



**Australian Army
Research Centre**

Planning to Not Lose: The Australian Army's New Philosophy of War

Albert Palazzo

Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 3



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Preface

In 2012, I published a short monograph titled *The Future of War Debate in Australia*.¹ At the time, I observed that the US Army was in the midst of a very public and fervent debate over the direction it should take as it prepared for the wars of the future. On one side were the small-war advocates, whose most prominent voice was Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, while leading the call for the traditionalist was Colonel Gian Gentile. Both published books and numerous articles on their points of view and there was no shortage of other military officers and civilians who joined the intellectual contest.² In *The Future of War Debate in Australia* the point I made was that the Australian military community was, in contrast, largely silent on the future of war, even though its soldiers had served alongside those of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan and had garnered a wide array of experiences of their own to reflect upon.³

The silence troubled me. Why had the Australian experience in these wars not resulted in any sense of curiosity—or not public curiosity, at least—on what the Australian Army had learned or on how this knowledge should inform the conduct of future war? I never expected every soldier to engage in such a debate, but even just a handful would have been enough to ease my concern. The hallmark of a true professional military organisation is a willingness to think, learn and change. Silence was the response of those without the vision to advance the profession of arms. At that time I had worked with and been around soldiers for more than a decade and had met enough of them to know that they were generally not ignorant men and women, and that most cared deeply about their profession and their duty to the country and its people.

To me, the intellect of the organisation and its lack of interest in examining its current wars were at odds. I concluded that the problem was at the institutional level, not the individual. The organisation lacked mechanisms to foster disruptive thinking, and soldiers lacked the opportunity and encouragement to reflect deeply on the art of war. More importantly, there was no reward for doing so. Symbolising this intellectual blight is that 18 years after the start of Australia's participation in the US-led wars in the Middle East there has been no institutional reflection on these operations, or any effort to test if the Australian art of war required revision in light of experience.⁴ At no point has the Australian Army attempted to replicate the effort of the German Army in the years immediately following the First World War to learn lessons, inculcate change and rethink the art of war for the future.⁵ The *Australian Army Journal* has not teemed with the contest of ideas. In the face of defeat in the Middle East and a rapidly changing international security environment, the status quo remains complacently supreme.

That a military can be resistant to change is actually quite common. The respected US Marine Lieutenant General Paul Van Riper observed that 'military cultures are like great ocean liners or aircraft carriers: they require an enormous effort to change direction'.⁶ There is no formal prohibition on professional debate in the Australian Army, although it does seem to have inherited the British Army's anti-intellectual bias.⁷ It also doesn't help that Australian society is profoundly anti-intellectual. In his book on Australia in the 1960s, now over 50 years old, Donald Horne wrote that it was 'the Australian style to deny the intellect', a practice that remains embedded in the Australian consciousness to this day.⁸

Further, it is not helpful for the promotion of free and frank debate that Defence policy requires anyone writing for publication to receive the approval of their one-star.⁹ Other militaries have imposed similar constraints on publication. In 1935, the French General Maurice Gamelin issued an *ukase* that all officers had to submit their lectures and articles that touched on doctrine to General Headquarters for permission to publish. A contemporary noted, 'everyone got the message and a profound silence reigned until the awakening of 1940'.¹⁰ A similar prohibition occurred in the US Army after the First World War. While a captain, Dwight D Eisenhower was carpeted by his general for his unorthodox views and was threatened with court-martial if he persisted in publishing his heresies. Eisenhower responded by requesting a corps transfer.¹¹

As he wrote the plan that would bring the Allies victory in the Second World War, General Albert Wedemeyer, observed that too many senior officers preferred to hang on to the proven and traditional, although outmoded, ways of waging war.¹² Perhaps if senior leaders had been more ready to encourage debate during the interwar years a more intellectually robust officer corps would have been ready for the Second World War. It doesn't take much to shut off debate, but the temptation must be resisted. How an army thinks about war is a function of its culture and represents an essential component of military effectiveness. This means a culture of openness is needed to think in peacetime about war in order to be ready for the future.¹³

It was only later that I realised that the failure of anyone to respond to my call for a debate was in part my fault. I had assumed that my clarion call would bring forth thinkers willing to share and debate their ideas. While *The Future of War Debate in Australia* called for a discussion on the force's future, it did not provide a starting point; I had underestimated the institutional impediments to free thought. This paper does not repeat the mistake. Once again, I believe that the Australian Army and the wider Australian Defence Force (ADF), if not all of Australian society, need to think deeply on the requirements of future security and the role of the land force—and Defence—in protecting the nation's sovereignty. Such thinking should be a whole-of-nation activity so that the nation's citizenry understands what is at stake and accepts and supports the need for change. My belief in the necessity for a national debate on the future of war has only strengthened.

To get the debate started, and putting my money where my mouth is, I therefore present in this paper a detailed outline of the kind of land force I believe Australia requires and the philosophy under which it will fight in a world that is more challenging and dangerous than we have ever experienced before. While Chief of Army, the current Chief of the Defence Force, General Angus Campbell, stated that we—Australia and the world—are heading into a more disruptive age, a sentiment with which I fully concur.¹⁴ The Chief of Staff of the US Army has employed similar language to warn about the future security environment, using words such as 'complex', 'dynamic' and 'uncertain'.¹⁵

I state quite directly that Australia must dramatically change how it prepares for and thinks about war if it is to remain a sovereign nation. Although I have thought long and hard on the paper's elements, I do not want what I have written to be the last word. Rather, I hope it is the first—simply a starting point for what should be an honest and forthright exploration of what the future army should look like and how it will think and plan to fight. I hope that this debate is conducted by those who wear a uniform as well as those who do not, and that the ideas contained herein are exposed to public examination. While I have limited my scope to the land force, I have no doubt that the other services and the joint force would also benefit from a similar free and frank debate. At stake is not just the future of the Australian Army and its way of war but also the future of Australian sovereignty.

Let the debate begin.

Introduction

In peacetime, the most important task of any army is to think about the requirements for future war and to prepare accordingly. As JFC Fuller observed, 'preparation for war or against war, from the grand strategical aspect, is the main problem of peace'.¹⁶ As war never stands still, much of this preparation should be spent on learning from past wars, examining the potential of new weapons and considering changes in strategic environment, in order to adapt to emerging conditions and to take advantage of, or create, new opportunities.¹⁷ The past contains the building blocks of the future, and the foundation upon which to base deep thinking, but the past must never be assumed to dictate the future. Again to quote Fuller, 'the past is only a road to the future'.¹⁸

War stands at a decision point. Military leaders will need to decide on the future course of how their organisation will fight in the future. Often such occasions are a result of a change in the available technology that unlocks a new way of war, such as the transition from muscle power to mechanical power, or the opening of new domains to contest, such as cyber. Less frequently, the shift is a result of a societal development. For example, the acceptance that all citizens of a state have a stake in its preservation only emerged during the French Revolution. This realisation resulted in the *levée en masse* and the fielding of enormous armies.¹⁹ Humanity once again stands at the crossroad of a significant period of transition in which there is the potential for militaries to reshape the art of war significantly.

How the current factors, explained below, that are driving change in the art of war intersect and interact remains speculative, as the end-point of their effect on war lies in the future. However, speculation, when it is based upon a deep knowledge of the past, provides the only effective tool

with which to explore and understand the unknown. This is why it is so important for military professionals to study history: if you do not understand how the present came to be, you cannot perceive the forces of change. When periods of transition have occurred in the past, astute military leaders reinterpreted their art of war to seek advantage over possible adversaries. German military theorist General Friedrich von Bernhardi, writing during his own period of transition—the technological advances and social shifts that occurred in the decades preceding the First World War—summarised the necessity for the military to address change. He wrote:

*Constantly we become aware of new forces in nature, and press them into our service, continuously obtaining thereby fresh means for conducting war. New problems must be faced, new grounds for activity are opened, and these must be considered in their mutual relationship. Theory, and what it teaches, must accommodate itself to the changed conditions under which war must be carried out. Theory is thus always subject to development, and from time to time must be cast into new moulds.*²⁰

Quantum computing promises to be our era's new force in nature.

Marshal Foch, a contemporary of Bernhardi, believed war shared a trait with the other fields of great human endeavour—they are never closed. The present, Foch observed, is marked by the visible horizon but the horizon moves as humanity advances. War, he wrote, 'is truly unlimited ground'.²¹ Accordingly, a willingness to seek out the opportunities change offers is a hallmark of a smart military.

The Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Rick Burr, has taken the lead here in his Accelerated Warfare and Army in Motion initiatives.²² This paper embraces the Chief of Army's direction to think about coming challenges and to offer possible solutions. It outlines a future philosophy of war for a future war-fighting requirement. I believe that what I propose is fit for the future, not the past. Despite the discomfort this proposal may occasion among some of the force's members, change is coming. The choice is simple: embrace change or accept defeat.

