

by **Australis**

**Australis is a collective name for a number of individual contributors to *Defender*.**

## Gunsmoke and mirrors

Inadequate defence funding is a longstanding problem in Australia. It was not so long ago that several of the principal welfare, education and health lobbies were calling for massive cuts in supposed high defence spending. Major clamouring along these lines from one welfare lobby actually occurred only a fortnight before the ADF had to be committed to resolve the September 1999 East Timor crisis. As the crisis broke, the same organisation was then heard demanding urgent and unilateral armed intervention in East Timor in a 'damn the consequences' fashion. This vignette aptly illustrates the type of short-term and narrow-minded thinking, and uninformed and emotive inputs, that perpetually plague political debates on defence issues in Australia.

The current government on coming to power rightly deserves some credit for its foresight and disciplined record in not cutting defence spending when most federal programs were cut or capped to some extent. Indeed, our ability to help the East Timorese and rescue Indonesia from its own folly, would not have been achieved without the early 1999 decision to bring the second of our only two (and understrength) regular brigades to a higher state of operational readiness. The declaration in the 2000 White Paper to increase defence spending by around three per cent per year in real terms was also welcome, although not enough to reverse the effects of decades of comparative neglect under governments of both political persuasions.

The essential fact remains, however, that despite the ringing security rhetoric of the Treasurer's speech introducing the 2003–04 federal budget, Australia continues to allocate insufficient national resources to its defence.

In analysing this year's Commonwealth budget for defence we need to concentrate on the big picture over time. Hyperbole about relatively small items in any one particular year, such as \$22 million in 2003–04 for a new headquarters for Special Operations Command, only distracts us from the magnitude and longevity of the overall underfunding.

Even discounting the hype, the opaque way the

accounts are presented continues to hide or distort the reality. Even the welcome demise of the unnecessary distraction of the capital charge will not blast away the mists of confusion. It is especially worthy to note that the principal broadsheet newspapers in the days following presentation of the federal budget, and the following week's edition of the *Bulletin*, all had significantly different figures for Defence spending, and the size of supposed increases in both dollar and percentage terms.

There is an old business adage that you cannot manage what you cannot measure. The format and structure of Defence accounting does not assist ministers and parliament in understanding and prioritising ADF requirements, nor does it help to explain to the Australian people where the money goes and why. Furthermore, given the long lead times and five-year rolling acquisition programs to introduce or update ADF capabilities, Defence is a notoriously difficult function to fund. The technical accounting problems also cannot be resolved entirely until the overall accountability problems within the bloated Defence bureaucracy are solved by root and branch reforms.

The ADA has also always been firmly of the view that one-off costs, such as the \$650 million supplementation over several years to cover our participation in the Iraq intervention, should not be included in assessments of whether defence funding has increased. Nor should our additional \$100 million provision towards the rebuilding of Iraq. By their essential unpredictability, wars or major peacekeeping operations are really one-off events and impossible to fit into longer-term defence capability development and capability maintenance planning.

The one-off cost of the recent war is just like paying for unforecast but necessary repairs to national infrastructure after major bushfires or floods. Although clearly distracting to the overall federal budget strategy, especially the decision to aim for a budget surplus no smaller than \$2 billion, the cost of the war is really neither here nor there in terms of developing and sustaining the size and type of defence force Australia needs in the long term. This is especially so regarding the Defence Capability Plan, which, among other things, seeks to

manage in an orderly fashion the continuous and rolling need to adequately modernise and re-equip the ADF.

This budget's small increase in defence spending (around \$570 million at most depending on how you convert the figures) reflects only the limited three per cent real growth per annum promised in the 2000 Defence White Paper anyway. Our strategic circumstances have changed greatly since this White Paper was published three years ago and much greater defence spending is now even more essential. One illustration of the problem is that this year's defence allocation is actually \$41 million less than the last budget's forecast allocation for this year (\$13,970 m compared with the last budget's projection of \$14,011 m for 2003–04).

With defence spending down to well under two per cent of GDP (1.8 per cent by some calculations) we are not even treading water that well. The gap between White Paper assessments of what is needed and actual spending since 1987 is now over \$100 billion. Defence spending needs to be at least 2.3 per cent of GDP in order to catch up for decades of relative neglect. It needs to be even greater to pay for the modern, versatile, operationally ready and sustainable defence force we actually need.

However, the Association notes that before defence spending is increased to the level really needed, major organisational and corporate governance reforms are required in the Department of Defence. These are essential to ensure the money is used wisely, and that our defence strategy and ADF capability development processes are sufficiently robust.

Finally, ADA members and *Defender* readers are likely to meet fellow Australians who may mistakenly believe that defence spending is somehow too high or that Australia cannot afford to spend more. We all need to take every opportunity to explain instead the stark truth. One of the best ways of doing so is to present the uninformed with the stark comparisons. Defence spending is now only the fourth largest national outlay (it was actually fifth for a while until government debt was reduced). Australia spends at least 5 to 6 times as much on welfare, at least 3 to 4 times as much on health, and at least 2 to 3 times as much on education, as we do on defence. Even without acknowledging our current and foreseeable difficult strategic circumstances, this low spending on defence should concern all Australians.

The Commonwealth alone spends five times as much on social welfare as it spends on defence. Federal spending on health alone is now over twice that spent on defence even before the significant spending by the States (on what is primarily a State responsibility) is included. Federal spending alone on education (also primarily a State responsibility and about half of each State budget) is virtually the same as that spent on defence. The defence budget seems relatively high to some because they fail to realise that it is met solely by federal spending.

Whatever your views on the importance of social welfare, health and education spending we need to face up to our neglect regarding an issue at least as important — our national defence.

