefields where the enemy tries to hide in the general population, such as much of current Iraq and Afghanistan.

Recent reports of a few alleged murders and one possible pack rape by US forces in Iraq need to be measured against this complex and nuanced operational and moral background.

The bottom line concerning possible and confirmed abuses and atrocities by allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan is that they are never excusable on an individual level but their effect must be judged only within a balanced assessment of the overall situation.

While some minor elements of US and other allied forces may have committed battlefield atrocities these are both relatively and absolutely infrequent, and are disconnected and largely aberrant incidents. Moreover, they almost invariably come to light because the internal processes of the allied forces have robust checks and balances designed to investigate and punish perpetrators, and encourage and reward whistleblowers. That these checks and balances may work imperfectly at times, and sometimes may not work at all, does not undermine the overall integrity of the system or the integrity of the overall allied mission to assist Iraq and Afghanistan in their transition to workable democracies.

On the other hand, the insurgents in Iraq, and the Taliban and Islamist terrorist groups we are fighting in Afghanistan, commit serious atrocities on virtually a daily basis. They do not respect or observe the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) in their prosecution of combat, nor broader international humanitarian law (IHL) in their deliberate targeting of civilian non-combatants and their careless and indiscriminate use of armed force. And they reward rather than punish their own for doing so. Allied prisoners-of-war and civilian hostages are routinely tortured and murdered in enemy hands. They have largely bombed United Nations agencies out of both countries and in Iraq they murdered the UN Secretary-General's envoy. Furthermore, they regard allied adherence to LOAC and IHL as a weakness to be exploited not a mark of civilisation to be respected or reciprocated.

It is therefore unfortunate that much commentary on allied shortcomings in both conflicts is often so unbalanced. Such commentary needs instead to acknowledge the overwhelming differences between the motivation, nature, number and frequency of allied and enemy atrocities.●

## Irony corner

- The ADF had to intervene again in East Timor the same weekend as the ABC showed the first episode of its two-part mini series on the 1999 East Timor crisis.●
- CNN's interview with PM John Howard during his US visit was accompanied by film of British troops in Iraq.●
- In Parliament on 22 June Opposition Leader Kim Beazley expressed concern that our troops in Iraq will soon be '... deployed in an area where there has been substantial combat ... without their own high capability armoured fighting vehicles ...'. (Project Waler, to replace the Army's mid-1960s era M113 armoured personnel carrier fleet, was cancelled by him as Minister for Defence in 1985).●
- Former longtime Defence deputy secretary, Hugh White, said 'I do think there are very deep-seated problems in the way in which Defence is managed and led ...'.●

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