Making the Case for Change

The Drivers of Change

It is abundantly clear that humanity has entered a period of significant transition where a number of factors are driving change, in Australia and elsewhere. These factors are global in their effect and they span all aspects of human development, most notably the economic, political, cultural, technology and security spheres. From Australia's perspective these factors are occurring on the international, regional and local levels and it will not be possible to escape their effect or effects. These trends have been discussed in depth elsewhere and there is no need to outline them in detail here. A brief summary can suffice to remind the reader of the forces bearing down on the planet, the region and Australia. They are:

- Planet-wide:
 - A reordering of the global balance of power as China threatens to overturn the existing order.
 - The acceleration of technology resulting from the information revolution.
 - The inability of humanity to rein in the emission of greenhouse gases that are causing climate change.
 - A population that will reach 10 billion by mid-century, thereby increasing demand on resources.
- Regional:
 - Australia's loss of its wealth advantage as the economies of regional states grow faster than its own.
 - Likely potential for regional states to achieve technological parity with Australia.

- Internal to Australia:
 - An aging population that consumes a greater share of national wealth while reducing the percentage of population from which the ADF can recruit.
 - The increasing strain and destabilising pressure caused by worsening wealth inequality on societal cohesion.

This is an imposing list of troubling factors that are contributing to Australia's changing strategic environment. None have easy solutions and several threaten to destabilise large regions if not the entire planet. A few, such as climate change, are likely to threaten the survival of numerous states, particularly those that are less able to adapt to harsher climatic conditions and resource shortages. In combination, these factors will produce a more dangerous and violent world whose severity may place the future sovereignty of Australia at risk.²³ The range of risks has led Stephan Fröhling to conclude that Australia has gone from being a lucky country distant from a great power threat to joining the ranks of those countries for which the possibility of a direct attack on its territory is an uncomfortable geostrategic reality.²⁴

The Australian Government is alert to the likelihood that the nation can expect greater uncertainty over the next two decades, and the 2016 Defence White Paper draws attention to the risks and highlights the need to meet a broader range of security challenges.²⁵ The 2020 Defence Strategic Update reiterates these risks, albeit in a more threatening tone, while accepting that Australia can no longer plan on any strategic warning time.²⁶ Readers who would like a detailed explanation for the risk factors Australia is facing should consult the notes for suggestions of additional reading.²⁷

Responding to the New Security Environment

Giulio Douhet, in his 1921 book *Command of the Air*, makes the following observation:

*Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur. In this period of rapid transition from one form to another, those who daringly take the new road first will enjoy the incalculable advantages of the new means of war over the old.*²⁸

The years between the two World Wars were one of the most intensive periods of military change humanity has experienced, as a number of new technologies came of age. For Douhet it was the airplane, while for others radar and electronic warfare opened new possibilities. For armies the tank and mechanisation suggested ways to reinterpret manoeuvre for land combat. In 1921, one US officer bravely observed that the tank ‘made the cavalry charge seem a thing of the past’. He went on to make a point that remains highly relevant to today’s information revolution. He lectured his fellow officers to assess the tank not as the sluggish, unreliable beast it was at that time but as what it would become once the technology became more capable.²⁹

Australia’s security policy is derived from an assessment of the present and anticipated security environment. However, as we all know, the environment, as detailed above, has entered a period of transition to something new. The transition may not be completed for several decades, but it is coming. As Douhet suggests, the wise state adapts to the change before it takes effect. The Australian 2020 Defence Strategic Update is a start towards the realisation that a serious and accelerating transition is underway in what it calls ‘Australia’s dynamic strategic environment’.³⁰ The Minister for Defence, Linda Reynolds, reinforced this point by observing that ‘the world we all grew up in is no more’.³¹

To manage this transition, the 2020 Defence Strategic Review sharpens the focus of Australia’s strategic objectives for defence planning. They are:

1. to shape Australia’s strategic environment
2. to deter actions against Australia’s interests
3. to respond with credible military force, when required.³²

These objectives are the means to the document’s unstated end—the preservation of Australian sovereignty.

The preservation of sovereignty is a state's most important responsibility, and in its securing the military plays a critical role. The 2020 Australian Defence Force Mission expressed this as 'to defend Australia and its national interests in order to advance Australia's security and prosperity'.³³ In the 19th century the great Prussian General Helmuth von Moltke made a similar observation. Commenting on the military's central role in the preservation of a state's sovereignty he wrote:

*The army is the most noble institution in the nation; it alone makes possible the existence of all other arrangements, all political and civil liberty, all creations of culture and finance. The state stands or falls with the army.*³⁴

As a soldier, Moltke is perhaps too generous in attesting to an army's role in defining its society, even Prussian society, but he is correct in its place as a guarantor of sovereignty.

To be sovereign means that a state has the ability to:

1. safeguard its territory
2. protect its citizens
3. preserve the ability to make its own decisions.

The first two conditions for sovereignty are fairly obvious and are the subtext of every security policy even when they are not explicitly stated. The condition concerned with decisions requires a brief elaboration. To be a sovereign state means having the ability to make decisions based on one's own interests, free of coercion by other states. If one cannot choose to do as one wishes, it means one's sovereignty is less than absolute, a condition that many lesser states have to accept. Even great powers sometimes have to compromise. However, it is the extent to which a state has to compromise its decisions that determines the degree to which it is sovereign and whether it is in fact a client, vassal or even satrapy of a more powerful state. For Australia the ideal condition of sovereignty would be to preserve the degree of freedom of action it currently enjoys. Australia is a status quo state and its people have no desire or need to expand the extent of the nation's autonomy. Australia's success in preserving its current level of sovereignty will determine the extent to which its future leaders can make and implement their decisions and avoid becoming a supplicant of a more powerful, and perhaps unfriendly, state.

Understanding Victory

While the 2020 Defence Strategic Update sets the strategic objectives for the ADF to meet and outlines the capability improvements it will receive, it does not express a philosophy of war by which the ADF will secure the nation's sovereignty. Nor does it contain a metric by which to judge whether the Army specifically and the ADF generally have achieved the goal. Admittedly, a philosophy is not the purview of a document such as the 2020 Defence Strategic Update, so its absence is not remarkable. However, to set a strategic direction and not have a philosophy of war is an error and the Army needs to define and inculcate one as soon as practicable. While the philosophy that this paper will articulate is from the perspective of the land force, it does so with the understanding that the Army is a part of the joint force. Readers should accept that the philosophy of war present here is equally applicable for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). In reality, it is a philosophy of war for the ADF and Australia and should be adopted by all the military services as well as other government agencies.

The starting point for the definition and inculcation of a philosophy of war is to understand the military's goal in waging war. There is only one goal and that is victory. If a soldier does not understand this, she or he is in the wrong profession. When political leaders choose war they must also accept that victory is the sought outcome, and if this acceptance eludes them they have no right to make such a decision. In every war, the need to strive for victory applies universally and without exception, no matter if the contest is one of existence or a lesser struggle. Victory is the only legitimate and just outcome to be pursued and if you are not trying to win, the war is illegitimate. More pointedly, if you are not trying to win, you are trying to lose.³⁵

Victory also has a simple definition. It is the achievement of the political objective for going to war. Whenever a state decides for war, it must have a firm and well-defined understanding of what it hopes to achieve; otherwise the war will be without purpose and legitimacy. The outcome of war is a binary expression: one is successful in securing the desired objective and enjoys the fruits of victory or one fails and suffers the ignominy of defeat. There are no draws in war, unless a drawn outcome was the political objective sought. Those who decide upon war must know for what goal they do so, as Clausewitz makes abundantly clear.³⁶ If a government

fails to set upon a goal, soldiers will find themselves fighting and dying but to no purpose, a fate that can befall those who serve than which there is none worse except perhaps death.

Victory can take many forms because it is dependent on the political objective for going to war in the first place. Thus in war there are as many definitions of victory as there are political objectives; the two are linked as long as the war lasts. I have observed elsewhere that Australia was the only country that emerged victorious from the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.³⁷ The US goal for initiating the war was to transform the politics of the Middle East by sparking a flowering of democracy across the region, which it failed to achieve.³⁸ Therefore, the United States lost.³⁹ Note that Iraq also lost, as Saddam Hussein's objective was the survival of himself and his regime. Winning and losing are not opposites; it is only the achievement of the goal that determines victory. Australia, by contrast, was victorious because the Australian Government's objective for going to war alongside the United States had nothing to do with the outcome in the Middle East. Australia's political goal was to improve its relationship with the United States—one that it achieved, as the enhanced connection between the two countries shows. Events in Iraq, except for the possibility of mass Australian casualties, were of little importance to the Howard Government. Australia's war aim was all about achieving a favourable perception of Australia by the United States. Australia achieved that goal and its alignment with the United States, for good or ill, is today stronger than ever.⁴⁰

The reader needs to remember that when considering war the terms 'victory' and 'winning' are not equivalent. They have very different and particular meanings. Victory is defined as achievement of a state's war objectives. Winning is the winning of battles and campaigns. It is possible to win most or even all battles and still not secure victory, as the outcomes of the Vietnam and Iraq wars teaches. In both wars American success in battle did not translate into victory, as the political objective defined by the United States remained unfulfilled. Tactical supremacy is important, but winning battles is no guarantee of victory.

