AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL

AUSTRALIAN ARMY RESEARCH CENTRE
/ 2026 Volume XXII, Number 3
Army in National Defence



SERVING THE NATION

ARMY.GOV.AU

AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL

AUSTRALIAN ARMY RESEARCH CENTRE
/ 2026 Volume XXII, Number 3
Army in National Defence

The Australian Army Journal is published by authority of the Chief of Army

The Australian Army Journal is sponsored by Head Land Capability

© Commonwealth of Australia 2026

This journal is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of study, research, criticism or review (as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968), and with standard source credit included, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.

Contributors are urged to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in their articles; the Editorial Advisory Board accepts no responsibility for errors of fact. Permission to reprint Australian Army Journal articles will generally be given by the Managing Editor after consultation with the author(s). Any reproduced articles must bear an acknowledgement of source.

The views expressed in the Australian Army Journal are the contributors' and not necessarily those of the Australian Army or the Department of Defence. The Commonwealth of Australia will not be legally responsible in contract, tort or otherwise for any statement made in this journal.

ISSN (Print) 1448-2843
ISSN (Digital) 2200-0992

DOI: https://doi.org/10.61451/22010

Website: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au
Twitter: https://twitter.com/AARCAusArmy
LinkedIn: https://linkedin.com/company/ausarmy-research

The Australian Army Journal Staff:

Director: Ms Luisa Powell

Guest Editor:

Dr Andrew Richardson

Editorial Advisory Board:

Dr Rhys Crawley

Dr Peter Dean

Dr Troy Lee-Brown

BRIG Jodie Lording

Ms Katherine Mansted

Dr Andrew Phillips

Dr Shannon Ryan

COL Lauren Sanders

Dr Joanna Wallis

Cover image:

An Australian Army Long Range Reconnaissance troop departs Gladstone for Emerald, Queensland, as part of Exercise AUSTRAL SHIELD 2026. *Source: Defence Image Gallery.*

The Australian Army Research Centre wishes to acknowledge the recent passing of two contributors to the Australian Army Journal.

***Mrs Anne Goyne** was a longtime supporter, contributor and reviewer to the AAJ.*

***Lieutenant Colonel Ross Hall** was a beloved member of the Australian Army Research Centre's production team, and supported multiple editions of the AAJ and Occasional Papers to publication.*

The Australian Army Research Centre expresses its sincerest condolences to the families and friends of both Anne Goyne and Ross Hall. This edition is dedicated to their memory.

/ CONTENTS

Forewords

CA Foreword
Australian Army Journal, Volume 22, No. 3
The Australian Army in National Defence *1*

Reflections on adaptation within the 2nd (Australian) Division 4
by Matthew Burr,

Introduction

National Defence and the Land Domain 6
by Andrew Richardson

Journal Articles

Preparing to Meet the Japanese Threat in 1942:
The Newcastle Covering Force in Peace and War *17*
by Sam Baumgarten

The Australian Garrison Battalions and the Volunteer
Defence Corps, 1939–1945:
A Case Study for Home Defence *39*
by Dayton McCarthy

Land Forces in the Defence of Australia:
The Need for a Kriegsbild for the Role of Army
and Army Reserves in Major War *68*
by Stephan Frühling

Resistance as a Component of Australia's Deterrence
by Denial Strategy *92*
by Andrew Maher

Revitalising the Latent Standby Reserve Workforce:
Lessons from the United Kingdom 112
by Vincent Connelly

From Mobilisation to Effect:
A Framework for Reserve Force Design
in Contemporary Australia 132
by John Coyne

Sustaining Deterrence:
Strengthening the Systems that Underpin
Australia's Northern Base Network 159
by Julian McMahon

Defending What Matters:
Countering Drones and the Challenge
of Prioritisation in Australia 177
by Carl Rhodes

Social Cohesion and Army's Social Legitimacy 193
by Phillip Hoglin

Professional Reflection

Twice the Professional:
The Army Reserve and the Strategic Value
of Polymathy for National Defence 219
by Matthew LM Jones and Samuel P Miller

Chief of Army Essay Competition

Hardwiring Adaptation Through Exploration 242
by Christopher Wooding - Chauvel Prize Winner

Weaponised Curiosity:
A Theory of Army 259
by Matthew Jeffries - Runner Up

Book Reviews

Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century.....273
by Matthew Jones

Contemporary Military Reserves:
Between the Civilian and Military Worlds.....277
by Jodie Lording

Symbols and Sacrifice in War:
National Identity and the Will to Fight.....282
by Andrew Frain

Strategic Imagination:
Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant.....286
by Nick Bosio

Military History Supremo:
Essays in Honour of David Horner AM FASSA.....291
by Michael Scott

Call for submissions

Call for Submissions for The Australian Army Journal.....297

Call for submissions for Australian Army Occasional Paper series.....299

About us

About the Australian Army Research Centre 301

CA FOREWORD: AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL, VOLUME 22, NO. 3

The Australian Army in National Defence

There is no more consequential role for a military than the defence of the nation. That is equally true of our Army. It is at the core of what we do – we exist to fight and win Australia's wars, as the nation's experts in land combat.

Since 2023 the Army has transformed, optimising for littoral warfare and long-range strike in a challenging era. We are creating a credible and relevant force that can: fight and win in the littorals; strike at long range; win the close fight on, from and onto the land; and, integrate with the ADF, with allies and partners, and with sovereign industry. We are deployed persistently across the region, and are training and preparing to defend the nation in war. *The National Defence Strategy* is our 'North Star' – the guiding light of the Army's transformation.

The world is changing rapidly, with an increase in global defence spending indicative of the weakening of long-standing structures that have kept much of the world secure. It is my responsibility to ensure that Army is prepared for this increasingly challenging future.

