

confidence the latter rightly placed in the former, so that the real and enduring national security lessons of late 1941 and early 1942 can continue to resonate. Curtin may have made the final decision on returning the AIF divisions from the Middle East, and about standing up to Churchill, but it was Sturdee who put the intellectual and professional steel in his spine at a time when panic gripped most of the War Cabinet.

During this period the strategic-level politico-military interface in Australia worked correctly and indeed properly in constitutional and professional terms. It probably worked the best it ever has, not least because it had to. Unfortunately, Curtin subsequently adopted a flawed structure for receiving strategic and military professional advice. For various reasons, not least self-doubt, he came to rely for strategic advice solely on a foreign general, Douglas MacArthur, and a civilian bureaucrat intriguer, Sir Frederick Shedden, rather than his own Australian military advisers.

Elements of the flawed politico-military interface that resulted have unfortunately persisted down to the present day. They underly many of the institutional and organisational culture problems embodied in the perpetually troubled and unbalanced diarchical organisation of the Department of Defence. They have encouraged the unwarranted belief that widespread interference in military professional matters by public servants is somehow normal and not contradictory to the Westminster principle of civil control of the military by Ministers. They have led to the increasing and inexcusable side-lining of the Service Chiefs as senior advisers to the Government, and to the demise of the former inter-departmental Defence Committee that included the CDF and the Service Chiefs to properly balance civilian advice to the Government. They have also meant the accretion of defence responsibilities by bodies, such as the Secretaries' Committee on National Security, that are beyond the professional capacity and legitimate authority of such bodies to handle.

All because we remember Curtin but forget Sturdee, and forget they worked as a team. And when we remember Curtin we forget his improper dependence on MacArthur and Shedden. ♦

Blaming the victim again

Once again the myth is being pushed that the Government's (really the community's) attitudes to Islamist extremism are somehow too 'hard-line' and supposedly to blame for a purported lack of co-operation by Australian Muslims with the federal police and ASIO. Similar claims are made regarding a supposed reluctance by Muslims to join our police and security intelligence agencies. The recruiting challenges are, in fact, more to do with citizenship requirements and security clearance difficulties, and with protecting staff and their families from potential intimidation, than any marked reluctance by Australian Muslims to help or serve.

The AFP and ASIO have a difficult job to do and they are generally undertaking it with considerable professionalism, tact and restraint. They are treading a delicate line in order that their necessary activities in monitoring extremism and countering terrorism are not unduly exploited by Islamist propaganda. The aim of such propaganda, of course, is to wrongly paint any security measure as 'anti-Muslim' and somehow aimed at all Muslims.

Describing common-sense counter-terrorism policies as 'hard-line' is simply more of the 'blame the victim' denial reaction that unfortunately still persists among some Australian Muslims, especially self-styled community leaders doing a bit of grandstanding. It also emphasises the unwillingness by some Muslims to concede that if moderate Muslims had done more to denounce and discourage Islamist extremism early enough, Australia would not still have anywhere near the same problem with combatting it.

Countering the Islamists is as much a spiritual and intellectual battle for the heart of Islam as it is a law and order problem for Australia as a whole. Moderate, mainstream Muslims are an essential part of this spiritual and intellectual battle. But they must become engaged in it because only they can shoulder much of the effort. Denying the problem or blaming their fellow Australians for being 'hard-line' is merely ceding the initiative and the spiritual middle ground to the Islamist extremists.

The bottom line in the argument as to whether current counter-terrorism policies and laws are 'hard-line' or 'anti-Muslim' is to acknowledge the overall tolerance and democratic maturity of Australian society in how it has carefully reacted to Islamist extremism. Despite 100 terrorist murders by Islamist there has been no serious backlash against Australian Muslims from the wider Australian community. This is a tribute to Australian society generally and, indeed, to the good sense of many Australian Muslims. But such tolerance will obviously be stretched if Muslim community leaders refuse to face reality and help Australians as a whole to defend ourselves against Islamist terrorism.

While there are Australian Muslims who support, sympathise, or are even prepared to excuse Islamist terrorism here or overseas 'in principle', the wider Muslim community must expect some degree of concern and even justifiable suspicion from their fellow Australians. Constant 'blame the victim' reactions from some Muslim spokesmen only increase such concerns and suspicions. At the very least they smack of an unwillingness to help fight the problem. At worst, they smack of apologia for the terrorists. ♦

A veteran fix for ADF recruiting and retention

The ADA does not normally enter debates on matters affecting war veterans, or other groups of former ADF personnel with grievances, unless a major matter of public importance involving our current defence efforts is involved. The Association generally leaves such matters up to the specialist veteran or other representative organisation concerned.