Western military practitioners tend to conflate winning and victory. For those who serve, and their political masters, the winning of battle is incorrectly seen as the mark of victory. Russell E Weigley and Cathal J Nolan expose this fallacy in their profoundly important books *The Age of Battles* and *The Allure of Battle*.⁴¹ This fallacy, however, remains alive and well among

contemporary soldiers, particularly in the United States. Shock and awe may represent a stunning display of American military might but it is of no use if its application does not translate into the securing of the political aim. General Tommy Franks illustrated this fallacy in his running of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. His interest in both campaigns peaked in what the US Army called Phase 3: Conduct Decisive Combat Operations. Phase 4, the phase in which victory is secured, held far less interest.⁴² The United States is yet to have this realisation. The development of the operating concept Multi-Domain Operations is a further reflection of a tendency to emphasis winning over achieving one's political goals.⁴³

As a junior coalition partner in all of the wars it has fought, the Australian Army has not had the opportunity to foster an understanding of how to wage war above the corps level, a product of the force also being relatively small in comparison to other militaries. In recent wars, most Australian actions have been at the battalion group and company team level. Because of this the force has tended to focus on the tactical level of war, and the Army rightly prides itself on its skill in the conduct of patrols and ambushes. Assertions of greater prowess are usually without foundation, however, because, with the possible exception of the Kokoda Campaign, larger Australian successes occurred within a coalition in which the senior partner provided all manner of unheralded support or they were fought in backwaters whose outcome no longer mattered.⁴⁴

Tactics, of course, is solely concerned with the winning of battle, not the achievement of war's political aims. The Australian Army's focus on tactical success was highlighted by its longstanding mission statement 'Winning the land fight', a prescriptive that the force incorporated into its keystone doctrine, *The Fundamentals of Land Power*.⁴⁵ The Army's designation of its mission as 'Winning the land fight' remained in place until 2017 when the then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, changed it to 'Army is to prepare land forces for war in order to defend Australia and its National interests'. The abbreviated version was 'Prepare Land Forces for War'.⁴⁶ This change aligned the Army's Mission with ADF's command structure: the Army prepares for war while Joint Operations Command conducts the fight.

The Australian Army still requires a philosophy of war to guide how it contests a future conflict. To be useful, such a philosophy needs to meet five conditions:

1. be supportive of the government's political objectives
2. be achievable with the resources provided
3. be in accordance with the laws of war and the Just War Tradition
4. be based upon a realistic assessment of the strategic environment
5. be sufficiently flexible to meet the unexpected.

The government's political objectives are those stated in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update. As noted above, these are Shape, Deter and Respond—plus the mandatory but unstated task of safeguarding sovereignty.

The resources are the monies provided by the government with which the Army builds capability. The laws of war consist of two parts: those that are defined in statute and international agreements and those that derive from the fundamental nature of war. The assessment of the strategic environment is an understanding of the current and future threats Australia may face as its security environment changes over coming decades.

Lastly, whenever considering future requirements, it is essential to build agility so that the force can respond to the unexpected.

Defining Australia's Future Philosophy of War

Even a passing examination reveals that all of the region's development trend lines are unfavourable to Australia from the perspective of risk assessment and the generation of relative military power. The demographic, economic, educational and technological indicators all suggest that Australia is already, or will soon be, in a poorer position relative to the other states in the region. As long as these trends continue in this direction, Australia's relative military power must decline. Success in war requires superiority in mass, depth, technology or other factors that provide advantage over adversaries. Consequently, the Australian Army, the ADF, the government and Australian society need to accept that it is highly unlikely that Australia can succeed in its future wars.

To be frank, the best that Australia can hope to achieve in a future war is to not lose. Therefore, to not lose must be the basis of Australia's new military philosophy; that is, it has maintained the status quo ante, which is the epitome of not losing. To win in the traditional sense is no longer possible if one reflects honestly on the implications of the region's trends and the effect they will have on the balance of power. This is Australia's future, a future which will come with a cultural shock to the force as well as to Australian society, which holds its military in high esteem and expects it to win. This philosophy of war will also require a re-examination of how the Army thinks about and prepares for war. The only advantage Australia will continue to hold is its geography, which it can only leverage for territorial defence. Consequently, the best and only logical philosophy of war that Australia can opt for is to not lose so that it can maintain what it has.

What I have described is what Clausewitz calls the negative purpose of the defence. This is when the defender has no aspirations other than to preserve itself and retain the status quo that existed before the war started. In war, those who embrace the negative purpose of the defence aspire to impose delay on their adversary and they fight to destroy just enough of the enemy's power to cause it to renounce its intentions. In a sense, under such a military philosophy, Australia would strive to negate the ability of its opponent to impose its will. It is a posture of frustrating the enemy's intentions and prolonging the war until the enemy is exhausted or distracted by other events or until there is a change in the international environment that leads to an adjustment of the balance of power that is more favourable to Australia.⁴⁷

Because Australia is a non-aggressor state, a negative strategic purpose makes eminent sense. In *The Conduct of War*, Colmar von der Goltz expands on the different kinds of defence and offence.⁴⁸ He identifies two forms for each: the Strategic and Tactical Offensive and the Strategic and Tactical Defensive. Australia would assume both the Strategic and Tactical Defensive because the peace it seeks is to minimise the changes that result from the war. Ideally, there would be no change. An aggressor, by contrast, must select the Strategic and Tactical Offensive in order to seize territory and impose different prerogatives in its relationship with its victim.

At the risk of repetition, it is important that readers remember the distinction that exists between winning and victory. Winning battles and campaigns is nice but not necessarily a prerequisite to securing a state's goals.

Victory, not winning, is the true purpose of war because it represents the gaining of the political objective. Ho Chi Minh and his brilliant military commander Võ Nguyên Giáp understood this. Certainly they would have preferred to deal the United States a decisive blow on the field of battle, as they had done to the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, but they recognised that they were militarily too weak to do so.⁴⁹ A story that Harry G Summers told after the Vietnam War's conclusion is particularly apt to this point. Speaking to a North Vietnamese army colonel he said that the US was never beaten in battle. His opposite offered the cutting rejoinder that while that was true it was also irrelevant.⁵⁰ The North Vietnamese understood the meaning of victory; the US did not.

Defining the Objective

To follow a philosophy of not losing is not the same as the acceptance of defeat. It only means that the Australian Government must set goals that are within the ambitions of a weak power and which align with the negative purpose of the defensive. The Australia Government must choose well-defined and well thought-out objectives that are also modest in ambition. In fact, the objective chosen may only be to deny the adversary the opportunity to achieve their own aims, assuming one knows what they are.

Striving to not lose recognises the limits of Australian power vis-à-vis other nations. Australia likes to claim the label of being a middle power and, while such a designation is true in many instances, in war power is a relative relationship, not a constant.⁵¹ From the perspective of military might Australia is a great power when compared to lesser states, such as those of the South-West Pacific, but when compared to a great power, Australia is itself a lesser state. As regional powers grow in relative strength, Australia will become comparatively weaker. Australia can remain a middle power in many ways of great importance in the international arena, but it is likely to be the weaker state when confronted by a potential adversary in a future war.

Unless it is a junior partner in a coalition led by a great power, Australia's political objectives in a future war must be defensive in nature. There is no choice in this when one is likely to be the weaker contestant. Such a posture, however, is a sensible one for Australia. It meets the first obligation of any government's security goal—the preservation of the state

and the sovereignty of its people. It also reflects the reality that Australia has no acquisitive desires; it is an unlikely aggressor. Such a military philosophy also leverages the natural superiority of the defensive or, to use Clausewitz's words, 'the defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive'.⁵² In his instructions to the Crown Prince of Prussia, Clausewitz identified defensive war as the form of war which a state wages for its independence; one chooses it when the enemy is superior.⁵³ Clausewitz's observations have relevance for Australia because the purpose of the defence is to preserve, which for Australia is a natural goal as it is a status quo state.

Further underscoring the primacy of the defence is that many weapons entering service, or in development, naturally favour the defender. As a result of the fielding of long-range precision missiles and sensors, the balance between the offensive and the defensive has swung in favour of the defender, with the result that the defence now enjoys a battlefield advantage.⁵⁴ This has led to the growth of anti-access and area denial (A2AD) systems that protect the approaches to a country's borders, sometimes out to ranges in the thousands of kilometres, a reality that the 2020 Defence Strategic Update acknowledges.⁵⁵ In fact, the greatest tactical challenge that an aggressor currently faces is being able to manoeuvre in the face of such defensive systems.⁵⁶ A military philosophy based on not losing leverages the inherent greater power that contemporary weaponry confers on the defence while forcing the aggressor to expose its forces to fires as they manoeuvre.

A military philosophy to not lose does not mean military weakness. If anything it means the acceptance of the need to balance means with ends. To achieve balance is the epitome of true strength. In this situation, the experience of Switzerland can serve as a model for Australia and the benefit of adopting a military philosophy of not losing. While its geographic circumstances are quite different, the Swiss political objective is the same as Australia's: to not sacrifice its territory or sovereignty to an aggressor. Switzerland has no territorial ambitions and since the 13th century it has followed a policy of neutrality. Despite its neutrality, however, Switzerland has never espoused military weakness. Instead, the Swiss found peace in strength. Niccolò Machiavelli's 16th century observation remains relevant today: 'the Swiss are strongly armed and completely free'.⁵⁷ Located in a far more dangerous part of the world than Australia, the Swiss have maintained their independence because they have invested

in military defence. Even today, the Swiss Army is far larger and better equipped than Australia's.⁵⁸ Switzerland's aim to be a porcupine is not unlike Singapore's 'poisoned shrimp' security doctrine. Both countries aim to be too difficult, painful and dangerous to consume to be worth a predator time and effort.⁵⁹

To maximise its effect, and to ease its attainment, Australia's military philosophy of to not lose should also be reflected in a to-be-defined grand strategy. War is only one way in which a government strives to obtain its objectives, and it should be a last resort. Other government departments, from Foreign Affairs to the most obscure, have a part to play in safeguarding the security of Australian territory and the sovereignty of its people. If the military is relatively weak, the work of other agencies can minimise this weakness by shaping the strategic environment in ways that maximise the nation's other strengths. This is a whole-of-government effort that requires the articulation of a grand strategy and the creation of a coordination organisation to make sure all departments work to the common goal of a sovereign and free Australia.

