

The recent speedy introduction into service of the first of four C-17 heavy airlifters followed close upon the heels of the first group of the 59 new Abrams tanks.

Neither was mentioned in the last defence white paper *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*. Nor were other commonsense steps over the last few years such as to replace the LPAs with medium-sized LHDs, add two infantry battalions, harden and network the Army generally, and provide at least some self-propelled artillery to the Army's sole mechanised brigade.

What does this tell us? First, it reminds us that wars and crises, often unpredicted, are great tests and swiftly show up outmoded strategic thinking, poor policy guidance and the resultant unsuitable order-of-battle and equipment.

Second, it justifies the public suspicions of the Prime Minister and recent Ministers for Defence about the intellectual and practical worth of previous white paper processes (a separate issue to the well-accepted principle of periodic white papers themselves).

Third, it begs the obvious question why many subsequent necessary, and in some cases urgent, major improvements in defence force capability were absent from the 2000 White Paper (not to mention its predecessors), no matter how its concepts and quasi-theology are reinterpreted.

Fourth, such force structure reforms and catch-up procurement decisions show that the National Security Committee of Cabinet recognises the flawed way defence white papers have traditionally been prepared. This is to be expected from an NSCC with the greatest continuity in its senior appointments ever (including during World War II), and which has taken a much more effective interest in strategic affairs than any of its predecessors since at least the mid 1960s.

Finally, it highlights again how the modern ADF is an integrated joint force not three warring single-Service fiefdoms forced to perpetually fight each other for adequate resources (for the convenience of bureaucratic power plays and political parsimony).

Those who ultimately fight on our behalf have the right, and must be given a reasonable opportunity, to provide professional military advice to the government on the best way to do so or not. And on what weapons and equipment might be necessary to achieve victory and minimise casualties. This especially applies when contemporary Governments and Oppositions are so bereft of personal military experience.

The drafting of the last three defence white papers ignored this principle by actively excluding the defence force from the process as much as possible.

Instead of harnessing professional expertise across the department and the ADF, they were largely drafted in seclusion by a self-selected coterie of civilian officials with no military expertise. Consultation was grudging, minimal or non-existent and short-notice deadlines for comment and bans on effective professional consultation were the rule.

One result was that each white paper had a 'missing chapter'. There was no real explanation how strategic policy logically translated into flexible capability development

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### Our cover

*A 6SQN F-111 bomber displays the many types of explosive ordnance it can deliver to its target.*

*Photo Courtesy of the RAAF*

guidance and thence into sound directions on force structure and equipment procurement. Indeed the 1987, 1994 and 2000 White Papers often seemed more intent on inflexibly trying to dictate what much of the defence force should never be capable of doing.

We should also have a whole-of-government approach to the preparation of white papers on related responsibilities. There should be a national security white paper, or integrated series of white papers, rather than defence, foreign affairs and counter-terrorism ones produced by separate processes at different times.

But no matter how they are structured in future, white papers need to be prepared by modern, inclusive, whole-of-government processes. Given that the Secretary is now invited to all Chiefs-of-Staff Committee meetings, giving that committee full responsibility to steer all the Defence aspects of future white paper preparation seems a sensible way forward. ♦