Continued controversy about the inadequacy of the compensation being paid to surviving war veterans and the families of dead veterans has, however, now clearly reached the stage where it is affecting recruiting for the current defence force. If the broader Australian community believes that the veterans of previous wars are not being treated appropriately then families will continue to discourage their younger members from enlisting in the ADF. Even when they enlist anyway, through youthful enthusiasm and the perennial belief that 'it will never happen to me', they are less likely to

stay for the long term once they become aware of the issue – particularly when they later accrue families and wider responsibilities of their own.

The recent ADF recruiting summit achieved broad agreement that the marketing of the defence force in recruiting terms needs to emphasise more than just the jobs or even the careers available. Service in the ADF is a fundamental function of citizenship integral to the well-being and security of the nation, not merely a matter of lifestyle or a temporary economic or employment relationship between the State and individual Service personnel.

Service in the ADF also entails responsibilities, exigencies and risks peculiar to the military profession. Our defence force, of necessity, is an unlimited liability company. Those voluntarily (or compulsorily) undertaking military service have an actual and implied contract with their fellow citizens that they, and their families, will be treated appropriately during their service – and fairly compensated then and afterwards for death, wounds or other disability caused by such service.

Fixing our inadequate or inconsistent treatment of the veterans of previous wars is therefore both a strategic and a moral issue. It is also an issue that is not going away, even as the youngest surviving World War II veterans enter their 80s and the youngest Vietnam veterans approach 60. The operational tempo of the last decade or so means Australia will have tens of thousands of younger veterans for at least five or six decades to come. As demographic pressures continue to shrink the ADF's recruiting pool, and as the population ages overall, we need to ensure that our inadequate treatment of veterans does not persist as a disincentive to ongoing recruitment and retention. ♦

Indexing not the index finger

Another impediment to recruiting and sustaining an adequately-sized defence force is continued strong dissatisfaction about the indexing of ADF superannuation pensions and the various compensation payments to disabled veterans. Both are indexed to increases in the consumer-price-index (CPI) only and fall ever further behind each year. This seems unfair and indeed discriminatory when, for example, various social welfare payments not involving the responsibilities, exigencies and risks of military service to the nation are indexed much more generously – to the higher of CPI increases or increases in male-total-average-weekly-earnings (MTAWE), and with the added safeguard that payments such as aged-pension and unemployment payments cannot drop below 25 per cent of MTAWE.

There is an obvious solution and it is fair, simple and transparent in perpetuity. ADF superannuation and veteran's compensation payments should be permanently indexed by the same method used to index parliamentary pensions. ♦

Disunity and biting hands that try to help

None of this, of course, is meant to imply that the efforts needed to fix the plight of war veterans will be an easy task. It is also a task becoming harder because agreement and unity among veterans is fragmenting not strengthening.

The number of separate organisations representing different types of veteran, different disabilities or other causes is growing regularly. Some of this is a reaction to real and perceived failures in representing particular categories of veteran by the larger and more established veterans' bodies such as the RSL. Other fragmentation stems from geographic, financial and expertise pressures in federal bodies, differing local conditions, political or operational disagreements, and suspicions that some veterans' organisations are now too ossified in their decision-making or too close to the bureaucracy or government to be fully effective lobbies. Some fragmentation is simply the result of personality clashes, irrational resentments, chips on the shoulder about being led again by retired officers, or the simple desire by some individuals to be a big fish in a small pond.

It would also be fair to say that, judging by their public statements and the quality of their research and lobbying efforts, some of the newer and somewhat esoteric veterans' bodies do not seem particularly well organised or led. Nor do they appear objective and informed enough in their public stances to win much public support. This can result in unhelpful contributions to public debate, especially when their input is sought and sensationalised by journalists motivated by a desire to sell newspapers, lift ratings or futher their career, rather than by any real desire to air genuine issues effectively through informed debate.

The Internet has also encouraged direct and independent action by some individual veterans, or small and dispersed groups of veterans who have not previously been able to contact each other easily. In such cases they are often veterans who are ostensibly or actually disappointed with the plethora of existing veterans' organisations. One serious problem resulting is that the emails consequently exchanged often appear to encourage opinions and action without necessarily improving the research and argument involved. In some prominent cases, originators and recipients seem keen to circulate emails for communication but not otherwise use the Web for actual research.

Unfortunately, independent action can be quite counter-productive, especially when emails full of abuse and short on facts, objectivity, context and logical argument are sent willy-nilly to bureaucrats and politicians. One result is that they discredit the veterans' community as a whole. Another is that they discourage negotiation towards a solution of grievances because they offer no reassurance that rational and reasonable interaction is likely. Even more unfortunately, the originators of some emails appear to be suffering the types of psychiatric disability that can hinder effective lobbying because they involve complications caused by PTSD, depression, isolation, paranoia, alcoholism and insomnia – some in combination. As a rough rule-of-thumb the date-time group on such emails can often be a good indication of the cogency of the contents.

But all must be gathered again into the veterans' fold before the lobbying attack can be renewed effectively. Some circuit-breakers in veterans' community organisation and leadership are needed to kick-start the collective and focused effort needed to fix things. ♦