I noted at the 2026 Chief of Army Symposium that 'change is no longer enough'.[1] I have encouraged the hardwiring of adaptation across our force to underpin everything we do. Fortunately, Army has done this before. The articles in this volume demonstrate that during the Second World War, the Army mobilised a range of people and capabilities to fight in North Africa, the Mediterranean and Middle East, then pivoted to jungle warfare and operations in South East Asia and the Pacific. We then rapidly adapted to defend our own shores against attack in an 'absolute' transformation of 'concepts, command and control, capabilities, and culture'.[2] Army is doing this again, now.

We can only serve the nation through the capability we build in and through our people. Since becoming Chief in July 2026, my mantra for our Army has been '*Mission Ready, People Always*'. Our people are the foundation of our Army, and we must put them at the centre of our decision-making if we are to be mission ready.

This means pulling together to look after our soldiers and their families, living as they do across Australian communities. It is Army's people that will play a central role in domestic defence if a threat of such magnitude arises. That is why the 2nd Australian Division is undertaking a full schedule of exercises to prepare for the defence of the homeland – in Talisman Sabre to test its warfighting capability, and through inter-service and interagency coordination to help secure Australian society. Explaining those efforts is important to maintain Army's legitimacy, and strengthens the social contract we have with the community.

I commend this volume for its work to develop an intellectual understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the Army in defending Australia in the 21st Century. Its historical analysis and conceptual framing provide a critical base to explore workforce considerations, logistic opportunities and Army's contribution to the *integrated, focused force*.

I am grateful to the Australian Army Research Centre for supporting and maintaining Army's intellectual edge. Forums such as the *Australian Army Journal* help us generate a cognitive advantage; warfare remains, after all, a human endeavour.

Army's people, their commitment to service, and the raft of capabilities introduced into service provide powerful evidence of our shared commitment to defend Australia. Whether offshore in our region or patrolling and protecting Australian territory, we are Team Army – Soldiers for Life.

Lieutenant General Susan Coyle AM, CSC, DSM
Chief of Army

20 October 2026

ENDNOTES

1 LTGEN Susan Coyle, 'Chief of Army Symposium 2026 opening address', Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, 7 October 2026. https://www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2026-10-07/chief-army-symposium-2026-opening-address [Accessed 14 October 2026]

2 LTGEN Susan Coyle, 'Chief of Army Symposium 2026 opening address', Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, 7 October 2026. https://www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2026-10-07/chief-army-symposium-2026-opening-address [Accessed 14 October 2026]

REFLECTIONS ON ADAPTATION WITHIN THE 2ND (AUSTRALIAN) DIVISION

Matthew Burr

As my command tenure draws to a close, I am grateful for the commitment of the soldiers, officers and command teams shaping the 2nd (Australian) Division's adaptation. The Defence Strategic Review (DSR) and the subsequent National Defence Strategies (NDS) have provided the direction, and a large portion of the Division's adaptation has been to understand and operationalise the broad strategic guidance in these two documents.

Like the wider Army, the Division has moved at pace to ensure it can execute the roles allocated to it. Since the NDS, our understanding of security and response (SECRES) operations has developed rapidly and we have evolved plans and force structures accordingly. This includes the Division being comfortable operating in a state of change and having very real expectations placed upon it. During the last two years, we have seen the 2nd (Australian) Division continue to evolve into a genuine operational rather than strategic reserve. A readiness culture—relentless in the pursuit of preparedness for war—is now pervasive throughout the Division. We have a set role and task, but it is largely based on a Reservist, contingent workforce. For us, adaptation is done within the precarious balancing act of meeting the expectations of a '24/7 role' while operating within the realities of our citizen soldiers' availability.

For the soldiers of the 2nd (Australian) Division, this is achieved largely by 'learning while doing': generating in–stride considerations and changes to concepts of employment, force structures and identified required capabilities to execute domestic security and response operations. 'Learning while doing' is necessarily at the same pace as the collective training series. Therefore, we see major opportunities to adapt after lessons–learned on these exercises. Our 'reps and sets' are necessarily based on reserve training availability. All of our training within the Division is focussed on the 'task of greatest consequence' for our teams within war. Opportunities for upskilling are maximised. This is a challenge when we seek to 'hardwire for adaptation.'

Nonetheless, the command teams within the Division continue to drive change because warfighting demands it. At the same time, the Division seeks to encourage bottom-up adaptation, harnessing the immense civilian skills and experience of our reservists. To achieve a top down and bottom up innovation, we harness a command–led, staff–enabled and soldier–driven adaptation culture.

In my command circulation around the Division's units, I am often asked by soldiers 'what does adaptation mean?' At the extreme end of the spectrum, if we look at Ukraine, successful adaptation means not losing. While essential for survival in combat, there is no single adaptation culture or mechanism that can be relied upon to determine success. Having the motivation and willingness to endlessly learn, push boundaries and risk failure in training, and analyse and adapt to the environment, will increase chances of mission success. For us in the 2nd (Australian) Division, we must instil an adaptation mindset in all ranks so that we maximise all opportunities to 'learn while doing.'

About the Author

Major General Matt Burr enlisted in the Australian Army in 1986 and graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1993. He has held command and senior leadership appointments across the Army Reserve, including Commander 4th Brigade, Deputy Commander 2nd (Australian) Division, and now Commander 2nd (Australian) Division. He has deployed to Timor-Leste and Afghanistan and commanded Joint Task Forces during Operations Bushfire Assist, COVID-19 Assist and Flood Assist. Major General Burr was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for his leadership of these operations. In his civilian career, he serves with Fire Rescue Victoria and brings extensive experience in multiagency emergency management and integrated operations.

/ INTRODUCTION: NATIONAL DEFENCE AND THE LAND DOMAIN

Dr Andrew Richardson



An Australian Army soldier deployed as part of Joint Task Force 629 maintains a lookout at Fleet Base West during Exercise Austral Shield 26.