## The darkening ecliptic

The apparently post-Modernist approach to public affairs continues in the Department of Defence's intriguingly titled Public Affairs and Corporate Communications (PACC) Division. Ern Malley would have been proud of them.

Over the last three years the number of queries to the ADA from the media has increased exponentially. As a rough rule-of-thumb about a half to two-thirds of these queries have primarily involved journalists seeking simple facts, basic explanations or historical background on various aspects of the ADF.

Prior to the advent of the highly bureaucratised, centralised and 'politically focused' PACC, such uncontroversial, security-neutral and/or basic queries were invariably handled, very promptly and efficiently, by uniformed ADF members working in the Directorates of Public Information answerable to the CDF and the three Service Chiefs.

The media appear to now often contact the ADA instead and increasingly regard the Association as a de facto Defence public-affairs body. On receiving such basic queries, journalists contacting the ADA are usually asked 'have they sought the information required from Defence'. Almost invariably the response falls into one or more of six categories:

- civilian PACC staff do not know the answer and/or how to find it out;
- the time that PACC staff have advised will be necessary to furnish an answer is either unknown or clearly exceeds filing deadlines for the story;
- PACC staff have simply not rung back;
- the answer provided by PACC staff has been irrelevant, incomplete or contradictory to other research of open sources;
- the journalist was referred to the ADA by Defence public-relations staff; or
- the journalist no longer believes it is worth the effort to seek the information from PACC in the first place.

Now the standard of question asked by many generalist journalists allocated a defence storyline to follow up is often very badly thought through. Questions from such defence neophytes frequently show only the most cursory understanding of defence issues, international affairs, Australian history and Australian governance. This is all the more reason, however, to staff Defence public affairs with experienced ADF officers and senior NCO/sailors from operational backgrounds like we used to do fairly well. Journalists need to talk directly to 'operators' in order to get timely and real answers to their questions.

However, for argument's sake, let us allow for the strictly controlled information flow theory inherent in the centralised bureaucratic model instituted through PACC. Let us also ignore for a moment the apparent preference to employ civilian staff with little understanding or knowledge of the ADF. Even ignoring these two aspects,

it still seems silly at best that media queries with no political sensitivity or security connotation cannot be handled efficiently and quickly. This approach also seems purpose-designed to exacerbate negative perceptions and stories rather than kill them during their gestation with the facts and/or an appropriate commonsense ADF perspective.

Some recent examples of other journalistic frustration with PACC include:

- A broadsheet journalist having to wait 28 hours when posing the simple query — what are the three largest ADF bases in Australia in terms of people stationed there?
- A broadsheet journalist wanting to write a ‘good news’ story on one Service’s recruiting activities in a certain State was continually fobbed off for some weeks from contact with the recruiting staff concerned.
- A television journalist seeking to interview ADF personnel, as to their professional judgement concerning the (non-controversial) mooted replacement for a certain weapon system, being refused all access to the units and individuals concerned.

Now we should not ignore that some parts of PACC work well. But the unprofessional chaos in ‘front office’ public affairs, and the flawed management philosophy and practices underlying PACC itself, are essentially caused by Defence ignoring three fundamental principles of military operations.

First, ADF public affairs is first and foremost a function of command, at all levels, and ADF commanders should be trusted to run their own public affairs. If they cannot be so trusted they should not be commanders at any level. If the commander’s staff do not know which public-affairs issues are sensitive and might require referral upwards to the minister, or horizontally to the department, they should not be ADF officers.

Second, in modern war, even more so than in the past, information is an essential tool of warfighting. It is an operational function and responsibility at all levels, not an administrative or bureaucratic one.

Third, the ADF fights as it trains and operates in peacetime. If ADF commanders and their staffs cannot handle their own public affairs in peacetime as they move up through the ranks, where do they gain the expertise to do so when deployed on operations with far greater public-affairs pressures and responsibilities?

The current structure and practice of Defence public affairs is riddled with serious moral, professional and practical contradictions. Many of Australia’s most experienced journalists invariably describe PACC as a nightmare or worse. Even excluding the lessons of the so-called ‘children overboard’ debacle still ringing in our ears, a fundamental commonsense rethink is urgently required. It is the ADA’s firm belief that the dubiously titled PACC would and should not survive such a review.

In the meantime, given the high workload for the ADA due to PACC’s apparent inability to do the job, the Association is now considering invoicing the

Department of Defence for its onerous public-affairs services on the ADF’s behalf.

## Rooting out terrorists from the verbiage

The ongoing trials in Indonesia of the Bali bombers should bring many of our national security debates in Australia down to earth but we would not bet on it. Several of the terrorists have declared in open court they hate us because we are ‘white’ and ‘Western’ and believe our deaths do not matter because of this. The ideological material discovered by the Indonesian Police investigating the bombing is generally just as intellectually shallow, and is riddled with religious bigotry, racism, misogyny, homophobia and extremely puritanical views on socialising, alcohol consumption and sex. Put simply, they fear and loathe Western liberal democracy and its pluralism and tolerance.

If the terrorists understood our systems and beliefs well enough they might smile more often, especially when our way of doing things unnecessarily delays essential action to thwart their attacks. Given the yawning tolerance and accountability gap between them and us, the question of which terrorist groups should be proscribed in Australia, and what degree of counter-terrorist measures might be temporarily necessary, are essentially simple ones.

There are natural concerns about allowing the Government to just add terrorist groups to the proscribed list but some appropriate safeguard mechanism is surely not beyond the realms of reason. This is especially so as terrorist groups mutate and change their names with some frequency. A parliamentary vote being required each time such a mutation occurs seems clumsy and time consuming at best. Furthermore, given the record and views of some fringe parties in the Senate, it is also reasonable to harbour concerns about commonsense always being applied if a parliamentary vote is always necessary. Basing our list on UN processes is also not an option. The UN invariably fails to act quickly, or agree on the obvious, such as Hezbollah being a terrorist organisation.