The Fallacy of Offsets

In the eternal quest for advantage over potential adversaries, military organisations employ what are called offsets. An offset is when a military focuses its strength in one area to compensate for weakness in a different area. In doing so, if the superiority is sufficiently large, the weakness is rendered largely irrelevant. Unfortunately for Australia, as the current trend lines continue there will be no offsets that offer the ADF an advantage against potential rivals.

The classic offset was the Eisenhower Administration's fielding of a nuclear arsenal to negate the Soviet Union's greater might in conventional forces. The United States, and its NATO allies, preferred not to bear the expense of a similar-sized land force in order to protect Western Europe from Soviet invasion. Instead, they chose to rely on nuclear deterrence. Of course, once the Soviet Union had its own powerful nuclear force the United States and Western Europe lost this offset. However, the United States then sought a different offset, which resulted in the revolution in precision weaponry.

Because of its relative weakness, Australia has a long history of fearing invasion that dates back to the colonial period.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, Australia has also sought to offset its weakness. The solution was the protection of a great power partner, firstly the United Kingdom and since the Second World War the United States, a policy that numerous governments pursued with a single-minded focus. The 2016 Defence White Paper simply recognised that ‘Australia’s security is underpinned by the ANZUS Treaty’.⁶¹ The 2020 Defence Strategic Update calls for a deepening of the alliance with the United States.⁶² Paul Dibb has described the alliance with the United States as ‘the wellspring of our security’.⁶³ This is a wise policy for a country that foresees a threat but is unable or unwilling to pay for a military of its own that is sufficiently capable to provide protection.

Offsets are compromises, which means that they never come without complications. While it has been cheaper and easier for Australia to devolve the issue of defence to a stronger partner, it has meant that, except in the darkest days of the Second World War, Australia’s political and military leaders have never had to do the hard thinking or make the difficult decisions that national security requires. Paul Dibb summed up this failing by observing that a series of governments showed a ‘reluctance to think realistically about national security’.⁶⁴ Defence has not really mattered to Australians, certainly not in the same way it has to those who live in more dangerous parts of the world. A policy of dependence also explains Australia’s dearth of experience at the strategic level of war and why its forces have sought excellence at the tactical level.

Of course, Australia’s offset remains useful only as long as a great power partner has the ability to provide, or interest in providing, for the security of its junior ally. Stephan Frühling describes this as Australian having placed a bet on US policy inclinations.⁶⁵ What Australia must ask itself, in this period of transition, is whether dependence remains a viable offset. Numerous commentators have begun to do this and there is no shortage of books or shorter works that question the future utility of the United States as a guarantor of Australia’s security.⁶⁶ This questioning also suggests the need to investigate the other means of providing national security.

Unfortunately, as noted above, other offsets are not likely to be possible for Australia to implement. Regional states are becoming economically and technologically Australia’s equal and a population-based offset never existed. By 2030 Indonesia is expected to have the world’s fourth largest economy,

after China, India and the United States, in that order.⁶⁷ Other regional states will enjoy similar growth. Seeking an offset in robotics or artificial intelligence is likely to be disappointing as their adoption becomes easier and cheaper, and as they proliferate widely. If everyone has military robots, for example, then it is the number of robots that matters, and Australia cannot win any conflict for which mass is the deciding factor. Therefore, a technology-based offset is also unlikely.

Realising the limitations of its wealth, population and technology, a perennial favourite for an Australia offset has been to seek a knowledge edge, an expression in use as early as the 1997 Defence White Paper.⁶⁸ In more recent publications it has taken the form of seeking a 'Cognitive Edge'.⁶⁹ But a knowledge edge offset is unlikely for several reasons. Firstly all humans have the same cognitive capacity and to think otherwise has imperialistic overtones and smacks of racism. Secondly all soldiers strive for mastery in the profession of arms; their lives depend on it. This means that a cognitive advantage will be fleeting or not of great significance. In fact, operations that depend for success on a commander's ability to outwit, out-plan or outmanoeuvre an opponent have been likened to a 'philosophy of fatal optimism'.⁷⁰ Lastly, and most significantly, the generation of a knowledge edge requires a society that values intellectual achievement. Australians, alas, are not an intellectually minded people. Donald Horne captured this societal essence in his oft-repeated remark, 'Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck.'⁷¹ Most people remember only this line, but the book in its totality is a damning indictment of a nation that devalues education, research and thinking. There is little evidence that much has changed since Horne published his book in 1964.⁷² Because a military reflects the values of its parent society, for the Australian Army to seek a knowledge offset is to build on infertile ground indeed.

How to Not Lose

Explaining the Theatre of Operations

Modern conventional weapons can now strike at immense distances, while better sensors make it more difficult to hide. China has developed a missile, the D-26, that has a range of about 4,000 kilometres, bringing the US military bases on Guam within range.⁷³ The theatre of war is now one of immense size, including extending vertically deep into both space and the sea. The Second World War was a global struggle, but that was only in the strategic sense. For those who conducted battle the contest was still very much local. By contrast, today's commanders must control operations across a theatre of hemispheric proportions. This has resulted in the strategic level of war blending into the tactical. The next generation of commanders will have to make decisions on targeting and weapon selection across multiple domains in order to seek a tactical effect—the destruction of a single ship, for example. Similarly, it has become difficult to distinguish between movement to or within a theatre from manoeuvre for battle.⁷⁴ What we are witnessing is the compression of the dimensions of war in which domains will largely be irrelevant, the blending of tactics into strategy, and a reduction in the constraints traditionally imposed by distance and time in the conduct of operations.⁷⁵

For Australia, this change in war's relation with distance has important implications including rendering even more irrelevant the perception that the defence of Australian territory commences at the continent's high-water mark. Following the delivery of Paul Dibb's 1986 report, Australia's defence requirement was defined as denying an enemy the ability to operate in the sea–air gap to the nation's north and to prevent

a hostile incursion onto the nation's shores.⁷⁶ This requirement became known as the Defence of Australia (DOA) policy and it was enshrined in the 1987 Defence White Paper of the same name.⁷⁷ Despite its implementation, DOA contained troubling flaws, the primary one being the assumption that Australia would fight in its near approaches rather than further away. This inadequacy was tested during the 1999 Intervention in East Timor when the ADF had to deploy substantial forces to the other side of the sea–air gap, a simple operation that tested the limits of the organisation's ability. In 2004, the then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, called for DOA's redefinition as a sea–air–land gap in recognition of the need for the force to operate on the far side of the waters to the nation's north.⁷⁸

The requirement for the ADF to project power further has only increased since East Timor. As the battlefield has expanded, distance has compressed and it is not as meaningful as it once was. Modern long-range strike weapons have effectively widened the width of the sea–air gap. Manila, approximately 3,200 kilometres from Darwin, is from a strike perspective effectively much closer than before. Perth to Singapore is only about 3,900 kilometres. The islands that China has built and militarised in the South China Sea bring its power projection ability further south. Information warfare, including cyber, extends an attacker's strike range to global proportions across an interconnected humanity. Stephan Frühling has observed that in a major war stand-off strikes against Australian military targets, or even population centres, are now feasible without the enemy needing to enter the sea–air gap at all.⁷⁹

To ensure its security, Australia needs to assert its defensive attributes to a greater depth. Rather than a sea–air gap or a sea–air–land gap, the emerging spatial representation should be a sea–air–land littoral zone, a vast area of defensive interest covering Australia's northern approaches. To call Australia's defensive geography a gap has also become inappropriate because it implies a break or an interval separating two or more distinct areas, whereas Australia needs to think of its approaches more in the sense of continuity extending across the archipelagos to its north and onto mainland South-East Asia. This is what the 2020 Defence Strategic Update defines as the priority geographic area for planning.⁸⁰ To keep an adversary at bay, Australia will need to increase the range that its kinetic and non-kinetic fires can reach. This means that the ADF will need to project

itself forward, to continue to be expeditionary in mentality and to acquire the equipment and skills necessary to operate in a littoral environment in cooperation with regional partners and allies. This does not mean that the entire ADF must surge northwards. Rather, only the capabilities needed to secure the desired effect need deploy. Nor does it mean that deployed capabilities have to remain forward. In an age of pervasive surveillance, a combatant either hides or stealthily shifts position, including returning to Australia. What forward presence means for Australia's future wars will be discussed in full below.