LSIS Zac Dingle, Department of Defence, at: http://images.defence.gov.au/20260713ran8656906_0272.jpg.

> ‘There is no more important task for the Government than defending Australia and protecting the security, interests and way of life of the Australian people.’[1]
>
> *2026 National Defence Strategy*

> ‘If there’s an attack on Australian soil, I assure you that there will be soldiers across the north of Australia in response.’[2]
>
> *Lieutenant General Susan Coyle AM, CSC, DSM*
> *Chief of Army*

Protecting, defending and securing the nation is the single most important responsibility for the Australian Government. Arguably, the most effective tool to achieve this responsibility is the Australian Defence Force (ADF). A 2026 survey of public attitudes to the ADF found that almost half of respondents 'identified the defence of Australia as the ADF's most important role'.[3] The question, then, is: How does the Australian Army contribute to the defence of Australia and what else might it need to do to meet that mission?

The emphasis of 2023's Defence Strategic Review (DSR) is the defence of the nation. There is rightful prominence on the development of concepts to project force offshore to hold potential adversaries at distance from Australia. The National Defence Strategy (NDS) codified the DSR's principles, with the central point—frequently lost amid newspaper columns on capability budgets and acquisition—being the entire purpose *to defend the nation*. The ADF's own Theatre Concept Aspire has as its centre Theatre Mission 1: The Defence of Australia. This is the ADF's first and most important mission. It will be achieved through a variety of ways, including fighting offshore and alongside partners to maintain regional stability, to protect a way of life or defend certain principles, and to maintain alliances. Across all of this, the single thread of logic underpinning Concept Aspire, Australian military power, and our NDS documents is the mission to protect Australia: its people, its territorial integrity, its democratic and political freedoms, its infrastructure and resources, and its connection with the world (trade and communications).

Over the past quarter-century, the most widely felt impacts of war on the Australian population have been financial. Levies have been implemented to pay for military campaigns, such as that imposed by the Howard Government to cover the costs of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) deployment in East Timor.[4] Though Australia has not faced external threat to its territorial integrity or its way of life since Japan's air and maritime strikes in 1942–43, any perceived threat to the country's territorial sovereignty becomes the most serious national challenge. In World War II, a national mobilisation of military, economic and industrial resources was required to defend the nation from Imperial Japan's war aims in this region, along with significant support from United States forces. The current fear is that regional instability may jeopardise Australia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, with a need to defend the homeland. In the 2020s and 2030s, the cost of doing so will require more than the imposition of a levy.

Since the DSR's release, pronouncements from the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister / Minister for Defence, and guiding strategic documentation have constantly reiterated that Australia faces the most challenging strategic circumstances since World War II, with the international system 'under greater strain than at any time since the Cold War'.[5] In this era of renewed uncertainty we must revisit assumptions about defending Australia in the 21st century and examine what precise forms that might take. The 2024 NDS and 2026 NDS both outlined the concept of 'National Defence'.

What is National Defence?

The 2024 NDS introduced the ambitious concept of 'National Defence', which was established as one of the key pillars of Australia's strategy of deterrence by denial. National defence, as articulated by government, is a concept that encompasses more than the ADF and goes beyond the Department of Defence. Distinct from the Defence of Australia policy— formalised in 1986's Dibb Report and the 1987 Defence White Paper to protect Australia's northern air/sea gap—the intent of national defence is to integrate all arms of national power to maximise the nation's security capacity and advance its interests.[6] In this, it shares some similarities with Nordic concepts of 'comprehensive defence' or 'total defence'—best expressed through the Finnish model—though in other ways, its immaturity as a concept in Australian security policy means that it falls well short of the practical manifestations of northern European practice.[7] For Nordic and Baltic nations particularly, the existential threat that arises from close proximity to a powerful and belligerent neighbour is an inherent motivator to preparedness. Australia, however, has enjoyed the complacency afforded by geography, and is only in the nascent stages of working through the ramifications of the national defence concept to harmonise the elements of national power. Recent crises such as the Iran war (and its subsequent impact on fuel security) have provided an impetus for government to open that preparedness conversation with the Australian public.

The perceived threat felt by Nordic countries is such that Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have introduced compulsory military service. Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Norway conduct national civil defence drills,[8] construct dual-purpose infrastructure (e.g., public facilities doubling as resistance shelters and highways doubling as makeshift runways for aircraft),[9] and have signed regional declarations on preparedness and security of supply in the transport sector covering emergencies and war.[10] Australia, meanwhile, still runs a national rail network of three different gauges that were determined in the pre-Federation era,[11] with vast internal distances still relying heavily on truck transport, which renders Australia's internal lines of communication exceedingly vulnerable. Australia's frequent weather extremes are being exacerbated by climate change and regularly render large parts of the national highway system impassable, particularly in Australia's north where Defence's post-DSR build-up is now focused. However, it is not as simple as transplanting Nordic or Baltic practices to Australia and expecting them to work. As Matthew Jones and Andrew Maher have argued, some elements are better suited to the Australian context than others.[12]

Though national defence spans a whole-of-nation approach, its direction to the military has resulted in changes to the ADF's structure, posture and investment in new capabilities, enabling preparation for deployment in the Indo-Pacific. That potential

offshore operational focus has dominated discussions of integrated investment forecasts and led to the cascade of new and expensive platforms that grab news headlines. However, the 2026 NDS is clear that the national defence pillar is a critical component of the deterrence piece in our national denial strategy.

The Land Domain in National Defence

The capacity of the ADF to physically protect Australia's landmass and territories and contribute to collective regional deterrence is a complicating factor for belligerents who would seek to destabilise Australian or regional security. For, as Lawrence Freedman has reminded us, deterrence depends on 'convincing the target that prospective costs [of an action] would outweigh prospective gains'.[13] The 2026 NDS and the accompanying *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026* (*Army Contribution*) describe how Army will contribute towards deterrence by denial. While national defence is a whole-of-government and whole-of-nation activity, only the ADF can contribute military power to protect Australia.