Similar circumstances beset consideration of the new ASIO Bill becalmed in the Senate for the last six months. A major stopping point is the proposed, and strictly limited, provision to detain terrorist suspects for questioning for up to seven days. Other concerns centre on the proposal to limit access to lawyers in some circumstances during an urgent ongoing investigation, and the safeguards when detaining legal minors for questioning. Without denying Australia’s proud liberal democratic traditions, none of these provisions appear unreasonable in the current circumstances. The fact we are debating them at such length proves the strength of our system and why abuses of authority are unlikely. Such provisions are also similar to the draconian national security regulations that applied temporarily during both World Wars and these, on the whole, worked very well with minimal abuses occurring.

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

strong with modern equipment. A proportionate Australian contribution would have been 15,000 not 2,000. One of the reasons we did not send a larger force was that we couldn't. Even if we had the time to scrape together a larger force, it would have lacked enough modern equipment to fight in a modern battlespace and we could not have rotated or sustained the force anyway.

The vehemence of the debate between the two camps, at least since the 1980s, is partly due to the defence debate having been unfortunately monopolised by a relatively small group of academics, bureaucrats and diplomats. Various governments, and the people of Australia, should have not permitted this sad state of affairs to arise, let alone to allow it to flourish like a noxious weed. At the very least, this latest strategic lesson for Australia over Iraq has (as did the East Timor crisis before it) emphasised a vital point. Public debates on national security issues should be just that — public and debated. What passes for a debate must never again be monopolised by self-selected, intellectually incestuous, insular and self-styled 'elites'. The results of strategic deliberations must never again be a supposed consensus foisted on us by such a flawed process.

## Time for a national security Green Paper?

Any strategic deliberations have to grapple with the profound sea change gathering force in our global strategic architecture. Despite being rescued by the US, UK and Australia over prolonged Iraqi defiance of its strictures, the UN and its underlying concept of collective security continues to struggle for effectiveness and credibility.

As the UN and regional collective security organisations dither, debacles of national disintegration and horrific human rights abuse continue in west, central and southern Africa. North Korean brinkmanship is resurgent and Japan is now openly proposing a break with its post-World War II restraints concerning the projection of force. The macro- and micro-states of the Pacific basin continue to disintegrate socio-economically, although some optimism is beginning to revive about Fiji. Terrorism by Islamic fanatics threatens the West, delays resolution of the Israel–Palestine dilemma and destabilises central, south and South East Asia.

The US can, and now is, withdrawing forces from Saudi Arabia in toto, and increasingly from Turkey, Germany, France and the Low Countries. NATO seems increasingly driven by the types of membership tensions, wishful thinking and loss of focus that led to SEATO's demise. In North Asia, the US appears to be headed towards a redeployment and large downscaling of its 100,000-strong forward deployments in South Korea and Okinawa.

The time for an integrated Green Paper on Australia's national security is now well and truly upon

us. This should, in turn, lead to a single, integrated White Paper rather than separate defence and foreign affairs and trade versions.

Just as importantly, such papers must be developed by intellectually and morally robust, and professionally inclusive, processes. The White Paper in particular must be drafted by a broadly drawn expert team, which includes the full range of ADF and diplomatic expertise available, and which is supervised by the Chief of Defence Force, Service Chiefs and relevant Permanent Heads. In this way we would avoid the many flaws, underlying intellectual dishonesty and overly prescriptive nature of most recent Defence White Papers. These numerous flaws in process and result largely occurred because principles of accountable governance and ADF professionalism were forgotten or deliberately ignored. This wrongly allowed recent White Papers to be developed in detail, and with far too much internal bureaucratic secrecy, by a small, narrowly drawn and closeted clique of Defence civilian bureaucrats.

## On the right path but too small a step

The recently announced government initiative to form a Defence and Security Division within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet is a small step forward in interdepartmental and inter-agency cooperation. The proposed separation of international issues into a separate division, however, does seem somewhat contradictory. If the bureaucratic method is to be followed, perhaps what is really needed is one integrated national security division.

The ADA has long believed, however, that solutions primarily dependent on bureaucratic reorganisation, or which are focused on one problem at a time, will not adequately address the real need for integrated national security decision making as well as bureaucratic coordination. This is the main reason why a specialist department of 'homeland security' is not required in Australia's case.

Starting from first principles, the National Security Committee of Cabinet appears to have functioned particularly well in the current government. The Association believes that this cabinet committee would function even better if directly served by a National Security Council. This Council should be established by statute and vested with appropriately delegated executive authorities and administrative co-ordination responsibilities. The Council should be supported by a deliberately small and independent secretariat not a division within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Most Australians would understand why the last Defence White Paper went to the National Security Committee of Cabinet accompanied, appropriately, by the then Chief of Defence Force (CDF) and Secretary

of the Department of Defence. They might wonder, however, why senior Defence civilian bureaucrats were also present for discussions but the three Service Chiefs were excluded.

The backdoor demise in the mid 1990s of the statutory interdepartmental Defence Committee (comprising the CDF, Service Chiefs, Director-General ASIO and key Permanent Heads) has resulted in some highly unfortunate consequences. Not least of these is the exclusion of the commanders of the navy, army and air force from the highest-level interdepartmental committees involved with national security issues. This is just plain silly and unprecedented by any comparable international standard or practice.

Furthermore, in the case of a future integrated national security White Paper, there would obviously have to be high-level input from many departments and agencies. The current 'process' of committees of some departmental Permanent Heads supported by lower-level interdepartmental committees and task forces needs serious reform.