The Future Australian Way of War

Australia must find the means to overcome the limitations on the size of its military and the coercive power it can generate relative to potential adversaries. As the future reveals itself it may no longer be sufficient to rely on the munificence of a great power partner to supply the necessary mass to offset Australia's military insignificance. This is not a problem unique to Australia. It is a challenge that all states face; there is never enough to ensure victory in every possible circumstance. One of the most successful military leaders in the history of war was Frederick the Great, who from 1740 to 1786 ruled the modestly sized and under-resourced Kingdom of Prussia. Although surrounded by more powerful neighbours, he waged war frequently and largely with success. He did this by not seeking advantage in numbers, which he could not raise, or in technology, as the armaments of the age were largely the same, but by exploiting interior lines and by instilling in his soldiers superior battlefield skill and morale.⁸¹ Frederick's targeting of particular aspects of war for enhancement was not unusual. Great commanders of every age must find the means with which to overcome the limitations of their forces.⁸²

When on operations, Australia's military leaders should avoid battle unless on very favourable terms. Their forces should aim to avoid detection, unless they want to be found, and fight not for territory but for time and space, because combined they delay and frustrate an adversary's plans. This will also require the use of long-range strike weapons, kinetic and non-kinetic, to disrupt the enemy's intentions. The destruction of the enemy is not an outcome to aspire to, because to do so would expose too high a percentage of one's own forces to a potentially painful counter-strike. A stronger adversary can absorb and regenerate losses in excess of what Australia can afford to sacrifice, and do so at a faster rate.

A military philosophy of not losing does not mean that Australian soldiers cannot be aggressive, take the initiative and strike before being struck. Equally, there would be no expectation that soldiers would have to stay where they are sent and take a pounding without responding. Nor does utilising the natural superiority of the defence mean that Australian forces will not inflict blows of their own. A defender who only passively defends is guaranteed to be slowly crushed. The obligation of the Australian soldier will remain the eternal one in war: 'to kill without being killed' and 'to will without being willed'.⁸³

The strategic defensive does not imply a passive defence. Soldiers should be ready to pounce on the enemy's mistakes. If the enemy exposes a detachment, and Australian forces can achieve a local superiority, they should be quick to eliminate it. The conduct of raids on enemy weak points or vulnerable infrastructure should also be undertaken, and distractions and deceptions actively pursued to confuse the opposition. Moreover, this is the posture at the commencement of the war. Although it is unlikely, if favourable opportunity presents to take the strategic offensive, and if such action will not detract from the attainment of the government's political objective, the Army should do so, even if temporarily.

Still, those on operations should expect that opportunities to go on the tactical offensive will be rare and that this will only be done in order to advance the objective of not losing. Again the experience of Vietnam helps. Except for the 1968 Tet and 1972 Easter Offensives, the North Vietnamese, along with their Viet Cong partners, spent the war on the strategic defensive. They did not have to win in order to achieve their ambitions. Their goal was to simply not lose, to wear out the United States and its partners so that their more powerful enemy would decide to give up. Aggressive tactics was an essential part of that plan.

There is considerable debate in the military community on the subject of a national way of war. Numerous books have been written with 'way of war' in their titles, although none specifically on Australia.⁸⁴ A national way of war is a product of a nation's consciousness at a particular place in time. Its creation takes into account geography; economic, political and social development; culture; and the temper of the people. Therefore it can change as the context of a nation changes, although some factors, such as geography, are timeless. Still even geography is subject to reinterpretation because of changes in circumstance. For example, England was a

backwater in Europe until the development of ocean-going ships, at which time its location on the edge of the Atlantic became an advantage.

The lack of a work on the Australian way of war does not mean that one does not exist; the question simply has not received attention.

This lack of attention may be because Australia's way of war is derivative of and dependent on the way of war of its great power partner.

That the Royal Australian Air Force has designed itself to be a wing of the United States Air Force is telling. This practice does come with consequences, however. Since the Australian Army has always fought as a junior partner, its leaders have never had the need or opportunity to focus on the higher levels of war. Instead, the Australian Army specialised at the tactical level, where it has excelled. Even on the Western Front of the First World War, a struggle of colossal proportions, the point of pride of the Australian Corps was its ability to dominate no-man's-land by aggressive but small-scale patrolling, the technique which it oxymoronicallly called 'peaceful penetration'.⁸⁵ The Australian divisions were among the best in the British Army and their commanders and staffs understood how to wage multi-divisional combined arms operations in conjunction with other corps. Yet it was in patrolling where Australian pride lay.

Once Australia adopts a military philosophy of not losing, its way of war will have to evolve. It will no longer be as important to dominate the tactical level of war. This might seem contradictory, because this work has argued that as a result of the increasing ranges of sensor and strike capabilities, even very senior commanders will find themselves making strategic decisions that seek a tactical effect. The point here is that as the strategic and the tactical blend into each other the principles of the strategic must dominate. This is because, as Allan R Millett explains:

*It is more important to make correct decisions at the political and strategic level than it is at the operation or tactical level. Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected but political and strategic mistakes last forever.*⁸⁶

Australian leaders must, therefore, become more adept at seeing how their actions contribute to the attainment of the political objective than they have had need to in the past.

The Nuclear Context of Australia's Military Philosophy

In war, it is critical for the weaker power to avoid any escalation of the contest. There is no advantage for the weaker power to encourage the stronger power to allocate more of its superior strength to a war. Since the weaker power cannot match the stronger power's increased commitment, its relative situation in the conflict will only worsen if escalation occurs.

This means that there are limits on how bold Australia can be in a future war against a credible opponent. As discussed above, Australia, due to the circumstances of its inferior power position relative to other regional states, is unable to win a future war, except against a minor Pacific Island state. This is why the best Australia can achieve in war is to not lose and it must select its political objectives accordingly. Consequently, it must incorporate the strategic defensive into its way of war.

However, what if Australia is unexpectedly successful against a stronger opponent? What if, as a result of the enemy's incompetence or even as a result of a stroke of luck, Australia unexpectedly finds itself in the position to crush utterly the enemy's forces? Such an opportunity may be difficult to let pass, but if the opponent is nuclear armed it will be essential to allow the enemy to escape destruction. No state can afford the risks of escalation when engaged with a nuclear-armed opponent, especially if it lacks a powerful deterrence capability. If a state which possesses nuclear weapons fears its defeat, it could decide that its best option is to cross the nuclear threshold. The result may be the annihilation of Australia's population centres.

This means that as it seeks its own political goals, Australia cannot risk causing the defeat of a nuclear-armed enemy. In such a situation the best outcome Australia can hope to achieve is that the adversary accepts that it cannot achieve its goals. This is what the United States eventually realised in Vietnam. Thus, in the case of a war with a nuclear-armed opponent, the ADF's ambitions are further limited to the extent that the defeat of such an enemy's armed forces cannot be pursued.

Unpacking the Army’s New Military Philosophy

The Australian Army’s field force is presently organised in three multi-role combat brigades (1, 3, and 7 Brigades) with three enabling brigades in support (6, 16 and 17 Brigades), the Special Forces, and the reserve belonging to 2 Division. The organisation is designed to support training and force generation; it is not designed to fight as it is. When there is an operational requirement the Army provides the government with force options. The government selects which option, or mix of options, that will best meet its objective or objectives. The Army then assembles a land task force that meets the mission requirement as dictated by the Government. The land task force is assigned to Joint Operations Command (JOC), where it combines with assets from the other services to create a joint task force. Army’s responsibility is to prepare for war; it is JOC that wages it. If the mission is prolonged, the Army generates a rotation force to replace those elements already deployed to allow them to return home. Brigades and units are not expected to deploy as entire entities—the last time a complete battalion deployed for war was during the Vietnam War.

Because how Army trains does not reflect how it fights, there is little utility in assigning tasks or roles to particular brigades and units in order to inculcate the philosophy of not losing. To do so would prioritise the training or preparation aspect of war rather than the fighting one. Instead, this work will identify the functional tasks that Army will need to perform if it hopes to not lose a future war. There are eight functions that Army needs to perform. They are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Operational Functions	
Mandatory Functions	Contingent Functions
Aid to the Civil Community	Forward and Enduring Presence
Logistics	Political Warfare
	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
	Distant Strike
	Light Force
	Heavy Force

There are two mandatory functions. The first is aid to the civil community. It is a default task. Even though aid to the civil community is not war fighting, it is a mandatory responsibility for every part of the ADF. If there is a domestic crisis that the government believes the military can ameliorate, it will call on the ADF to commit appropriate resources to the task. The Australian public expects no less, and no government would long survive the neglect of this function. While the bushfire emergency of the 2019 summer and the COVID crisis of 2020 saw a highly visible military contribution, there was nothing new in either response. One need only recall the magnitude of the Defence commitment to the relief of Darwin after the city's destruction by Cyclone Tracy in 1974.⁸⁷ Lesser aid efforts are commonplace. As this function does not relate to war fighting there is no need for further elaboration.

The other mandatory function is logistics. Without appropriate logistics no other function can succeed. The Army must be able to support and sustain itself on operations; otherwise the assigned force cannot achieve its mission. This simple statement of fact is not meant to detract from the great complexity that accompanies the provision of timely and appropriate support by the ADF's logistic elements. It just means that there is no benefit in a further elaboration of the obvious.

