



**The letters pages are an important part of *Defender's* role in furthering informed public debate on defence and wider national security issues. Letters to the Editor of *Defender* are submitted on the condition that the Australia Defence Association as publisher may edit all letters and reproduce them in electronic form. Emailed letters should be sent to <defender@ada.asn.au>. All writers must supply their name, address and daytime telephone number. Identification of writers will be withheld where justified. Letters should be kept to a maximum of 300 words (ideally 150-250) and avoid personal attacks.**

Sir: Bill Mellor [letters, *Defender*, Spring 2007] hit the nail on the head about the difference in potential effect of the similarities shared by our new deputy prime minister, and her Coalition predecessor, concerning their apparent dearth of interest and expertise in defence or strategic policy matters. But after 12 years of uninterrupted government by one side of politics, and therefore 12 years in opposition by the other, is this really that surprising?

Particularly when we consider the number of leadership changes and shadow cabinet reshuffles in the then Labor Opposition in recent years. The opportunity for potential party leaders and potential prime ministers to gain experience across the three great offices of state (treasury, foreign affairs and defence) was obviously limited – and shadow portfolios are a pale imitation of the real thing anyway.

Even the current prime minister has experience in only one of them (foreign affairs) and only then as the shadow spokesman. His Coalition predecessor as PM had previously been a treasurer only. This is not unusual, of course, as no long-term Australian prime minister has held more than one of the three portfolios in office or in opposition before becoming PM.

Arthur Fadden had previously been Treasurer and a Minister for Air (responsible for the RAAF) but was prime minister for only five weeks. Gough Whitlam was fill-in Treasurer and Minister for Foreign Affairs for a week or so in late 1972 but this was after he became prime minister. He did retain the Foreign Affairs portfolio until 1974. Most previous prime ministers have been Treasurers beforehand, with Malcolm Fraser having been a Minister for Defence and a Minister for the Army, and John Gorton having been a Minister for the Navy.

But government in the modern era brings its own realities and experiences. The new Labor government is also governing at a time when our defence force is operationally committed in several theatres of war so the experiences of defence matters are not theoretical or contingency ones. The deputy prime minister is a member of the national security committee of Cabinet, so it can be assumed she is now gaining considerable exposure to most important defence, foreign affairs and other national security matters.

It may be ideal for prime ministers to have had previous experience in each of the treasury, foreign affairs and defence portfolios, or even at least two of them, but this has not happened in the modern era of Australian politics. With the exception of Bob Hawke, of course, no one has become PM

without previously handling at least one of the three and then generally in government rather than opposition.

**Richard Massie  
New South Wales**

Sir: The ADA's doubts about the practicality or efficacy of the Parliament, not Cabinet, exercising the constitutional war-making power (*Defender*, Spring 2007) are well founded. The positions espoused by the minority parties often holding the balance of power in the Senate are, by definition, unrepresentative of the country at large even before the actual logic or morality of their arguments is examined.

In a case where the majority of the parliament was strongly against military action this would mean one of the major parties was so opposed. A deeply unpopular war would surely be quickly ended anyway by political and moral pressure and, in the final analysis, by parliament's control of the purse strings.

**Mark Weaver  
South Australia**

Sir: With regard to the point raised by Bruce Dowse [letters, *Defender*, Spring 2007], I am reminded of the statement by Marshal of the RAF Sir John Slessor in 1950:

*It is customary in democratic countries to deplore expenditure on armament as conflicting with the requirements of the social services. There is a tendency to forget that the most important social service that a government can do for its people is to keep them alive and free.*

**Kay Hamilton  
New South Wales**

Sir: Bruce Dowse makes eminent sense about defence investment and why it must be quarantined from arbitrary spending cuts or indeed any serious reductions. Most Australian taxpayers (and voters) are probably unaware of the extent of the inadequate investment in defence throughout most of the last 35 years or so, including savage cuts at times, or that the real-term increases of the last few years are essential to catch up for these decades of neglect.

Governments of both types got away with this for so long because the ADF had no major operational commitments from 1972 to 1999 and most Australians were not focused on defence matters. They should not be allowed to get away with it now.