The emphasis on transforming into a force optimised for littoral manoeuvre should not automatically presume that Army will project force into the region. Holding an adversary at distance is the preferred option, but fighting 'in the littoral' also means fighting in and around Australia in its defence—its coastline, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, reefs, shoals, ports, beaches, archipelagos, cities and urban areas, and the region inland. As the *Army Contribution* reminds us, approximately 87 per cent of Australia's population lives near the coast, 99 per cent of national trade moves from and through the coast, and the coast is where vital submarine cables keep us connected to the world.[14] To defend all these elements is to defend Australia's way of life. All missions that protect the nation fall under the broad umbrella of national defence, but it is not necessary to term all functions and tasks as such; 'the defence of Australia', 'homeland defence' and variations are appropriate, acknowledging they are task words to describe government's national defence objective.

The *Army Contribution* (and the 2024 edition before it) identified the 2nd (Australian) Division (2 (AS) Div) as the lead formation to undertake Army's contribution to homeland defence and its support to alliance and regional warfighting relationships.[15] That assessment presupposes that the 1st Australian Division (1 (AS) Div) will be offshore, contributing to efforts to keep an adversary at distance—but as noted above, Theatre Mission 1 commits the ADF's *entire* capability to the defence of the nation. While unlikely, it is nonetheless conceivable that Army's new landing craft, main battle tanks, hardened logistics nodes, long-range fires and suite of attack, multi-role and heavy lift helicopters could be deployed far closer to home than planned. Should any echoes of a 1942-like

threat to northern Australia arise, there would be strong arguments to husband the ADF's core capabilities for homeland defence; the Australian community would likely look askance at suggestions that a distant offshore role was more pressing than the defence of continental Australia. Indeed, in the event of war, capabilities that assist in controlling Australia's northern air and sea approaches —such as 10 Brigade's long-range fires—could find themselves retained *on* Australian territory to meet political expectations and soothe national nerves.

The Land Force Contribution to a Whole-of-Government Effort

While the *Army Contribution* provides Army's mission statement, the land force's specific contribution to homeland defence will be varied and uneven in practice. It will also face numerous challenges that will be reprised from the World War II era, such as infrastructure protection, overlaid with fresh dilemmas that have emerged from the adoption of new technologies honed in the Russia–Ukraine war, such as the proliferation of cheap and ubiquitous uncrewed systems. The Army—expressed initially through 2 (AS) Div in its role as Joint Task Force 629 (JTF 629)—will be expected by government to work with state and territory authorities to meet these threats. As the World War II experience reveals, cooperation between the Commonwealth and the states is necessary for any effective defence.[16] The same substantive structure remains—that is, states own (or run) the functions —police, fire, ambulance, hospitals, public transport, electricity, water and ports—while the Commonwealth seeks to coordinate.[17] This constitutional relationship endures, though the pandemic-era National Cabinet established a new collaborative forum for closer federal–state coordination in matters of national importance. The directed tasks will be executed through JTF 629 (or a variation of it) and include assignments as varied as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, population protection, and asset and area defence[18] through to potentially controversial responsibilities such as prisoner of war security, enemy internment and detention operations.

Army is rehearsing some of these assignments now. Convened biennially, Exercise Austral Shield tests 2 (AS) Div's capacity to respond to domestic security threats. Held in Queensland and Western Australia in July 2026, it assessed the division's capacity to deploy forces to new areas of operation, working alongside personnel from across the ADF (RAAF, RAN, Cyber Command, Space Command) and representatives from state and federal agencies to secure critical infrastructure and protect national resources.[19] Such preparedness generates critical muscle memory and exercises the whole-of-government component under national defence. Rather than cause for alarm, however, the public messaging of such large domestic exercises is about reassurance. The Finnish example teaches that 'by embedding preparedness across society and integrating a whole scale of capabilities, Finland strengthens deterrence by denying

adversaries easy avenues for coercion or harassment'.[20] It is arguable whether Australia is at a point to embed national preparedness towards a broader improvement in resilience, but regular community-based military exercises certainly result in localised reassurance and contribute to resilience improvements.

Austral Shield's intention during peacetime and competition is to improve preparedness and coordination to protect the population, critical infrastructure and national resources, with 2 (AS) Div providing the military power necessary for such operations. In its purest expression, Army's reserve division is to defend the homeland and contribute to national resilience, protecting the northern base network and critical infrastructure.[21] This is an enormous responsibility, and becomes yet greater when calculating the range of individual tasks that are likely to fall upon it.

The complexity of Australia's physical terrain and population demographics are well known, but knowing does not make the operations any less challenging. Protecting the country from kinetic military threats will be complicated further by threats of foreign interference, espionage, cyber attack, sabotage, disinformation, social agitation, and internal unrest that could manifest in a number of different ways. As the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have demonstrated, kinetic attacks may come from the air (missiles, drones) and sea (maritime drones, naval assets, shadow fleets), accompanied by cyber attack to disorientate and slow or paralyse defensive efforts. Our reliance on internet-based services for everything from banking to electricity grids has made digital infrastructure as essential to national operations and wellbeing as physical infrastructure. Further, irregular migration has become weaponised by belligerent states, and could comprise one of the array of complex challenges that 2 (AS) Div supports other government agencies in responding to.[22] The ADF's longstanding contribution to Operation Resolute provides a deep well of ADF experience in interagency cooperation; however, in times of crisis or war, 2 (AS) Div's capacity to address all necessary security challenges will undoubtedly be stretched to breaking point. Australia is, after all, a large place, and the Division cannot be everywhere it needs (or will be expected) to be. Government will set expectations, but as the largest component of the ADF response to homeland defence, Army will be largely responsible for delivery via JTF 629.

