

It is also worth noting a recent national security example where concerns about the potential for ASIO abuses proved quite unfounded. The claimed need for an independent 'Security Appeals Tribunal' was a major cause celebre for ASIO's critics in the 1960s and 1970s. They feared that public service advancement, and other rewards and rights, were somehow being wrongly denied on security grounds. After being set up during the Whitlam Government with much fanfare, the tribunal was later merged with other human rights bodies due to sustained lack of work.

The current impasses with the ASIO Bill and in how we list acknowledged terrorist organisations for proscription are inexcusable. Given the testimony in the Bali and Jakarta terrorist trials, all parties in Australia contributing to this situation should revisit their professed positions and expedite commonsense measures to protect Australia without further delay.

Counting them all out and counting them all back

As for all Australia's previous wars the Government committed the ADF to the war in Iraq using the millennium-old Crown prerogative conferred under Section 61 of the Constitution. Even if Australia became a republic, and even if the Westminster model of government was discarded, it is likely this power would not fundamentally change except for the term perhaps becoming 'executive privilege'.

While there was and remains some party-political controversy about the current government's decision to commit the ADF to military operations in Iraq, all the major and minor parties represented in Parliament appeared to express their support for the forces once they were committed. This is as it should be and the ADF deserves no less.

It has also been encouraging to see both government and opposition parliamentarians join the Australian community in the farewell and welcome home ceremonies for the forces deployed on our behalf.

Such ceremonies are truly national occasions. They are above partisan politics and inter-State or inter-Service rivalries. The time-honoured and tested traditions and protocols involved emphasise the importance of the ADF in Australian life as one of our oldest, most integrated and honoured national institutions. In constitutional and professional terms, such national ceremonies especially illustrate that the ADF is apolitical in function and history and that it serves all Australians equally. Such national ceremonies particularly emphasise that while the ADF quite properly always carries out the lawful orders of the government of the day, the defence force itself has a wider and longer-term reciprocal relationship with, and responsibilities to, the Australian people.

It has therefore been more than a pity that the farewell and welcome home ceremonies for the ADF elements who served in Iraq have not had the traditional 'above politics'

theme that would come with the presiding dignitary being the Governor General or the relevant State Governor.

Whether in truth or just common perception, and on this matter it does not much matter which applies, it seems both of the main parties have, at times, sought to make party-political capital out of such ceremonies or the associated media coverage. This is to be regretted. It is hoped the appropriate sense of constitutional perspective and professional decorum prevails in future.

After all, even Parliament is always opened by the Governor-General rather than a politician for similar reasons.

Structuring the ADF to sustain our enduring national interests

With the war in Iraq another generation of Australian Service personnel have seen combat in the Middle East. At least this time round we did not have to capture Damascus yet again.

Once again Australia's enduring national interests required the projection of force outside our territory and its immediate region. Once again we were a junior partner in a multinational coalition. Once again this coalition included several of the principal Anglo-Saxon democracies. This is at least the tenth time these national security criteria have applied over the last century or so.

Some commentators have expressed the hope that this latest lesson in the apparent folly of configuring the ADF primarily for semi-independent 'home defence' will be absorbed. The Association wishes it were so. Australian history, however, shows a perpetual swing of the pendulum between the 'home defence' and 'wider international interests' camps under various labels. What cannot be denied, by either camp, is that the pendulum swings have resulted in the ADF generally being too small to cope with the eventual calls made on our forces. Today is no different. The ADF faces increasing calls — and likely future ones — without possessing many of the capabilities actually required. At best, this needlessly risks casualties and/or strategic embarrassment. Even worse consequences need to be considered without being at all alarmist.

All three Armed Services continue to struggle with increasing capability development problems, especially in obtaining realistic numbers and types of modern equipment, and in closing the interoperability gap with Australia's major allies. The underfunded 10-year Defence Capability Plan continues to struggle with resolving the key problem that so many of our major weapons platforms are becoming obsolescent over the same short period. All three Services do not have sufficient people, not least because we too often quickly wear out those we have through high operational and training tempos.

The war in Iraq illustrated our much-reduced capabilities dramatically. The UK contingent was 45,000