Given the integrated approach to national security now required, Australia needs a proper National Security Council rather than interdepartmental committees comprised of officials only. Such a council would involve ministers, senior ADF commanders and civilian officials in a similar manner to the War Cabinet and later the War Conference instituted during World War II.

Our proposed National Security Council would be chaired by an appropriate minister, and include all or most of the members of the National Security Committee of Cabinet when required by the seriousness of the issue. The Council would also always include: the Chief of Defence Force and all three Service Chiefs; the Directors-General of the Office of National Assessments, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service; the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police; and the heads of key departments (Defence, Foreign Affairs, Treasury and Attorney-general's). Some State premiers might also be invited to attend from time to time when relevant.

A National Security Council constituted along these lines would allow the highest political level of government to be continually across the issues and up with the thinking of its most senior professional advisers. It would also stop much of the process-driven bureaucratic game playing that sometimes prevents ministers from being as fully informed as they should be (and the expert advice of the Service Chiefs being excluded).

Many will be the self-serving arguments against such a concept from various senior officials. There are, however, no valid constitutional, legal or professional impediments. In the light of 21st century whole-of-nation threats a whole-of-government response, not a bureaucratic response, is clearly required.

## Garnering disaster

While the force-on-force phase of the US-led campaign to topple Saddam Hussein succeeded beyond nearly all expectations, the continuing chaos of the subsequent occupation risks undoing much of the good. Over two months after organised Iraqi resistance collapsed in early April the allies still appear to have inadequate forces to impose order on the chaos.

US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld's direction to cut the forces needed may have appeared to work for the fight but any campaign also includes the consolidation and the orderly withdrawal phases. Occupations, even relatively benevolent ones, soak up forces until a semblance of street-level law and order is re-imposed and public confidence is restored enough for some semblance of normality to return. The corrupting nature and longevity of Saddam Hussein's regime and the Sunni-Shia schism in Iraq, has contributed to the problem as there is little enduring civil society to fall back on for rebuilding.

Unless this situation is fixed quickly, the US risks replicating the British quitting of Aden in 1968 on a large scale, rather than midwifing the first of a new order of democracies throughout the Middle East. Even worse, the US at first seemed to lack the will to restore order. Growing Iraqi impatience and even antipathy to their liberators may be in no small part due to many Iraqis just wanting enough order re-imposed, however temporarily, so they can eat, drink and work before moving forward to rebuild and democratise Iraq.

Despite pre-war Pentagon hype about post-war planning there were obviously not enough occupiers to deter or stop post-combat looting. Such looting also continued for far too long. Whatever the reality, the whole world unfortunately contrasted the photos of a well-protected Oil Ministry with the burnt-out shells of other ministries and museums. Losing much of the common treasure of mankind's earliest urban civilisation, despite Iraqis being the looters, was a colossal goal for the allies in the struggle of perceptions. Not giving Iraqis the bulldozers to topple the statues of Saddam Hussein on their own, and draping US flags everywhere, were examples of unprofessional military discipline and unnecessary triumphalism we may all regret in the long run.

There was an easily foreseen serious shortage of Arabic interpreters during combat operations that led to many unnecessary civilian deaths through misunderstandings and concern about suicide bombers. Misunderstandings and, much worse still, proliferate with a US armed forces not well populated with diggers oozing cross-cultural awareness and sensibility. Many US soldiers interviewed on TV continue to say exactly the wrong thing.

Given the US's long involvement with the Middle East it is somewhat surprising that they had no 21st century, Arabic speaking, 'General MacArthur' equivalent waiting in the wings. While things have looked up since the diplomat Paul Bremer eventually replaced the profoundly

charisma-challenged Jay Garner, a long and difficult road lies ahead.

If it all turns to disaster it may be morally and politically difficult for Australia to avoid shouldering a greater burden in the consolidation phase of the campaign. A requirement to contribute a reasonable number of ground troops to the occupation of Iraq would impose a near-impossible burden on the ADF, especially while our commitment to the security of East Timor continues. We simply lack the troops to meet, let alone sustain, both commitments.

## Fragmentasi?

Last month hopes for a peaceful solution to the Aceh problem in Indonesia were again dashed. The current Indonesian government has again resorted to trying an exclusively military solution to what is a political, religious and cultural dilemma. It is noteworthy that the Swedish diplomats mediating the negotiations between Indonesia and the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), representing the secessionist Acehnese, have attributed the failure of the talks almost exclusively to Indonesia.

The Indonesian leadership and military (TNI) appear to have learnt little from their long but counter-productive campaign in East Timor, or indeed from previous counter-productive campaigns in Aceh. Initial objective international press and Red Cross reporting from Aceh has not helped Indonesia's case. While GAM are certainly not angels either, it will be hard for Indonesia to hide abuses by excluding the international and domestic media, and diplomats and NGO, as it did in East Timor during the 1970s and most of the 1980s.

The problem of Aceh is likely to pose a growing moral and practical dilemma for Indonesia's neighbours. While the case for Aceh's secession from Indonesia is different in fact and international law from that of East Timor (and of West Papua), continued Indonesian atrocities in Aceh may eventually cancel this out as it did for Serbia over Kosovo. There are clearly limits to the legal defence of invoking state sovereignty, especially where persistent and serious human-rights violations are involved and the secession appears to have considerable popular support in the territory concerned.

Furthermore, even more importantly, Indonesia itself cannot properly democratise while it is prepared to sanction the use of armed force — rather than consent — to hold on to provinces that strongly desire to secede. As Mahatma Gandhi noted, 'you cannot really be free while you oppress others'. Indonesia cannot be truly democratic itself at the national level unless it permits free provincial elections in Aceh (and elsewhere). While it is arguable how much popular support GAM really has, especially if not allowed to sway the result by intimidation, Indonesia needs to truly face the prospect that GAM or a moderate secessionist party might overwhelmingly win a free election. There is also no accurate method of determining GAM's true level of support without such a free election.