An Expectation Gap?

The operating environment frames any conception of Army's work in the defence of Australia. Domestically, this will be affected by the degree of social cohesion, which varies by region, demographics and time, and the associated social licence Army will rely upon to deliver its mission.[23] Though social cohesion is not an Army responsibility, it has a very direct bearing on the permissiveness of the environment in which it will

operate. A 2026 University of New South Wales survey on societal attitudes towards Defence shows that more than two-thirds of Australians trust the ADF, reaching a high of 71 per cent in Queensland and a low of 63 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory.[24] One scholar has noted the 'degree of confidence and trust the public places in the Australian armed forces' as a consequence of 2 (AS) Div-led contributions to bushfire (2019–20) and flood (2022) assistance.[25] Though this work was not core to the defence of the country, it was nonetheless essential in maintaining societal linkages as a reminder that Army is of and for the community, and a loyal servant of the government of the day. Such work, and the importance of maintaining similar positive and effective interactions through major exercises like Talisman Sabre and Austral Shield, maintain Army's social licence to operate across the Australian community.

This social licence is not uniform across the nation. Army's work and engagement will need to differ depending on location, requiring different approaches to leverage the soft power of the Australian Army. The Tiwi Islands, for example, will require a different type of engagement than a Canberra demographic. As Australia could be in strategic competition for a long period of time, the building of that long-term social licence will be an investment in resilience and deterrence, and will continue setting the conditions for persistent access. However, the trust Army enjoys may evaporate if it is tasked to undertake unpopular or divisive missions.[26] The reception that JTF 629 elements might receive will depend on where in Australia it is directed to deploy and what it is directed to do. The deployment of military capabilities could even be resisted by local communities if their presence is perceived to make the area more liable to attack. Communication and expectation management will be key in messaging the nature of Army's role in each individual homeland defence mission.

There will be challenges for 2 (AS) Div, too. National climatic crises such as floods, bushfires and cyclones have historically seen Australian governments call on the ADF as a panacea to address the most acute assistance needs. The same trust that Army might rely upon now is partly driven by societal misconceptions of the ADF's core role, based on Defence Assistance to the Civil Community.[27] A crisis or wartime scenario, however, places enormous pressure on formations like 2 (AS) Div to meet a range of homeland defence obligations across the entirety of Australian territory, its population bases and its infrastructure. Along with a range of other judicious World War II era administrative and governing architecture for homeland defence, legislative limitations would almost certainly apply to 'reserved occupations' that are considered essential for the effective functioning of the country and the economy. A sizeable number of 2 (AS) Div's strength is drawn from a cohort that also perform critical roles in civilian employment (such as emergency services), casting doubt on their capacity to render immediate wartime service until Australia's societal/military/industrial needs are understood.

The Journal

The articles in this special themed journal address some key contentions in national defence and the land domain's role in it. They cover a range of themes and tasks to inform and support thinking about how Army might approach the role of homeland defence. Firstly, Samuel Baumgarten provides a historical article on the Newcastle Covering Force that explores the challenges of area defence and the adaptations made in the early stages of war to the prewar defensive plan. Dayton McCarthy's paper on the garrison battalions and Volunteer Defence Corps of World War II provides an example of the multilayered defence schemes that utilised the wartime workforce to its maximum; McCarthy employs Fundamental Inputs to Capability to link historical lessons to the contemporary environment. From there, the journal evolves to look at the present and future, with Stephan Frühling's conceptual article encouraging Army to develop a 'coherent image' of what major war looks like in terms of Australia's territorial defence, the roles of its two divisions, and the impact on national defence. Andrew Maher's provocative piece analyses historical precedent in supporting resistance in other countries, to ponder a modern implementation as a tenet of Australia's own strategy of deterrence by denial.

The second half of the journal has a strong focus on technology and people. Vincent Connelly's article analyses the British Army's post-1980s history with Regular Reserve forces, its renewed attempts to revitalise this cadre, and the lessons it may offer the Australian Army's use of its SERCAT 2 workforce. A discussion by John Coyne of Army's reserve force design follows, framed around the challenges of meeting the mobilisation of its people to protect Australia's northern base network. Julian McMahon then scopes the options and opportunities to strengthen sustainment and resilience to this new operational epicentre, including the testing of different models to strike the right balance for Australian capabilities and conditions. The threat that drones now present to defensive forces is the subject of Carl Rhodes' article in assessing counter-UAS options for the defence of Australia, which argues that prioritisation of effort will be best served through a layered approach and surge capacity to the most vulnerable areas. Phillip Hoglin, meanwhile, engages the impalpable yet essential concept of societal cohesion and its impact on Army's social legitimacy—a prerequisite for successful domestic operations for national defence. Finally, in a professional reflection piece, Matthew Jones and Samuel Miller articulate the value of the polymath reservist: a citizen soldier who strives for excellence across civilian and military service, and the benefits that accrue from the translation of such expertise from one world to the other.

This journal provides a basis for practitioners, academics, policymakers and educated readers to explore the breadth of tasks that may fall to Army under a whole-of-society effort to defend the nation. Owing to Army's trusted position in Australian society, it will

be the first organisation to meet the challenge, and will be relied upon to deliver the last line of defence. The responsibilities that will fall to the Australian Army under national defence will be substantial and largely underappreciated, but—fortunately—not new. The World War II experience provides important evidence of successful past practice by maximising the available workforce to undertake everything from intelligence and surveillance, air defence, reconnaissance and ground security to area denial, infrastructure protection, interagency enforcement and bolstering national resilience. We hope never to have the need to deploy troops to protect the Wivenhoe Dam or guard the Sydney Opera House, but all such tasks (and many more besides) will fall to an Army that is already preparing and already rehearsing.