The problem of public perceptions is now taking an unfortunate new turn. The truth about the 'catch-up' needed seems counter-intuitive to many. This is partly due to the additional political and media publicity given to defence spending over recent years. And, it must be said, because of costly procurement bungles such as the Seasprite helicopter or controversial purchases such as the Super Hornet fighter.

The other major cause of public confusion, however, is that spending in other areas of government is not as visible or as readily measureable in everyday terms by the taxpaying public. The far larger sums expended each week on social security, for example, are largely hidden from public view even when minor examples of inappropriate spending on an individual level may be witnessed. Any waste or even extravagance involved is not readily visible to the taxpayer, at least in the macro-economic sense.

It is easy for taxpayers to conclude wrongly that more is being spent on defence (by the federal government) than is being spent on social security, health and education (by the federal and state governments), when far more is actually expended in these latter three areas. That much of this spending is done by or through the states and territories hides this from public view.

Recent history has taught us again that cuts in defence spending become exponentially more expensive in the long term, as the amount of funding needed to catch-up is added to the inflationary needs of the spending required just to maintain the status quo

The Government, and especially the Minister for Defence, need to emphasise the importance of continuing (and even increasing) current levels of defence investment, and why the current levels of funding are vital to redress a very long period of neglect.

**Peter Snowdon  
Queensland**

Sir: I agree with Rear Admiral Peter Briggs [*Defender*, Spring 2007] that the Collins class submarines must be replaced. There would surely be few strategic experts or laymen in Australia that would disagree with him.

I am somewhat more sceptical that a future submarine force, in the limited numbers of boats that we can probably afford and actually man, would be able to deliver the degree of serious *strategic sting* that he claims they will.

This is not because these submarines will probably not use nuclear propulsion, nor because of doubt that they will not be strategic in terms of their range of action. It is more that the conventional torpedoes and missiles that they would carry will not deliver the strategic effects needed to warrant the term *sting* in the strategic as opposed to the operational or tactical sense.

**Stephen Ford  
Queensland**

*Editor's Note: The second of Peter Briggs' two articles on next-generation submarine requirements is at page 12.*

Sir: I found the article *Fixing Defence's Most Expensive Mis-Step* by Robert Marlowe [*Defender*, Spring 2007] both enlightening and insightful. While I do not accept all

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(02) 6231 4444 (International 61+2 +6231 4444)

defender@ada.asn.au

www.ada.asn.au

## EDITOR

Dr Malcolm Kennedy

## EDITORIAL BOARD

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of his considerations, I would have to agree that his final recommendation does make eminent sense.

The processes leading to the decisions taken so far in a project of such major significance to the defence force, and Australia, have been seriously flawed to say the least. Continuing delays in the JSF program and the acquisition of the F-18F give justification and time to review those decisions. This could best be done by a formal evaluation of the available contenders for the next major air weapons system for the ADF, rather than another internal review.

Defence capability development and acquisition processes, while lengthy and involved, at least provide a rational base for decision making. The “hip shot” decisions taken so far which have led to the current situation indicate just how important it is to follow a structured and rational approach.

If the approach recommended by Marlowe were adopted, it would settle things down and allow rational consideration of other options including the F-22, should it be made available to the ADF.

My personal view is that Australia needs a Strike capability and while the F-22 is without doubt the pre-eminent air superiority fighter available at the moment, I have not seen it deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, nor have I seen the air superiority aircraft it is replacing, the F15, similarly deployed.

However, my view is as flawed as that of any one else outside of the loop and I would welcome a full competition which critically examines where we are, and where we want to go, in a true appreciation of what is best for this country. Perhaps we could then bring some professionalism back to the argument rather than the personal abuse, acrimony and condescension we are currently seeing.

**Alan Reed  
Victoria**

Sir: The argument about our future air combat capability continues to drag on. The new government has at least been prepared for a bit of a fresh look, although not without some unnecessary politicking about the (albeit sudden) decision by their predecessors to acquire an interim capability with the Super Hornets.