Australia's strategic relationship with Indonesia is an exceptionally complex one by any standard of international relations. We are locked together in perpetuity by simple geographic proximity and strategic inter-dependence. As well as coping with all the contrasts in ethnicity, religion, culture, economics and demography, our two countries have starkly differing national foundation myths.

Australians freely chose to join in a federal union, with some other possible constituents (such as New Zealand) deciding not to. Most Australians would have accepted a choice by the Cocos Islanders to go their own way if they had chosen this option in their UN-supervised 1984 referendum. Similarly, while it is an unlikely possibility it is virtually unthinkable, for example, that Australia would not let Western Australia or Norfolk Island secede should they freely choose to do so. Most secessionist impulses in Australia attract only fringe support because the arguments for and against secession can be freely debated and tested in a calm atmosphere. Federalism in Australia is as democratic as it can be and matures as our country matures. It minimises our regional differences by genuinely popularising our shared history and outlook. On the whole Australian federalism also shares national resources between its constituent states, with the resources largely flowing from the richer states and regions to the poorer ones by general consent. Our federalism draws us together in fact and perception.

In contrast, Indonesian decolonisation and 'nation building' was based on the concept of 'inheriting' Dutch authority over an otherwise diverse group of ethnic communities, cultures and polities. Despite promises to the outlying islands, federalism was strangled at birth because it was, and largely still is, seen as driving 'Indonesians' apart rather than drawing them together. Many Indonesians in the outlying islands also consider that national resources are being plundered by the majority Javanese rather than shared equitably. Three generations of Indonesians have also grown up deliberately immersed in the questionable belief that any successful secession would mean the end of multi-ethnic Indonesia as a whole. Particularly when general Indonesian federalism is perpetually postponed, the danger is that such a myth can needlessly become self-fulfilling when a secession becomes inevitable anyway. These effects can be seen in the manner in which many Indonesians have superficially reconciled themselves to the loss of East Timor. Many, perhaps most, regret its loss rather than truly face up to why Indonesia 'lost' the territory. The farcical sentences now being awarded by Indonesian courts allegedly trying cases of human-rights violations in East Timor exemplify the enormity of Indonesia's self-perception problem.

At this juncture, Australia has little alternative but to maintain a public position that Aceh is an internal Indonesian problem. Obviously attempts need to be made to encourage peace talks to resume and for the Indonesian government not to sanction continued harsh repression

by the TNI and national police. GAM should also not be allowed to get away with egregious propaganda. This will be a hard 'row to hoe' for Australian diplomacy. Meanwhile it is probable the civilian casualties will continue to mount and the world will continue to take notice. It remains more than likely that elements of the TNI will again shoot Indonesia in the foot — perhaps mortally.

In the longer term, especially if, as seems probable, the TNI campaign continues to harden rather than weaken Acehnese resolve, Australia faces the same fundamental moral and strategic dilemmas posed by the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. In the case of East Timor, our de facto and subsequent (unique) de jure recognition of the territory's forcible incorporation into Indonesia because of supposed 'realpolitik' eventually collided with our other enduring national interests. These included Australia's moral conscience, pervasive democratic outlook and burgeoning international pressure for resolution. Just as importantly, 'realpolitik' eventually dictated the strategic need to finally heal a continually festering and worsening wound infecting the overall bilateral relationship. As many observers have noted, even a threatened or actual short war with Indonesia in support of East Timorese independence in 1975 might have caused far less bilateral damage in the long run. Even more to the point, these collisions over enduring national interests were driven more by Indonesian blunders and wider international consequences than by our own shrewd diplomatic navigation.

By the early 1990s, as Falantil resistance in East Timor strengthened rather than weakened after a long colonial occupation, some perceptive Indonesians realised the game was up. Indonesia had by then lost even the option of achieving a compromise solution, such as provincial autonomy within the republic, because of central government intransigence and loss of moral authority through repression. It seems such a great pity that a harsh lesson of Indonesian history seems about to repeat itself over Aceh.

As in East Timor (and West Papua), Indonesia faces the continuing paradox of colonialism eventually faced by all colonial powers. That most Indonesians cannot even begin to see themselves as colonisers only exacerbates the fundamental problem of confused national identity. True democratisation of Indonesian society would help such national self-realisation, but even if this occurs it seems probable it will not happen quick enough to forestall another disaster.

More Indonesians need to study French history. The French were unwilling to acknowledge the lessons of their forced withdrawal from Indo-China in the mid 1950s. In the late 1950s too many of the French could not accept that Algeria was not a department of France itself but an overseas colony yearning to be free. As with Indonesia's continuing colonial dilemma in West Papua and elsewhere, the parallels in Aceh with French colonialism in Algeria remain striking.

While Australia obviously cannot be seen to be encouraging the dismemberment of its largest neighbour, some contingency consideration needs to be undertaken. If some measure of Indonesian disintegration becomes inevitable, would it not be better for both our countries to assist Indonesia to manage such a transition. Despite the lessons of East Timor (and many other examples with other countries), Australian policy, at present, often seems to be based on an assumption that Indonesia is an immutable polity, and that if we ignore secessionist pressures in Indonesia they should, and will, simply go away.

## Japan strikes in

In the light of continued North Korean brinkmanship Japan's Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, has finally said openly what many Japanese leaders have said privately for years. Mr Koizumi made his remarks to an upper house parliamentary committee in late May examining proposed war contingency legislation that has already passed through the lower house of parliament. The bill is intended to provide the government with greater powers to forestall or react to potential attacks on Japan.