About the Author

Dr Andrew Richardson is the Senior Academic Research Officer at the Australian Army Research Centre (AARC). He was awarded a PhD from the University of Tasmania in 2005, and contributed entries to The Companion to Tasmanian History (2005) during his postgraduate years. Between 2007 and 2018 Andrew was an historian at the Australian Army History Unit, Department of Defence. In 2018 he was seconded to the Official History Project at the Australian War Memorial, where he co-authored the (forthcoming) volume on Australian peacekeeping operations in East Timor 2000–2012 with Dr William Westerman. In May 2022 Andrew joined the AARC, where he has undertaken research and academic content review to support the work of Army's Future Land Warfare Branch. Outside of research in the AARC, Andrew maintains an interest in the Great War to explore the lessons it continues to hold for modern military practitioners.

ENDNOTES

1 Australian Government, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), p. 5, at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

2 Lieutenant General Susan Coyle quoted in Nicola Smith, '"My Job Is to Assume Things Get Worse", Says Our New Defence Chief', *Financial Review*, 24 September 2026, at: www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/my-job-is-to-assume-things-get-worse-says-our-new-defence-chief-20260924-p60e7u (accessed 25 September 2026).

3 Richard Dunley, Nicole Townsend, Margaret Hutchison, Tristan Moss, Ashleigh Brown and Rhys Crawley, *Public Attitudes Towards the Australian Defence Force: 2026*, War Studies Research Group, UNSW Canberra, 2026, p. 11, at: http://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-canberra/hass/2026-07-5253529-PublicAttitudeTowardsTheADFSurveyReport-Final.pdf. See also Figure 12, p. 13 which provides the breakdown of expected roles for the ADF.

4 John Howard, 'Statement by the Prime Minister on East Timor', 1 July 2000, transcript at: https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10984 (accessed 28 September 2026).

5 See, for example, Prime Minister Albanese's statement on the release of the DSR: Guardian Australia, '"Most Challenging Strategic Circumstances" Since WWII: Defence Strategic Review Revealed' (video), *YouTube*, 24 April 2023, at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRqWNzMfbr0; Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), p. 32; Australian Government, 2024 *National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), p. 5; Australian Government, 2026 *National Defence Strategy*, p. 11; Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, 'Speech to the National Press Club', 16 April 2026, transcript at: www.minister.defence.gov.au/speeches/2026-04-16/speech-national-press-club (accessed 9 September 2026); Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2026), p. 1.

6 Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1986); Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia*: 1987 (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987), at: https://nla.gov.au:443/tarkine/nla.obj-1663719677; Australian Government, 2024 National Defence Strategy, p. 6.

7 The concept of 'comprehensive defence' grew out of the Cold War era total defence principle. However, as security scholar Ieva Berzina has noted, as 'hybrid threats cover all major societal functions, the defence against them must be comprehensive ... [c]onsequently, the two basic principles governing comprehensive national defence are the whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches'. Ieva Berzina, 'From "Total" to "Comprehensive" National Defence: The Development of the Concept in Europe', *Journal on Baltic Security* 6, no. 2 (2020): 2, at: https://journalonbalticsecurity.com/journal/JOBS/article/2/text.

8 'Finland Holds Europe's Largest Civil Defence Drill Since WWII', *Helsinki Times*, 4 September 2026, at: www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/29232-finland-holds-europe-s-largest-civil-defence-drill-since-wwii.html (accessed 9 September 2026).

9 Kari Pelkonen and Veli-Petteri Valkamo, 'Finland's Comprehensive Security and Total Defence: Operationalising Resilience', *Ares & Athena* 29 (2026): 36, at: https://chacr.org.uk/2026/06/23/ares-athena-issue-29-coming-ready-or-not (accessed 18 September 2026).

10 The agreement ties Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Norway to cooperating on the 'security of supply in crisis and war'. Carl-Oskar Bohlin, 'Joint Nordic Declaration on Security of Supply', *Government Offices of Sweden*, 2 September 2026, at: www.government.se/statements/2026/09/joint-nordic-declaration-on-security-of-supply (accessed 9 September 2026).

11 In 2024, there were approximately 31,212 kilometres of operational heavy railways, of which 56 per cent were standard gauge, 35.5 per cent were narrow gauge, 8 per cent broad gauge, and less than 1 per cent dual gauge. See Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics, *Trainline 12* (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, 2025), p. iv.

12 Matthew LM Jones and Andrew Maher, *Towards Total Defence: A Literature Review and Feasibility Assessment for Australia*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 39 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2026), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/towards-total-defence.

13 Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 159.

14 *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026*, p. 10.

15 *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024*, p. 18; *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026*, p. 17.

16 Joyce Fisher, 'Appendix 1: Civil Defence Organisation', in Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942–1945*, Volume II, *Australia in the War of 1939–1945*, Series 4—Civil (1970), p. 636.

17 Ibid. On 27 September 1939, the Australian Government issued its provisional list of 172 reserved occupations: '172 "Reserved" Occupations', *The Argus*, Victoria, 28 September 1939, p. 2. With greater understanding of wartime and manpower needs, by March 1942, the government arranged three national industry priority groups. These were industries for which: 1) production was to be maintained at the highest capacity: munitions, aerodrome construction, hospitals, iron and steel manufacture, cable communication; 2) production may be allowed to fall to a limited extent: state government administration, road transport, wireless radio and newspapers, dairy farming; 3) production may be allowed to decline substantially: film production, non-newspaper printing services, motor hire services, and pickle and sauce manufacturing. Newspaper reporting claimed that men called up from reserved occupations could still undertake their war work 'if the army requires such men'. 'New Schedule of Reserved Occupations', *Barrier Miner*, New South Wales, 13 March 1942, p. 1.