The functions that require more detailed description are the contingent ones. These functions are contingent in the sense that their undertaking requires explicit government direction. The Australian Government has the freedom of action to choose whether or not to authorise Army undertake any or all of these functions in response to a crisis. Another way to describe the activation of one or more contingent functions is that they are discretionary; the Army's tasking is entirely dependent on the Government's decision to employ the military to address a requirement. It is worth reiterating that the Army's first task in a military response is to provide options to the Government. A crisis may take many forms and range from responding to a natural disaster that has struck a nearby state, the onset of a conflict or even Australia's participation in a major war that involves coalition operations. In all cases, it is the Government which decides how the crisis is to be addressed. This remains the case even if there was a direct threat to Australian territory and people. In such a situation the Government still has the discretion to concede to an aggressor, and in doing so, decline to use the military to defend the nation. Admittedly, this is an unlikely scenario,

but it does capture the fact that all tasks performed by the Australian military are contingent on the nature of the Government's response to a crisis.

It is also important to note that all 8 functions are integrated. It is very unlikely, even unimaginable, that for an operation the Army would employ a single function independent of the others. For example, during the East Timor Intervention — essentially a HADR and peace stabilisation mission — the largest function deployed was the light force. However, elements that conducted information warfare (political warfare) and distant strike (submarines) were also present. General Peter Cosgrove, in his memoirs, describes the critical role played by the heavy force in backing up the light force, adding their intimidating mass to the operation. In his book it is also clear that the personal connections Cosgrove made in the performance of forward and enduring presence tasks now paid dividends in his management of the coalition and his interactions with Indonesian commanders.⁸⁸ How much each function is represented in a particular operation is determined by the type of mission and the government's objective. Therefore, whether the task is an East Timor type intervention or the Army's participation in a medium level war, Australia will likely require all of the Army's functions, and their integration, to achieve its aims.

Unstated in the functions is the maintenance of Australia's relationship with its great power partner. Alliance management is an ongoing requirement, but it is best not expressed as a function. This is does not reflect a lack of importance. Rather, alliance relations is not a function because to do so would confuse functional requirements with the desired end state. The Australian Army will continue to engage with its alliance partners and build interoperability, but will do so through the mastery of its functional tasks.

The reader will also note that the list of functions makes no reference to Special Forces. This is because none of the functions correspond to a particular capability. In future wars, there will remain a critical need for the Army to have a Special Forces capability. However, what missions these soldiers undertake are defined according to the eight functions already identified; there is no function that is unique to Special Forces.

Forward and Enduring Presence

The ADF is no stranger to maintaining a forward and enduring presence in the region; its importance has long been recognised. In 2015 Lieutenant General Rick Burr spoke of the centrality of international engagement to the Army mission.⁸⁹ Going forward, it needs to become even more important, even if it is largely not a war-fighting one. Most engagement needs to be conducted in peacetime, although it is possible that during a war the Army will embed personnel with a partner's force as advisors or trainers. The Australian military conducts exercises with regional partners, hosts exchange programs and posts personnel to foreign schools and courses. To facilitate this engagement the Defence School of Languages provides instruction in the languages of critical partners and regional countries, including Vietnamese, Indonesian, Japanese, Tagalog and Tetum. In 2020, Army had 121 students posted to the school, studying 19 different languages.⁹⁰

In 2019, Army interacted with the land forces of more than 25 countries. Some of these are high-level engagements such as the Chief of Army meetings with the heads of other land forces or the multitude of staff talks that are held each year. Much more common, however, are the exercise, training and individual personnel opportunities that Army sponsors. In 2019, Army participated in 65 named exercises with partners, along with managing 13 exchange programs. Army also opened its schools to nearly 300 foreign soldiers and dispatched 70 mobile training teams to partner countries. In total, in 2019 Army conducted 318 international activities that involved over 3,000 foreign soldiers.⁹¹

Army is already making a strong commitment to building ties with other countries. Still, to maximise its potential, forward and enduring presence needs even greater investment. Army should increase significantly its commitment to international engagement, particularly in the region, and to do so for longer periods of time. Some of this will be easy to achieve, such as organising more exercises and training opportunities or increasing the number of foreign military personnel attending Australian schools. But more of the same, just more intensively, is inadequate. A different approach is required. Army needs to develop soldiers who are specialists in a particular country, have fluency in the local language or languages, are absorbed in the local culture and spend considerable periods of time either studying or working in the country of their focus. This may sound like a

description of the Foreign Area Officer stream that the US military supports.⁹² In part, this is correct. But because the Australian foreign presence overlaps with the area defined as part of Australia's sea-air-land littoral zone, these personnel have a direct operational function. In fact, when they are overseas serving in their country of interest they should be considered to be on operations and compensated accordingly.

Forward and enduring presence should be treated as an operational function, and its successful undertaking requires the writing of explicit mission objectives. It needs to be treated as more than an adventure that brings soldiers from different nations together or an opportunity to make mates. It needs clear goals, and after-action reports need to be rigorously studied and observations compiled into a war-planning database. The Army's goals need to be coordinated across the ADF as well as aligned with the objectives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This is because those soldiers performing this function will be making an important contribution to building the relationship connections and knowledge base needed to ensure that Australia is best positioned to not lose a future war fought in its sea-air-land littoral zone.

Those who enter this career path—and, unlike in the United States, they need not be limited to officers—should expect to spend long periods of time in their target country. The norm for tours should be five or more years, rather than the current two- or three-year cycle. When rotated back to Australia, such individuals would serve as desk officers for the country of their focus; undertake an attachment with DFAT or other relevant departments or non-government organisations; or undertake full-time university studies for Army-sponsored Masters or PhD degrees to expand their knowledge and understanding of their focus country.

To justify the expense of establishing a new stream of specialist soldiers there must be a greater return on investment than is achieved through current international engagement practice. Those who take up this calling need to be more than defence attachés or students in a foreign school. The objective needs to be seen as more than gaining or expanding a circle of friends, although that is important too. Such a net gain is possible because their activities will have a mission effect, in support of the philosophy of not losing. Their most important function will be to accumulate geographic and cultural knowledge on the littoral zone in which the Army will expect to fight and to build deep relationships with members of their chosen country, not just their military opposites.

When the future theatre of operations covers an enormous area, advantage can be found from having a better understanding of the combat zone than that of one's enemy. In addition, in the missile age, reconnaissance or scouting, to use the naval term, is a critical task for the weaker combatant, which invariably will be Australia. Writing from the perspective of naval tactics, Wayne P Hughes Jr and Robert Girrier stress that a scouting edge is necessary if an inferior force is to fight with effect.⁹³ Their point has relevance for a land force because in the littoral to Australia's north the Army will be able to contest the sea from the land. It might even be able to control the sea. To draw a hard distinction between the sea and land domains is unnecessary and unhelpful, because with the abilities of modern weapons and sensors the two will almost completely overlap. These foreign specialists are essentially scouts gathering information—or conducting reconnaissance, for those more comfortable with land force terms.

The terms 'scouting' and 'reconnaissance' are used in more than their geographic sense. They also apply to the human terrain. Army's foreign specialists should aim to appreciate the culture of the society to which they are posted in order to gain an understanding of how it will respond when pressure is applied by an aggressor or by a request from Australia for assistance or access to their territory. Such assessments will enable Australian planners to better understand how the region will react to a hostile environment and allow them to shape their response and define more realistic mission objectives and force requirements. Alliances may not result from these efforts, if such formal arrangements are even desired, but by better understanding the region Australia can prepare with greater efficiency to counter an aggressor and to seek help from regional states.

To suggest that these specialists will be able to influence the decisions made by a foreign power is perhaps to go too far. All countries will invariably respond to pressure in what they consider to be their own best interests, not the interests of their friends. Yet this is the point. To understand the subtleties of another country's interests requires a deep understanding of its culture, including the strengths, fears and weaknesses of its people. Only long-term study and reflection can secure this degree of awareness.

There is one further reason why the Army needs to increase its foreign presence and develop foreign specialist soldiers. Because of its reliance on the United States, Australia has never had to consider the full requirements of national security. This is changing and Australia's security

is likely to depend increasingly on its relations with regional states. Australia's geographic location is becoming more important as Asian states grow in power whereas the United States can only remain a distant ally. Frühling's observation that Australia's defence situation is becoming more normal is an astute one.⁹⁴ We have been able to get away without such specialists for so long because it did not really matter. Now it does.

Political Warfare

While the military has a role in the conduct of political warfare, and the Army must be prepared to undertake it, it also must accept that its role will be small compared to that of other government agencies.⁹⁵ The waging of political warfare is a whole-of-government endeavour in which all government departments have a part to play, even if that part is limited. In fact, Army's primary contribution to political warfare will be its intelligence collection assets, as well as the information derived from its forward and enduring presence activities.

The first requirement to wage political warfare is the articulation by the government of the end state it wishes to achieve. The second is the government's provision of the necessary resources to meet the end state. The Australian Government must also establish a coordination body to link the efforts of all participating departments and to make sure that activities undertaken work towards the objective. Without all of these in place, the Army, or any other agency, should not conduct political warfare.