Mr Koizumi's preparedness to consider pre-emptive action against aggressors (most notably North Korea) echo similar remarks by Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba earlier this year. To exemplify the change of stance Mr Koizumi has also proposed renaming the Japanese Self-Defence Forces as a navy, army and air force. These latest changes to Japan's defence posture are understandable steps along the progression that really took off with Japan accepting the responsibility in the mid 1980s to protect its sea lanes of communication out to one thousand nautical miles from Japan itself.

Japanese participation in US plans for theatre missile defence now seem certain, as does Japan's acquisition of cruise missiles for a first-strike capability. Japan is, however, not proposing any reconstitution of the large force projection and strategic mobility capabilities that allowed it to conquer much of the Pacific Basin in the early 1940s.

The reaction of China and South Korea to these latest comments will prove very interesting. Japan's neighbours have known this day would eventually come but are nonetheless not comforted by the forecast. Japanese diplomats are no doubt working overtime in Seoul and Beijing. In the latter capital, they are no doubt alluding to China's part in forcing the decision through its failure to satisfactorily influence North Korea to be a responsible international actor.

While the two generations of Australians with personal experience of Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 1940s grow ever smaller, a strong degree of strategic suspicion concerning Japan also lurks in the Australian national psyche. This has not been alleviated by Japanese official and popular reluctance to face up to its past in the same manner as Germany or even Russia. Contemporary

Japanese school history texts still incorrectly dismiss many Japanese war crimes as myths, including major atrocities such as the Rape of Nanking and Japanese biological warfare experiments on Chinese prisoners. The texts also do not cover Japanese mistreatment of Australian (and allied) prisoners of war in anywhere near appropriate detail. Many young Japanese tourists visiting Australia are consequently surprised to discover that Japan attacked Australia during World War II.

That said, however, it seems unlikely that Japan will again pose a military threat to Australasia. Like Australia, Japan is now a major ally of the United States and this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Japanese governance is also fairly democratic by international standards. Furthermore, free-trade agreements and general peace guarantee access to raw materials a lot easier and cheaper than conquest. The becalmed Japanese economy suffering from prolonged deflation also acts as a firm brake on substantial Japanese rearmament and a recurrence of a foreign policy driven by sabre rattling.

While nations have only enduring interests rather than enduring friends, a potential threat from Japan also remains unlikely for even more prosaic reasons. The modern, joint-focused ADF, and the Australian population at large, are surely most unlikely to again embrace a modern version of the 'Singapore strategy'. Such a disastrous strategy was foisted on us in the late 1920s and 1930s by narrow-minded civilian bureaucrats in the Department of Defence and complacent politicians unwilling to pay for effective national defence. It couldn't possibly happen again could it?

## The eccentricity of hermits

The hermit kingdom of North Korea continues to provide the epilogue of the Cold War. While there appears to be no rational reason for a war to break out, especially from our viewpoint, the biggest problem remains in understanding how the North Korean regime views its international and domestic predicaments, and in how it might react.

North Korea remains an enigma wrapped in a riddle governed by what we think is a joke (individually and ideologically). At least superficially, the North Korean State could be described as a 'would-be Roman Empire' celebrated in bronze instead of marble. Even more than their North Asian neighbours, the North Koreans appear to value the oriental game of 'Go' in strategy formulation. Put simply, they do not always share our predilection for linear logic and therefore often appear unpredictable within our frames of reference.

Throughout the Cold War, North Korea was occasionally a worry but not a significant threat outside the Korean peninsula. In a similar manner to Iraq, the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and consequent regional instability has fundamentally changed the equation. Recently there has been an upsurge in the

numbers and seniority of North Korean defectors. As well as providing further evidence of the regime's unravelling, these defector reports apparently indicate that the concept of 'regime change' and the recent collective intervention in Iraq have concentrated the minds of the North Korean leadership. No doubt the example of the 'decapitation strikes' launched against the Iraqi leadership at the beginning of the intervention in Iraq has not assuaged their concerns. Accurate assessments of the real North Korean reaction are still being compiled but more than mild paranoia appears to be endemic.

For Australia, the detention of the North Korean ship Pong Su for alleged smuggling of illegal narcotics with official blessing simply adds another unwanted layer of complexity. As a signatory to the 1953 Korean armistice Australia is legally, morally and strategically bound to assist South Korea and the US should North Korea initiate hostilities again. Our ability to assist is limited, but no doubt some contingency planning is occurring for air and maritime options.

The biggest problem with the North Korean regime is not so much in determining when its inevitable collapse will occur. The key dilemma remains in assessing what its leaders understand to be their situation, and what they might resort to in attempting to avoid or survive the regime's death throes (if they can recognise them). Furthermore, the paranoid nature of North Korea's totalitarian regime and its tendency to strategic brinkmanship provide obvious limitations to dialogue and crisis management through conventional diplomacy.

The death throes of communist dictatorships thus far have not followed a uniform pattern and the Asian versions have, as yet, all survived. The Soviet juggernaut slowly bogged down in internal corruption of all types until it eventually tottered to a complete stop. The externally imposed communist dictatorships in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria crumbled quickly when their ruling cliques realised the game was up. The unwilling communist federation of Yugoslavia crumbled through a mix of secessionist and democratic pressures, but not without a decade of war provoked by Serbian communists trying to prolong the inevitable. In only one case, Ceausescu's Romania, probably the closest equivalent personality cult to North Korea, did the ruling clique attempt to repress widespread popular dissent and thereby trigger a violent confrontation that it swiftly lost.

No one outside North Korea really knows what effect the half-century of cradle-to-grave, all-pervasive propaganda and mystical twaddle about the two Kims has really had on most North Koreans. It may have, even if only subconsciously so far, nurtured the type of underground cynicism and desperation that only awaits the right trigger as in Romania. On the other hand, the North Korean people may be as broken in spirit as many Iraqis.

