

Australian Defence Almanac 2004–2005

Raspal Khosa

Reviewed by Neil James



In reviewing the *Australian Defence Almanac 2004–2005* the ADA needs to disclose that when the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) first advertised in May 2003 for temporary in-house staff to produce this almanac, the Association unsuccessfully proposed instead that it be written as a joint ASPI-ADA multi-disciplinary project.

There is no doubt such an almanac has long been needed to further informed public debate on defence issues. As but one example, the often poor standard of public and departmental debate (and process) involved with the Defence green and white papers in 2000 would have been improved considerably by this almanac. This is especially so if it had been available in tandem with ADFP-D, the ADF's new capstone doctrine publication, (which was finished by September 1999 but whose publication was inexplicably delayed by the then CDF and which unfortunately did not appear until April 2002).

Virtually all of the information in the almanac is published somewhere else but that is the very point. The *Defence Annual Report*, for instance, has generally improved its reporting of statistical detail and its recording of major ADF activities over recent years but not in a generally readable format. Both SDSC and the former ADSC have produced compendiums of long-term defence statistics but not recently. In April 2003 Defence produced a useful stand-alone booklet optimistically entitled *The ADF Capability Fact Book*.

Largely the work of Raspal Khosa and Dr Mark Thomson from ASPI, the *Australian Defence Almanac* records, updates and integrates information that has previously been

spread across a range of official and semi-official sources, and also includes some of the explanatory background detailed in ADFP-D. The almanac is structured in seven chapters plus a useful seven-page list of defence acronyms and abbreviations and a three-page list of the documentary and online sources used.

The first chapter attempts to provide an overview of defence organisation and strategic policy matters. There are several obvious gaps or arguable points, especially in its coverage of the constitutional and legal basis for defence matters. Some of the explanations throughout also appear weighted in favour of viewpoints held in the higher reaches of Defence's civilian bureaucracy rather than ones commonly agreed. The only two maps in the whole volume are disappointing. One shows Australia in the Asia–Pacific region but strangely occupies only half its page. The world map uses a squashed and barely readable example of Mollweide projection.

In chapter 2, the structure, weaponry and basing of the ADF are covered in comprehensive and generally well-explained detail. This would be improved by the addition of information such as the characteristics of warships (length, tonnage, crew size, etc.) and clear designation of which units in all three Services comprise reserve, regular or mixed elements. There are some errors, for example, all the RAAF units in 41 and 42 Wings are not listed and the RAAF's 65 PC9 training aircraft are missing (as they also are from this year's Defence Annual Report). Minor glitches with nomenclature and designations will also grate with

Kokoda

professional readers. Examples include 'service' being spelled without a capital 'S' throughout, anti-armour weapons described as 'anti-tank', and pennant numbers on warships incorrectly described as hull numbers.

Chapter 3 briefly details the structure of the Department of Defence and lists senior personalities and the programs into which defence 'outputs' are organised for financial management purposes. The fourth chapter provides 20 pages of comprehensive charts covering personnel and associated matters. Some aspects are presented in a potentially misleading format, such as the numbers of civilian staff over time, and while there is a table showing ADF numbers broken down by rank, its equivalent civilian staff table strangely details only SES-level officials.

The following eight-page chapter on financial aspects is well presented but has some traps for the unwary. The table showing defence outlays since federation catalogues the general record of neglect, but shows outlays only, because the data on other spending (such re-investment from asset sales) is not available from earlier years. The chart showing comparative defence spending in our region (based on DIO reporting) should also be interpreted carefully as it is presumably based on official reporting and under-estimates the actual spending by totalitarian countries. The chart showing comparative federal spending between defence, public order, education, health and social security only begins in 1998–99. This is a pity as a start date in the mid 1970s would present the significant increases in the latter three categories, against the declining or relatively static figures for defence, even more starkly.

Chapter 6 outlines the international treaties and organisations Australia is party to in the defence and associated arenas. It also lists significant ongoing regional conflicts (whether they involve Australia or not), recent terrorist incidents in the region, ADF deployments 1947–2002, ADF operations in 2003–04, the amounts spent on defence assistance to regional countries 1987–2004 and the amounts of other developmental assistance in 2003–04. The coverage of treaties, alliances and organisations is always problematic and there are several obvious omissions such as intelligence exchange agreements. The vexed question of whether Australia has an alliance with the UK is also left hanging. The listing of ADF operations has numerous puzzling errors and omissions, most of them concerning detail readily available and, even in the more obscure cases, certainly known by the Service history units or the professor of ADF history at ANU.

First there are many simple errors of fact such as the first Australian to command a UN peacekeeping operation (UNMOGIP 1950–1966) was Robert not Richard Nimmo, and the UNIIMOG contingent were ceasefire observers not NBC specialists. Second, there are claims of unknown data, such as the number of observers with UNYOM in 1964, when even the names of the four individuals are known. Finally, there are numerous operations simply not mentioned, such as the

evacuation of orphans from South Vietnam in 1975, or the EW detachment deployed to the then New Hebrides in 1980 to track down the French Secret Service transmitter supporting secessionist rebels. The real tragedy here is that simple proofreading by any one of a dozen ADF history experts would have alerted the authors and prevented the problem.

Counter-terrorist structures and processes are covered well in chapter 7 but again there are terminology errors and much of the explanatory detail, especially on the National Security Committee of Cabinet and the intelligence and security agencies, may have been better placed in chapter 1.

Overall the *Australian Defence Almanac 2004–2005* is a welcome first attempt at producing a tool to further informed public debate of defence issues. However, more consultation with subject matter experts, more fact checking and greater care with terminology and in some cases layout, would have resulted in a more accurate, comprehensive, usable and therefore reliable publication. Fortunately, these are all matters that can be readily rectified in the next edition. ♦

Raspal Khosa (editor), 'Australian Defence Almanac 2004–2005', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, 2004, Softback, 109pp., RRP \$29.95

Co-op