

Strategy must determine resourcing

Key interim decisions stemming from the Defence Capability Review (DCR) are covered in the feature article in this issue. One important and long overdue decision taken, to finally modernise the Army's tanks, is explored in more detail in our new 'The Sharp End' section.

As is common in what too often passes for public debate on defence issues in Australia, media coverage of what the DCR announcements mean has included several articles presenting wildly contradictory interpretations.

Articles by some former defence officials, in academic or strategic 'think-tanks', even posited that the DCR was fully consistent with the Defence of Australia (DOA) policy of the 1980s and early 1990s. Much other commentary detected a refreshing change from DOA strictures.

Several members of the academic-bureaucratic circle who used to play the 'what the government wants to hear line' are now embarrassed by DCR decisions. This is primarily due to the review's emphasis on balance and versatility in the ADF. It rejects the previous prescriptive configuring of the ADF to match pet theories about Australia's strategic circumstances, the probability and nature of future events, and, hopefully, the long-term canard of making strategic assessments fit budget limits.

The modern Joint Force strategy and concepts underlying the DCR have also proved somewhat confusing to those used to the narrow 'Service Stovepipe' terminology and approach long favoured by the Department's large civilian bureaucracy—to buttress its policy of dividing and

conquering the Services in order to preserve its own power and influence.

Some uninformed criticism of the DCR was inevitable from those with Service-centric biases or platform 'hobby horses'. This group includes some older or long-retired ADF personnel, and academics and journalists with no on-the-ground military experience or feel.

Many commentators missed or undervalued one major DCR announcement, perhaps because it did not involve photogenic hardware issues. This was that the government's decisions in the DCR had drawn heavily on the advice of the CDF and Service Chiefs. For anyone with knowledge of the pre-1974 structure of higher defence management, or indeed with knowledge of how other comparable countries do this, the statement (if true) was particularly encouraging.

Hopefully this development signals an end to the silly and destructive habit whereby strategic advice to government has been the ruthlessly protected preserve of Australia's large civilian defence bureaucracy, rather than more broadly informed and constituted groups and processes.

Most importantly, it may finally be that our intelligence assessment, strategy formulation and capability development processes can become intellectually and professionally robust ones, incorporating the best expert advice available—including the considered professional advice of our senior sailors, soldiers and aviators. This has not been the case in recent times. The two most recent Defence White Papers, for example, were developed by processes that deliberately excluded the Service Chiefs and their staffs as much as possible.

The flawed DOA policy in particular was a result of a process that was corrupt politically, intellectually, professionally and constitutionally. It was essentially a figleaf to disguise a defence strategy that was wrongly driven, and unduly constrained, by the funding thought to be available. Although always shortsighted, such a policy was able to gull the uninformed and uninterested during times of relatively benign strategic circumstances. Our contemporary, much more fluid, strategic circumstances require integrity and a robust approach.

The amount of our national resources to be allocated to our national security is not unlimited but it must be primarily dictated by the situation we face—both now and in the future. Short-term political perceptions and concerns, and our three-year federal electoral cycle, have too much sway. We need more maturity in assessing the threats to our national security and in deciding how we respond to them. We must also avoid in future the perennial situation to date where the funding promised in Defence White Papers is never delivered. The gap, since only 1987, is now at least \$107 billion.

We must have a robust process whereby the strategy and the forces we need to execute it drive the resourcing allocated not vice versa. ♦

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