18 In mid-2026, elements of 2 (AS) Div undertook Exercise Austral Shield. The division also contributed to 2025's edition of Exercise Talisman Sabre. See Captain Tim Klingner, 'Sappers Gear Up for Asset Protection', media release, 18 July 2025, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2025-07-18/sappers-gear-up-asset-protection (accessed 16 September 2026).

19 Defence Media, 'Australian Security Strengthened as Part of Exercise Austral Shield', media release, 16 June 2026, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2026-06-16/australian-security-strengthened-part-exercise-austral-shield (accessed 16 September 2026).

20 Pelkonen and Valkamo, 'Finland's Comprehensive Security and Total Defence', p. 36.

21 Captain Jon Stewart, 'A Shift of Focus to the North', media release, 13 October 2023, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2023-10-13/shift-focus-north (accessed 18 September 2026).

22 See for example Mark Galeotti, *People as Ammunition: The Structures Behind Russian and Belarusian Weaponized Migration* (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2026), at: https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/russian-belarusian-weaponized-migration (accessed 18 September 2026); Tom Searle, 'Migration: A Multifaceted Tool in the IW Toolbox', *Irregular Warfare Center*, 11 May 2026, at: https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/publications/insights/migration-a-multifaceted-tool-in-the-iw-toolbox (accessed 18 September 2026); Jaiden Ahuja, 'Weaponized Migration: When Mobility Becomes a Weapon of War', *NATO Association of Canada*, 9 August 2026, at: https://natoassociation.ca/weaponized-migration-when-mobility-becomes-a-weapon-of-war (accessed 18 September 2026).

23 Army's relationship with the Australian community and its social licence was the topic of the 2025 Chief of Army Symposium, held in Canberra. See Chief of Army Simon Stuart, 'A Brief History of National Conversations', speech, Chief of Army Symposium, 26 August 2026, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2025-08-26/chief-army-symposium-keynote-speech-brief-history-national-conversations.

24 Dunley et al., *Public Attitudes Towards the Australian Defence Force: 2026*, p. 3.

25 John Fowler, 'Disaster Relief in Australia: Competing Visions of the Military', PhD thesis, The University of Queensland, 2026, at: https://doi.org/10.14264/db546ea.

26 The ADF has historically been used by government for tasks that might be considered 'divisive'. These include industrial disputes, the most notorious being the 1949 Coalminers' Strike, when the Chifley Labor Government sent 2,500 troops to the Hunter and Central West regions of New South Wales in July and August that year as labour to break the strike. See Phillip Deery, 'Chifley, the Army and the 1949 Coal Strike', *Labour History* 68 (1995): 80–97; Elizabeth Ward, *Call Out the Troops: An Examination of the Legal Basis for Australian Defence Force Involvement in 'Non-Defence' Matters*, Australian Parliamentary Research Paper No. 8 (Parliament of Australia, 1997–98).

27 'Defence Assistance to the Civil Community Initiative', *Department of Defence*, at: www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/programs-initiatives/defence-assistance-civil-community-initiative (accessed 21 September 2026).

PREPARING TO MEET THE JAPANESE THREAT IN 1942—THE NEWCASTLE COVERING FORCE IN PEACE AND WAR

Sam Baumgarten

Introduction

The Newcastle Covering Force (NCF) was a divisional-strength military formation deployed to defend the coastal Hunter region in 1942. It was characterised by the adaptations it made in response to pre-war strategic planning. This article focuses on key changes to the structure and tactical posture of the NCF during its homeland defence role after the commencement of the Pacific War. These changes demonstrate what adaptation looks like during the initial stages of conflict.

The NCF's genesis was one part of Australia's pre-war efforts to defend Newcastle and Sydney from an amphibious invasion by Japan. The title of NCF derived from doctrine; it was to be a forward security element that protected an assembling counter-attack force. The NCF was raised in April 1941 and comprised a mix of (predominantly) part-time forces who had differing levels of readiness and capability. Just a year after it was raised, the NCF was renamed the 10th Division. While the impetus for this change was a complete reorganisation of the Australian Army's higher command, the NCF's transition to a divisional structure matched the improved levels of capability it had come to achieve. Indeed, by the time it was renamed, the NCF was conducting robust defence in depth across the Hunter Valley region.

The example of the NCF provides a valuable case study of adaptation in warfare. Improvisation was an initial characteristic of the NCF as it sought to balance a circumscribed allocation of forces with the need to achieve rapid deployment. A process of appraisal changed the NCF's mission from defence to destruction of the invasion force as the Army's leadership came to better understand the nature of the Japanese threat. While it was successful in raising a defensive capability rapidly,

logistics nevertheless remained the NCF's chief shortcoming and constituted a significant impediment to its freedom of action. These constraints ultimately led to the 10th Division being disbanded in September 1942, just nine months after it was established as a formation-level organisation.

The experience of the NCF in World War II provides valuable insights into the process of rapidly preparing a formation while conflict is already underway. The NCF was able to deploy a force while it was still under development and to achieve a level of understanding about its operational setting that was ahead of the direction available from higher headquarters. Its experiences remain relevant as the Australian Army prepares security response forces for homeland defence in accordance with the Defence Strategic Review.[1] The challenges faced by the NCF underscore the reality that standardised doctrinal structures are the preferable aim point for growth when preparing for uncertain operational situations. It also demonstrates the importance of adapting the mission allocated to subordinate elements to align with correct analysis of the threat, in line with higher intent and formation capability.