Using a first principles argument, it seems a simple question of undertaking a cost–benefit analysis to determine whether North Korea should exist or not. If it should but will still collapse eventually, is it better to continue propping it up, or to actively manage its collapse, or to just let it fail? The chances of agreement on this issue being easily reached between China, the US, South Korea, Japan and Russia are not good. The chances of North Korea agreeing as well are virtually nil. The dilemma for the outside world really remains whether we can risk waiting for an internal collapse in North Korea with all its attendant risks from a disintegrating regime lashing out first in desperation, or whether further external coercion or even direct intervention might bring a better result. North Korean threats of nuclear and conventional ‘retaliation’, and the somewhat ambiguous situation and position of China further complicate the issue.

The only country that can really make the call on whether ‘wait and see’ is still an option is South Korea because it would have to bear the brunt of the risks and consequences either way. Even if war is avoided, there are clear signs that some South Korean leaders are becoming somewhat traumatised at the prospect of Korean reunification. South Korea has studied the lessons of German reunification with great interest and rocketing concern. If the huge and strong West German economy could be so damaged by absorbing the most successful of the communist economies, South Korea naturally fears having to absorb probably the worst of them. While South Korea is the world’s 13th largest economy, North Korea’s is less than half that of Bangladesh. On top of this are the simple facts that the North is starving and its people are deeply traumatised psychologically by their long inundation in lunatic political, social and economic conditions. The only silver lining for South Korea, and it would be a two-edged sword, is that it might inherit a nuclear-weapons capability without the international odium of developing one.

While the world ponders these dilemmas, Japan and South Korea grow ever more nervous and North Korea’s leaders probably ever more paranoid. The benighted people of North Korea also continue to endure mass starvation, extensive and comprehensive repression, and the scary prospect of being sacrificed even more to the vanity and paranoia of their self-styled ‘dear leader’.

## A firm base for an argument

Kites appear to be floating again in the sky of Australian public debate concerning possible basing of US forces in Australian territory. One impetus for renewed interest in such an option appears to be increased US desires to significantly reduce their large forward deployments in South Korea and Japan (principally Okinawa). Australian Ministers and senior US officials have denied that there is any serious US interest in long-term basing in Australia for large forces.

Discussion of this issue needs to be kept in perspective. For example, only one US carrier battle group is homeported outside the United States (in Japan) and US ground-force deployments are rarely substantial away from traditional ‘front line’ confrontations. The constraints of Australian geography, especially the distance to traditional ‘front lines’ in the Middle East and North Asia, will always limit the potential attractiveness of Australian facilities for large-scale US forces on a permanent basis. Despite some media speculation, the campaign against transnational terror in South East Asia does not require the forward basing of large US forces closer to the region.

Furthermore, and in our strategic and ADF interoperability interests, US forces have been exercising in Australia, either jointly or on their own, for decades — often for months at a time. Elements of the US military, especially the Marine Corps, have been interested in even greater training access to Australian facilities for many years. There are often more USMC (and Singaporean) fighters exercising from RAAF Darwin than Australian ones. The USMC have also often expressed interest in accessing ADF field training areas such as the much under-utilised (and difficult to access) Yampi Sound Training Area in the Kimberleys.

There is often much interest at State level in both the Northern Territory and Western Australia in hosting more US forces on either a temporary or permanent basis. While it is unlikely that large US forces might be based in Australia permanently, there are no insurmountable obstacles to more US forces in principle. A degree of knee-jerk anti-Americanism from some sections of the community cannot be discounted but can be appropriately placated or ignored. To put this in perspective, how many Australians are aware that Singapore maintains permanent and extensive air force training facilities in Perth?

Some Australian journalists and pressure groups can be expected to blow this issue out of all proportion in order to satisfy latent or blatant anti-American prejudices, or to provoke a reaction among Australia’s neighbours in order to get a ‘story’ or some publicity respectively. Some might even scratch both itches. Even without such gratuitous beatings of the regional bushes the reaction of Australia’s neighbours to any increase in US use of Australian facilities would need watching. Their reaction, however, poses few real obstacles if managed correctly. The US already has access to facilities in Singapore and this is viewed at a good thing for regional stability. Thailand and the Philippines are not likely to object as both have formal and informal alliances with the US, including regular joint exercises with US forces. Some elements in Malaysia and Indonesia might choose to view such increased US use in a bad light but most will not — at least in private. More to the point, the anti-Western bigotry that would motivate some Malaysian and Indonesian critics is inevitable no matter what Australia and the US freely choose to do. Growing US impatience with such posturing, in suitable diplomatic phrasing, was

apparently passed to the Malaysian government by the US Ambassador recently.

The bottom line is that firm US proposals are required for the public debate in Australia to go further if indeed it needs to go anywhere. You cannot really fly a kite successfully without something firm to tether it to.

## Ducking criticism

Now since its bipartisan founding in 1975 the Australia Defence Association has genuinely striven to be as apolitical as it can be. The Association considers it needs to be apolitical in order to improve our national defences by raising political and community consciousness of defence issues. We could not function any other way even if we wanted to. A truly apolitical stance takes effort both in actual objectivity and fairness, and in scrupulously observing appropriate conventions and being seen to do so. Generally speaking we are confident that we hit the mark pretty consistently. All mainstream political parties respect the Association, even when we disagree with one of them from time to time.

The Association therefore hesitates to enter the perennial debate in Australia about the degree of political bias exhibited by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The ADA notes, however, that in both the 1991 and 2003 wars with Iraq, Australian governments of both Labor and Liberal political persuasions have perceived that the ABC has shown a marked tendency to left-wing and anti-American views, rather than professional objectivity, in much of its war coverage. Perhaps these perceptions have arisen not just because of the existence, or otherwise, of bias but through the ABC's apparent reluctance to observe appropriate and commonsense apolitical conventions.