The ADA has, rightly in my view, tended to adopt a position mid way between the various extremes of the debate. I also agree with the ADA's observation on the radio recently that we will not really know for several years whether some of the decisions being taken are correct, particularly until the success or otherwise of the F-35 JSF program becomes clearer, and we know for sure whether the potential procurement of at least some F-22 Raptors is a viable proposition eventually or a pipedream.

That former and current RAAF officers can be found on all sides of the debate shows healthy professionalism rather than mindless conformity. I am, however, sorry to see so much personal abuse instead of technical, operational or strategic argument on all sides. We all want the best for the Air Force, the ADF and the country. Surely any differences of opinion are only about the best way to achieve this, not

because those with an opposing view are automatically fools, knaves or traitors.

**Name and address supplied  
Australian Capital Territory**

Sir: Paul Monk's analysis of the arguments for and against the recent updating (but downsizing) of the Army's tank force [*Defender*, Spring 2007], was an admirable exercise in objectivity. The argument mapping concept involved and the provisional conclusions of the study will hopefully mean future exchanges on this matter can be a proper debate between two schools of opposing thought.

All we have had so far is largely inaccurate sniping from those against the decision and impatient, barely suppressed anger from many of its uniformed defenders. This latter reaction seems to result from frustration that their professional judgement should be questioned by those they regard as amateurs or biased (or both), and outrage at the belief that their critics do not seem to care about the operational risks that might be faced by soldiers in combat without tank support.

Dr Monk is to be congratulated for his efforts to defuse such confrontations. There is obviously much to be gained from using argument mapping in the many other vexatious disputes that plague strategic policy and capability development in the Department of Defence.

**Rowan Bradford  
Queensland**

Sir: Thank you for publishing Dr Paul Monk's scholarly and rather witty study of claims by Professor Hugh White about supposedly incoherent defence capability decisions since White left the Department of Defence [*Themistocles: Ancient thinking all at sea, Defender*, Winter 2007].

I had no idea that ancient Greek history from the early fifth century BC could produce so fertile an intellectual battleground in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia, nor result in so mortal a casualty.

**Keith Burr  
Victoria**

Sir: I often find *Defender* full of interesting facts, new ideas and thought-provoking tidbits not found elsewhere. But it was Dr Peter Stanley's review of Max Hastings's *Nemesis: The Battle for Japan* that most caught my attention in the Spring 2007 edition.

Dr Stanley made an interesting and thorough critique of the book's chapter 14: *Australia: Bludging and Mopping Up* – and the thrust of the chapter is hardly a new charge and is largely discredited. In David Day's *Politics of War* (2003) Churchill was quoted as expressing the view that the Australian war effort was ‘a very poor show;’ only to be cautioned by his own Chiefs of Staff that Australia's campaign was ‘a remarkable achievement.’

But I particularly noted the remark in the review in reference to the 1944-45 Bougainville campaign: ‘These men anticipated his [Hastings'] argument that peripheral campaigns cost lives without bringing victory closer.’ The late Peter Charlton addressed this matter well in *The Unnecessary War* (1983). This was hard-fought campaign

against a desperate enemy, by mostly adolescent diggers with limited logistics and air support. The New Britain campaign was similar and even involved no tank support for the infantry.

However, cast the story back to 1942. Australians felt vulnerable with Singapore, Philippines, Java, Timor, New Britain, Wake, etc., having fallen. Japan was running rampant across the western side of the Asia-Pacific basin. The Government was conscious of the Allies' *Germany first* strategy and that Australia might be less of a priority than defending India, China and the Central Pacific. The allies' strategic reasoning of the time, however ruthless or callous to our ears, was that should Australia fall because the allies had only limited resources, it would be eventually liberated after Germany was defeated and the full weight of Allied might brought to bear on the Japanese.

Think again then about Bougainville (and indeed the rest of New Guinea); which had been placed under Australia as a League of Nations trust territory in 1920. Australia was responsible for the welfare and protection of the people of these territories.

Perhaps we might ponder a bit why the 'eventual liberation' argument was so unpalatable in the case of Australians; with the expectation instead that the Allies ought, as a matter of course, to provide aircraft, ships, troops and materials of war in our defence.

