

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