Political warfare is not actually war, because it occurs in peacetime. To be war, it must include state-sanctioned violence by military forces. Although not war, political warfare is a part of the constant contest that exists between states for advantage in their relations. Political warfare is also a useful medium to shape the environment in ways that are more favourable to your objective if war does eventuate. Its definition was provided by George Kennan in a 1948 US policy planning memorandum:

Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz's doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures, and 'white' propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of 'friendly' foreign elements, 'black' psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.⁹⁶

Violence is anathema to political warfare because its whole point is to achieve what you want without instigating a war and thereby forcing a violent and expensive confrontation whose outcome you cannot control. Despite the recent successes of Russia and China in achieving their aims by employing the techniques of political warfare, and the coining of the term 'grey zone' to classify these operations, there is nothing new in a state using non-violent means to secure its aims. In reality, political warfare is one of the oldest forms of human contest and is captured by Sun Tzu's statement that 'to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill'.⁹⁷ Thus, political warfare has a part to play in Australia's securing of its goals.

For Australia, as a weak state, to embrace political warfare would help to level the playing field against stronger powers. This is because the cost of action is much lower than in war and, if done skilfully, political warfare has deniability. It also is a logical follow-on from the first priority because it can harness the knowledge gained from Army's role in forward and enduring presence. More importantly, understanding political warfare will better enable Australia to recognise, deter and defend against an aggressor state employing this methodology.⁹⁸ As a status quo power, Australia has limited need to utilise political warfare in an offensive sense. It has, for example, no desire to target another state with political warfare attacks in order to weaken its resistance to coercion or conquest. However, used defensively, political warfare integrates well into the strategic defensive and fits comfortably into a philosophy of not losing.

The resort to political warfare does come with boundaries, especially for a liberal democracy. Covert activities are contrary to a democracy's preference for openness, and the employment of propaganda, subterfuge or deception may make some uncomfortable. Political warfare also can involve the distortion of what is true and what is false, which can cause distrust and confusion in a democratic society.⁹⁹ The Army, and other government agencies, will need to take into account the art of what is acceptable if it is to succeed at political warfare. Political warfare can become dangerous if one's covert actions are unmasked, particularly when conducted by a small state against a larger one. This is because the stronger power has less to fear from a weaker power and, therefore, may be inclined to respond violently if annoyed.

Despite the risks, political warfare techniques have utility for Australia and the Army has a role to play, albeit a limited one. Firstly, political warfare can be employed defensively, which matches Australia's posture as a non-aggressive state and aligns with the principles of the strategic defensive. In defence, it can be used to distract or delay a larger power, encourage it to shift its ambitions to a different target, or sow confusion in the minds of an adversary's leadership. It can also be used to extend the range of Australia's defence. As long-range missiles push the boundaries of Australia's defensive zone outward, political warfare can reach into a potential aggressor's homeland. For a nation whose situation is well-suited to the strategic defensive, political warfare can shape the environment to support an Australian philosophy to not lose.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Other Stabilisation Missions

HADR is the international equivalent of the aid to the civil community function. The main difference is that the ADF's performance of HADR is discretionary, whereas aid to the civil community is not. Stabilisation is the use of military force to restore order and governance in a state or territory that is in crisis. The Army has great experience in the conduct of both missions.¹⁰⁰ It is the government's choice as to whether Australia will come to the aid of another nation that has had the misfortune to be affected by a natural or man-made disaster.

Despite these missions being discretionary, Australia, as a member of the international community, has shown a great willingness to undertake them, particularly in the near region. After Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in 2013, Australian aircraft transported supplies and a medical team to the stricken area.¹⁰¹ In 2015 Australia offered support to Nepal after it suffered a major earthquake that left nearly 9,000 dead and 3.5 million homeless.¹⁰² In the aftermath of the massive Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 the ADF undertook a prolonged relief mission to Indonesia in Operation Sumatra Assist.¹⁰³ The Army also supported multi-year interventions in East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomons to restore order in those areas. Hardly a year passes without some disaster in the region to which the ADF responds. Additionally, as climate change worsens, more powerful and frequent storms, as well as damage to water and food supplies, will likely increase the expectation on the ADF to perform HADR and stabilisation missions.

That HADR and stabilisation missions are included as one of the Army's functions is not out of humanitarian consideration. It is because it is another means to build up fellowship and friendship across the region, and to show Australia as a friendly neighbour in a dangerous neighbourhood. War is about obtaining an advantage over one's adversary, and in offering relief to a stricken country the ADF will be contributing to such a goal against a future need. In providing this support, Australia would also help to maintain the stability of fragile states whose collapse may cause turmoil to cascade across the region. Additionally, by undertaking these missions the ADF has the chance to practise its techniques in an operational environment, where the tyranny of time and the randomness of friction exist in ways that cannot be replicated in training exercises. Even more importantly, the conduct of HADR and stabilisation tasks allows the ADF to test the effectiveness of its procedures and systems, such as the coordination between the three services, links to other government agencies, and the reliability and resilience of the national supply chain.

Those who serve in the military do not enlist because of the desire to serve on a HADR or stabilisation mission; at least they should not. There are many non-uniform agencies—government, non-government and international—that offer such opportunities. Soldiers are firstly war fighters and war is the sole reason for their existence. Yet shaping the operating environment is a military task and from this perspective the dedication of uniformed personnel to HADR and stabilisation is a legitimate role. Supporting neighbour states in the region is more than being a morally sound international citizen; it can also build up relationships with potential partners at both the individual and state levels that may prove useful in a future time of crisis. From this perspective, some of the goals of Operation Philippines Assist, a HADR response, and Operation Augury-Philippines, a training mission, were the same.¹⁰⁴

While HADR and stabilisation are an intermittent function, it is one that the ADF can exploit more resolutely to build the future relationships it will need in the sea-air-land littoral zone to Australia's north. For example, the ADF possesses two highly capable amphibious ships, HMAS *Canberra* and HMAS *Adelaide*, as well as the less capable HMAS *Choules*. Although designed to conduct an amphibious operation, they also offer an ideal sea base for these missions. Therefore, as the cyclone season approaches, these ships should be designated HADR vessels, preloaded with aid stores

ranging from food and water to toy koala bears, with army engineers, communication elements and medical teams embarked. Our neighbours should be informed that these ships will be on the way before a cyclone hits their shores. Assigning these maritime and land forces in this manner will create regional friendships that will support the larger goal of creating a military that has the resources to not lose.

Distant Strike

Distant strike is the first of the Army's functions that is exclusively undertaken during a war. It is also the most important combat function for the ADF's defence of the sea–air–land littoral zone to the nation's north. Although this function is described from the perspective of the land force it is important to remain cognisant that it will be undertaken by the joint force across all domains.

Through Project Land 8113, Army is acquiring a long-range strike missile capability. In fact, with the addition of sensors and coordination with the other services, Australia is creating what is known as an anti-access and area-denial system (A2AD). This is of enormous significance for the Army and its place in the hierarchy of the nation's defence. Contemporary missiles are available with ranges in excess of 2,000 kilometres. This represents a huge leap in the Army's ability to deliver indirect fire. As I have argued elsewhere, it will allow Army to create a 2,000 kilometre killing zone through which an adversary will have to manoeuvre.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the platforms being acquired are easily deployable or can be mounted on a ship. Even a small army boat or a barge can serve as a platform that Army is acquiring in Project Land 8710, thereby extending the killing zone even further from Australia's shores.

On one level the acquisition of a distant strike capability represents Army's reassumption of the land force's traditional mission of coastal defence, with the big difference that the forward line is not the horizon off Sydney or Fremantle but the littoral to the north. These weapons are also the ideal tools for a state whose best future posture is the strategic defensive. While they can be used offensively, it is defensively that long-range missiles will make their most important contribution to Australia's future security.

The acquisition of long-range missiles will mandate that Army and the ADF think differently on the balance between the three services. To date, Army has had only a small role in the development of the nation's strategy,

particularly in contrast to the larger part played by the RAN and the RAAF. There have been extended periods when the government limited the Army's role in national defence to the mopping up of small parties of enemy raiders who managed to evade the Navy and Air Force and reach Australia's shores. For the first time in the nation's history, Army will now have a significant part to play in the formulation of the national security strategy; in fact it is likely to be the dominant part. By fielding these missiles, Army will be able to contest the maritime and air domains to a great distance from its batteries. This event will also force a re-evaluation of the concept of domains of war as the land domain impinges on the others. A unified domain in which the land force dominates is the most likely outcome.

Army's enhanced role in Australian strategy will also create a need for a cultural rebalance. Throughout its entire existence, Army's leaders have focused on the tactical level of war because of their limited ability to effect the strategic. Soldiers will now have to become masters of strategy, even more so as the tactical and strategic levels of war blend into each other. This may prove a traumatic process, even more for the sailors and aviators of Army's sister services. After all, funding tends to follow strategic relevance. Soldiers will also need to accept a reordering of the hierarchy of corps within the culture of the organisation. The age of the gunner beckons as the long-range missile becomes war's decisive weapon.

Light Force

The definition of a light force is any capability that is air portable, either by fixed wing or rotor wing. Forces that can be deployed by a small fast boat or a submarine would also qualify as being a part of the light force. They could even reach their objective by jet pack or other personal lift devices. Although a factor, weight is not the main determinant in whether a capability is a part of the light force—it is speed of deployment that matters.