We also note that the ABC continues to vigorously deny the charges, as did its famous 'internal inquiry' into the 1991 Gulf War accusations. We further note that part of this attempted defence is to quote statistics that purport to illustrate letters of complaint about ABC bias are 'politically balanced' in overall numbers.

The ADA's archives contain letters of complaint and letters of praise from Australian governments of both main political persuasions. They contain even more complaints from cranks across the full political spectrum. Our experience is that the quality of the letters is just as important as the numbers. With this distinction in mind, and based on observation of media coverage of the recent war in Iraq by ADA members with some experience as professional warfighters, the following thoughts on the issue of ABC bias are offered.

Bias in broadcasting is not just a matter of what is said or shown. It includes the conscious or unconscious exclusion of alternative views and TV 'vision' to what is said and/or who is interviewed and for how long. Bias can also arise through a lack of real intellectual

diversity in the journalists, producers and researchers employed. In terms of war coverage, bias can also easily sneak in through ignorance of basic military operational matters (tactics, weapon capabilities, international law, need for operational security, etc.), or in not giving proper weight to the difficulties of reporting from both sides of the conflict. This is especially so where one side is a totalitarian state with a much greater motivation and capacity to deny access, stage manage supposed incidents, or intimidate those 'bystanders' who might be 'interviewed' by foreign media.

The concept and practice of being apolitical, even if you hold strong personal beliefs, is faced daily by members of the ADF and the forces therefore place great importance on being apolitical. The defence forces serve governments of all political colours with considerable professionalism and pride in this regard — even when governments do silly things concerning defence. The forces usually react to even the silliest criticism and comments from the general public with impressive equanimity. The general reaction of many ADF personnel when recognising perceived ABC bias is therefore interesting to note. As members of a profession proud of its apolitical traditions and record they rarely show outrage at the nature of the bias itself. More often than not, by a wide margin, ADF personnel are genuinely offended or disappointed by the lack of public broadcasting professionalism involved when a broadcast is not, or does not strive to be, apolitical.

In general, the apparent bias in ABC news and current affairs coverage during the wars in Iraq appeared worse on television than it was on radio (with the probable exception of JJJ), and not as bad on Radio Australia as on other radio. Problems with access and 'vision' may have contributed. It is also worth noting in comparison that the apparent pro-American bias in coverage by the Fox cable network was just as bad, if not probably worse.

With this in mind, and admittedly based on anecdotal evidence only of the apparent popularity of BBC coverage of the war among Australian viewers, the question of relativity concerning letters of complaint might be worth reviewing. Perhaps many Australians of a conservative bent have stopped writing letters of complaint to the ABC because they fear it does no good or because they have stopped watching or listening to the ABC altogether. Perhaps many Australians of a left-wing bent are unconsciously quite comfortable with the ABC, and only write to the Corporation because they are so shocked when finally (and rarely) confronted by the odd broadcast that makes them actually uncomfortable.

Now there will also always be those who will seek to defend actual or perceived ABC bias on the grounds that commercial media frequently exhibit the most egregious examples of 'cant and slant', and that the ABC is somehow 'merely providing balance'. This is

a false argument. Just like the publicly funded military who serve and defend all Australians equally, publicly funded broadcasters must always be apolitical in absolute terms.

Finally, ABC coverage of the recent Iraq war has also been defended on the grounds that the journalists and producers involved were just employing due scepticism when challenging announcements by the Coalition partners. There is, indeed, nothing wrong with scepticism in itself. However, to be truly fair such scepticism should be used politely, not based on what may be fairly perceived as questionable assumptions, and deployed with equal vigour against all sides of an argument. The real problem is that the question of broadcaster bias and its cure exist as much in perception as fact. The Association suggests that the key to solving the

problem of actual or perceived bias in ABC broadcasts is to convince ABC staff that the problem actually does exist, and that even a hint of bias is both unprofessional journalism and an abuse of the ABC Charter.

There will probably continue to be at least some ABC staff who reject the accusations of left-wing and anti-American bias out of hand. There will undoubtedly be many who genuinely believe, however mistakenly, that they undertake their reporting or production duties objectively even when covering issues on which they have strong views. However, on the matter of identifying bias in their broadcasts perhaps they should discount resorting to such rhetorical camouflage and remember the old Aussie bush saying about appearances: 'if it walks like a duck, smells like a duck and quacks like a duck — then it must be a duck'.

## Conference Calendar

**ADA members and *Defender* readers may be interested in the following public conferences scheduled over the next few months:**

**Chief of Army Military History Conference 2003  
Foundations of Victory: The Pacific War 1943–44  
National Convention Centre, Canberra  
10–11 July 2003  
Enquiries: (02) 6266-2744**

**Royal Australian Navy 2003 King-Hall Naval History Conference  
The Navy and the Nation  
Telstra Theatre, Australian War Memorial, Canberra  
24–25 July 2003  
Enquiries: (02) 6266-2654**

**Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (Australian Defence College)  
US Grand Strategy: Implications for Alliance Partners  
Hyatt Hotel, Canberra  
01 August 2003  
Enquiries: (02) 6266-0664**

**Australian Defence Studies Centre 2003 Homeland Security Conference  
Safeguarding Australia: Frontline Issues  
National Convention Centre, Canberra  
31 July to 01 August 2003  
Enquiries: (02) 6262-7337**

**Australian Financial Review 'National Critical Infrastructure Security Conference  
Four Points Sheraton, Darling Harbour, Sydney  
22–23 September 2003  
Enquiries: (02) 9080-4307**