Now ponder further the argument then, and by some even now, that rescuing our dependent peoples from Japanese occupation was not important or even not necessary.

My uncle served as a wireless operator with 4th Armoured Brigade and he fought with his unit on Bougainville. I knew him as a decent man, who had raised a family, and who also had astute business sense. But he was a man of his time. We also need to remember that our wartime government was not initially keen for large numbers of African-American servicemen to be deployed here or even to disembark from ships transiting Australia. It was also reluctant to accept Asian refugees from Malaya and Indonesia and made great efforts to send them all home swiftly when the war ended. Curtin's call to arms stressed the cause of preserving 'a citadel for the British-speaking race'.

I do not fault those of my uncles' generation. They were products of their time and the world and Australia were then different places. But all these years after the Pacific war – and even if this is perhaps just a matter of how 'peripheral' the Bougainville campaign actually was – historians might carefully consider a key issue. Was the belief that Bougainville need not be liberated, or at least need not be liberated quickly, inconsistent or callous at best and condescension or even racism at worst.

**Russell Miles  
Victoria**

Dear Editor: Michael O'Connor's examples of irresponsible media reporting of defence matters (letters, *Defender*, Spring 2007) goes nowhere near exposing the true depth of the problem. It is not just that many journalists do not understand, or even worse are prepared to ignore, the operational security considerations Michael described; but that so many have no effective grasp of defence concepts and requirements in the

broader sense. Is it any wonder then that the general standard of media reporting on defence matters is so often nothing short of appalling.

For many, perhaps most, journalists, reporting on defence issues is no different to reporting on sport, politics or flower shows and they are often not much good at that either. With defence the emphasis is too often on superficialities rather than relaying the facts or explaining what has happened based on in-depth research and analysis. The headline splash often appears to be the focus of the report not the real story, particularly if the issue concerned is complicated or has a long history. The hook of the story often seems to be a contrived confrontation or purported scandal rather than the facts.

Anyone in the ADF featured in an article is described as an 'officer' no matter what their rank. If they are an Army captain-equivalent and up they are almost invariably wrongly described as a 'senior officer'. Operations are wrongly termed exercises and vice versa. Personnel wounded in action are insultingly described as merely "injured" as if they do not want to admit someone hurt them in anger. Female personnel are commonly and wrongly described as not serving in combat or not on the "frontline" which make one wonder how much more "forward" (whatever that means) you can be than on a ship in the Gulf or in Bagdad. Sailors and airmen are sloppily termed 'troops'. Any unit mentioned is more likely to have its title jumbled up than not. The Navy's ships usually have a superfluous 'the' placed before 'HMAS' *whatever*. Any Defence documents procured by the media are usually described as 'highly classified' even if only the lowest security classification or no classification at all. None of these typical errors does much for the credibility of the article concerned.

This all seems to occur no matter how long the journalists have reported on defence topics or how much effort the ADF and the Department of Defence have spent exposing them to the realities at sea, on the ground and in the air. Despite the best efforts of the ADF and Defence there is the continuing problem of negativity, or worse, where the reporter becomes the prime focus of the stories being reported.

One tabloid reporter, supposedly a defence specialist, is particularly prone to using sensationalist and/or derogatory angles and language. ADF aircraft and vehicles 'guzzle' fuel. All senior officers are 'brass hats' who are 'out of touch'. Sums of money spent on defence matters are described as a 'fortune' and are 'coughed up' by 'taxpayers', often 'outraged' ones. This language has been around since World War I and Biggles books, and make you wonder if the journalist's level of understanding has changed much since then.

Is it any wonder that much of the Australian public is so misinformed on many defence matters? Or that, despite the facts, political spin merchants or armchair strategic theorists find it so easy to get their particular message across to the media – and through them the public – without objective criticism. I am now beginning to wonder what wonderful examples of journalistic efforts Dick Smith is going to have to read through before deciding to award his prize. Any bets on whether or not anyone actually wins?

**Rosemary Ganly  
Australian Capital Territory**