Because of how they deploy, the elements that make up the light force will lack durability. Its personnel will by necessity be lightly armed and equipped, their vehicles will have less protection, and sustainment endurance will be relatively shallow. Inherent firepower will also be constrained, although with a powerful communication suite light forces can call in fires from other shooters. When confronting a more powerful enemy, which is likely to be the case, light force troops will need to rely upon their stealth and ability to live off the land in order to reduce their detection threshold. This is because if found and fixed they will be destroyed by the enemy's

superior strength. The tasks of the light force are to conduct strategic reconnaissance, destroy the enemy's exposed positions and weak points, introduce unknowns into the adversary's decision-making and support local forces of friendly partners. In a sense the light force can be used as a raiding force: strike hard and fast, reap destruction on the enemy and escape before retaliation. Most importantly, the Army could bear their loss if that were to happen.

The light force can also secure points of entry for a follow-up force—for example, securing a port for use by the RAN or an airfield for the RAAF. Those serving in the light force could also be assigned in small teams as advisors, embedded in the forces of a regional partner, as was done by the Australian Army Training Team during the Vietnam War. Their task would be to enhance the fighting power of indigenous troops through training, as well as to coordinate air strikes and other fires from Australian shooters, much as the Green Berets did for the Mujahideen in 2001.¹⁰⁶

The light force is well suited to pursue a philosophy to not lose. Its high mobility allows it to strike at enemy weakness and sow disorder upon the enemy's plan. Its very existence will dissipate the enemy's strength by forcing it to allocate troops to protecting its line of communications and other installations. By partnering with indigenous troops and civilians a small Australian force could wreak havoc on an aggressor's rear, tying up many more of the enemy in unproductive garrisons. There is Australian precedent for this kind of fighting. During the Second World War two Australian independent companies kept thousands of Japanese troops busy on East Timor—troops that could have been used more profitably elsewhere.¹⁰⁷

Heavy Force

Similarly to the light force, the land force elements assigned to the heavy force function are not determined by their weight. While the elements assigned to the heavy force are literally too heavy to be carried in an aircraft, the slower speed of their deployment is a more important consideration. Heavy forces will tend to be complex systems that require heavy maintenance and intensive support. They will deploy with robust sustainment. Therefore, the heavy force will typically deploy by sea in military or civilian chartered lifts.

The deployment of large numbers of heavy force elements is likely only in a war where there is a significant political objective which will require the mobilisation of the entire ADF and require the full support of the Australian support base. It is the type of war in which firepower will be decisive and casualties potentially high. An example would be the resumption of war on the Korean Peninsula. Australia will have limited ability or desire to avoid participation in such a conflict, particularly if it intends to maintain its reliance on alliances for its ultimate security. Smaller size heavy force elements will also prove essential in the backing-up of the light force with direct fire and to add a force protection degree of visual intimidation.

The need to deploy the heavy force is not likely to come as a surprise to the Australian Government or the leaders of the ADF. There will be warning signs as tensions rise and relations deteriorate with an aggressive state. Australia would be subject to an increase of political warfare operations, including cyber probes of critical systems and the onset of an aggressive information campaign. The enemy's mobilisation of its expeditionary military capabilities will confirm its hostile intent. While the term 'warning time' is less useful now than in the past, there will be signals that a major war is on the horizon for which Australia will need its heavy forces.

Since Australia has no aggressive intent, it will not need its heavy force to conduct the strategic or tactical offensive. Thus, the enemy must come to Australia, a transit which will take time and require preliminary steps. Time is thus on Australia's side. This means that most of the capabilities assigned to the heavy force can be placed in the reserves. Only a minimal part of heavy capabilities need be a part of the full-time force, because warning time will allow for the mobilisation of the reserves to allow this function to play its role in the strategic and tactical defensive.

Explaining the Functions as a Conceptual Whole

The reader will notice that the first three functions—forward and enduring presence, political warfare, and HADR and stabilisation missions—do not employ the military to apply violence against an adversary. The lack of violence does not mean that these functions are not important. In fact, they are vital—more so for a relatively weak state that does not have the option to overwhelm an opponent with mass. Despite the recent hype about activities in the 'grey zone' there is nothing new in the undertaking of competitive actions in order to advance the interests of one's state.

If war is a contest of wills, so is peace, because the contest between states and peoples knows no bounds. The key enabler of will is possessing a deep understanding of firstly yourself and secondly your opponent. This understanding is created by acquiring knowledge and developing expertise. This is why forward presence and HADR are so important. Sometimes objectives are best achieved through cooperation, but as the Russians have shown in the Crimea, sometimes other means prove necessary. In order to defend against such tactics it is necessary to also know how to employ them offensively. This is why political warfare is included as a military function even if most of the responsibility for its conduct lies elsewhere.

Still, sometimes war is the best option to achieve one's aims. But since war contains risk and its course is unpredictable, it is safer for a state to try to achieve its objectives by other means first. While going to war should not be treated as a matter of last resort, it must be treated with respect. As Sun Tzu observed, 'war is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin'.¹⁰⁸ If war does prove necessary, a combatant can create an advantage by first shaping the coming conflict through undertaking non-combat functions. Even HADR, while its good international citizen role is acknowledged, has an element of seeking advantage in its conduct of the internal contest between nations.

Once war begins, competition-style operations do not cease. Sowing confusion in the enemy's decision-making remains critical in peace as well as in war. This means the conduct of the forward presence missions and political warfare actions becomes even more important. Sun Tzu is correct in his conclusion that 'all war is based on deception'.¹⁰⁹

The reader should also note that none of the functions are aligned with a particular style of war. This is because the functions are applicable to war in all its myriad forms. It is the political objective which will determine the utility of a particular function or functions. Some political objectives will require the activation of the heavy force while others might be secured by forward presence actions. War's complexity does not allow for a prescriptive allocation of capabilities to functions. The pursuit of every political objective will require a unique mix of military capabilities operating across the functions, as well as contributions from other government assets.

Conclusion

War changes in accordance with the context of the age. There is nothing particularly profound in this statement; it is the way it has always been. Because of this, military organisations must evolve in order to meet the challenges and harness the opportunities of the present and future. To not do so is a dereliction of duty of the highest order.

Writing in 1999, General Robert H Scales Jr peered into the coming information revolution and concluded that the ‘imperatives for charting tomorrow’s capabilities today are imposing’.¹¹⁰ The same words sum up the state of play for the Australian Army today. The challenges are indeed imposing. They are complex and are occurring simultaneously. The precise future is unknown but one thing is clear: Australia’s future will be less comfortable and secure than its present. Every indication is that Australia’s future position will be worse than it is today. Also, because events like the rise of regional superpowers or climate change are largely beyond Australia’s ability to control, there is little the country can do to prevent its situation from becoming increasingly dire. Therefore, Australia must adapt to the new context.

The first step in any change is to accept reality. Australia needs to recognise the reality of its relative weakness and plan accordingly. The envious lifestyle of the Swiss, or the Swedes for that matter, demonstrates that Australia’s future need not be an unpleasant one. The Swiss are realists and prepare accordingly. Australians need to become realists. For the military this means the abandonment of any notion of being able to win war in the traditional sense. The Army and the wider ADF will not go forth and force the enemy to succumb to our will. That is no longer possible, as the succession of lost wars shows. Instead, our future lies in being a state whose objective is to maintain the status quo or, in other words, to not lose.

In the aftermath of the disastrous twin defeats at Jena and Auerstädt in 1806 at the hands of Napoleon, Prussia implemented reforms under the guidance of General Gerhard von Scharnhorst. He knew that his reforms would not be well liked because they would set the Army and the nation on a different course. His ideas required a cultural reinterpretation of how Prussia prepared for and waged war.¹¹¹ This is where Australia finds itself today as the context of war changes. Hopefully Australia will embrace the idea that its secure future lies in forging a military instrument whose way of fighting is based on the philosophy of to not lose. Hopefully, Australia will not require its own Jena–Auerstädt to do so.

Afterword

There you have it.

The future of war continues to attract great debate overseas.

The United States Army is in the midst of updating its war-fighting concept with a new idea called Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). In fact, the Americans have reached the stage of writing new doctrine, raising specialised units and conducting experimentation on MDO's utility. Elsewhere, the Russian and Chinese militaries continue to build on their successes with 'grey-zone' tactics. In Australia, by contrast, the little debate that exists tends to focus on the technology or on the ability of defence to support industry policy.

Australia, both the Army and the wider ADF are on track to purchase cutting-edge military technologies. This will result in the most advanced-equipped defence force Australia has ever fielded. This is a great accomplishment and an important one. However, these acquisitions are occurring in an intellectual vacuum. Thinkers, both in Army and out, need to stand back and take a big-picture look at what these acquisitions mean in the context of a shifting age. How do they fit into Australia's philosophy of war and does that philosophy need to change, as I suggest it must? No doubt doctrine will be modified and training regimes altered to accommodate the new kit. Such tinkering is not enough. The character of war and the context of Australia's strategic environment are changing rapidly and not in a good way. What I have outlined in this paper are my thoughts, and mine alone, on how the Army needs to think about future war. The Army must prepare to fight to not lose. I am pretty confident that many will find fault with my thinking. Good. I hope that is the case and I further hope that those who object do so loudly and in writing and in public so that such views can be shared with others and subjected to scrutiny and challenge. Australia needs a debate on the future of war. Here is a place to start.

Endnotes

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