Preparations up to the Commencement of the Pacific War

The origins of the NCF can be found in pre-war strategic planning. The 1920 Senior Officers' Conference, had predicted that the Japanese military was capable of conducting an amphibious invasion of Australia with approximately 100,000 personnel in one convoy.[2] This assessment, however, was not uniformly accepted in political circles. United Australia Party Prime Minister Joseph Lyons (1932–1939) and his successive Ministers of Defence Sir George Pearce (1931–1934) and Archdale Parkhill (1934–1937) sought to predicate Army structure, mobilisation and base defence plans against the threat of smaller-scale raids of approximately 200 personnel. They assessed that any threat to Australian territory could be met within the existing limited resources of the Australian Military Forces (AMF). Instead of prioritising homeland defence, their preference was to fund the Royal Australian Navy and the development of the Singapore Naval Base which, it was hoped, would keep the Japanese threat far from Australia's shores.[3]

The AMF's senior leadership objected to this approach. Two successive Chiefs of the General Staff, Major General Sir Julius Bruche (1931–1935) and Major General Sir John Lavarack (1935–1939), made contrary preparations for more substantial anti-invasion forces.[4] Ultimately, the strategic-level concept comprised an AMF of sufficient strength to defend key locations on Australia's eastern seaboard against the stronger threat envisaged by the Senior Officers Conference. The Hunter region and Port Kembla were identified as critical due to their economic importance as ports and their proximity to Sydney. The plan to raise this defence force was titled the Plan of Concentration.

The Plan of Concentration would be better characterised as a system of mobilisation and an allocation of forces rather than an operational plan. At the time, the AMF consisted of the part-time Citizen Military Forces (CMF) for service in Australia and the small Permanent Military Force, which performed cadre responsibilities such as training. The Plan of Concentration placed considerable emphasis on training for coastal defence. It drew on lessons learned from a combined arms exercise conducted by the 1st Brigade at Port Stephens in October 1938 to repel a coastal incursion. This was, at the time, the largest exercise ever conducted in Australia.[5]



Figure 1. The Plan of Concentration

The Plan of Concentration committed two corps to defend the Sydney–Newcastle–Port Kembla region. In a concept developed by the 2nd Military District (which commanded all AMF units in New South Wales), forces would be mobilised in two discrete phases. The first phase would be triggered during a period of heightened threat before formal hostilities and was known as the Precautionary Stage.[6] It involved a modest posture of NSW-based infantry units to protect Newcastle, the 2nd Battalion and 13th Battalion, to provide security to the Newcastle fixed defences.[7] Subsequent to the Precautionary Stage, the First Line Component phase would see both corps fully raised, with one to defend Sydney and the other to defend Newcastle. The First Line Component called for 40 infantry battalions, 11 artillery brigades and 10 engineer field companies. At the time, the entire nation's AMF numbered just 45,000 members, of whom more than 75 per cent would be committed just for the defence of the Sydney–Newcastle–Port Kembla region. This constituted 'an overwhelming allocation of the Army's strength'[8] and left nothing for the defence of south-east Queensland or Victoria.

In August 1940, the 1st (Australian) Division (1 Div) was allocated to Newcastle under a modification of the First Line Component. It was to deploy when called out for full-time service, less one brigade. Its purpose was to cover the concentration of the rear division (3rd (Australian) Division).[9] This was less than the allocation envisaged under the original Plan of Concentration, which had seen both 1 Div and elements of the 1st Cavalry Division (1 Cav) earmarked for the role of covering the rear division before a subsequent counter-attack.[10] 1 Div began homeland defence training activities when it was assembled for periods of training; however, it remained a part-time formation and was not scheduled to fill the covering force role fully until the CMF was called out for full-time duty. It was assessed that a large amphibious assault would place the force under considerable pressure. Therefore, 1 Div recognised early that mounting an effective defence of the coastline around Newcastle would require 'as large and mobile reserves as possible'.[11]

Over the next 12 months, increased demands on the AMF's modest force, including provision of defensive capabilities at other locations such as south-east Queensland and Victoria, led to a redistribution of forces. While defence of the Hunter Valley region remained a priority, there was growing anxiety about the wider threat to populated areas of Australia. In April 1941, 1 Div was redeployed to Sydney, where its mission was changed to the defence of the Port Kembla–Sydney region.[12] To fill this gap, Eastern Command (which had succeeded the 2nd Military District at this time) immediately created a new formation, the Newcastle Covering Force (NCF), to protect the strategically important Hunter Valley region. Whereas previously this had been a name for the defensive task around Newcastle, the NCF was officially established on 8 April 1941 and was allocated the role that bore its name. The Precautionary Stage had commenced by this point.

The term 'covering force' can be found in the 1935 edition of *Field Service Regulations*, which was the capstone doctrine for the AMF in this period. The section titled 'The Preparation of a Campaign' characterised the function of a covering force as protecting a concentration area, ideally one covered by a natural obstacle.[13] The key observation is that the role of a covering force was considered provisional to enable the concentration of the main battle force. It was therefore fundamentally defensive in nature. *Field Service Regulations* was an operational-level document that used the 'covering force' terminology to encapsulate the function of a senior echelon. While the term is no longer used in Australian doctrine, it is still employed by the US in its *Army Techniques Publication 3-92—Corps Operations* to mean a formation-level security task.[14]

A cadre of NCF headquarters staff was soon assembled, predominantly from part-time officers.[15] The forces available were situated in the context of the extant mobilisation regime. The CMF was a predominantly part-time organisation until the start of the Pacific War. Its readiness had, if anything, diminished since the commencement of the Second World War. It had seen many of its superior leaders enlist for overseas service in the AIF and substantial amounts of its equipment allocated as well. Conscription commenced in 1940 and extended to camp periods of six months for recruits and 90 days for trained soldiers from July 1941. The camp periods usually involved the embodiment of whole CMF units, who facilitated initial and collective training.

The first Commander of the NCF was Brigadier Fritz Solling, a doctor who had served in the First World War as a Regimental Medical Officer. He was undertaking full-time duty, having previously commanded the 13th Battalion and 1st Brigade.[16] The early headquarters staff were a mix of CMF personnel on part-time and full-time duty.[17] The process of consolidating the NCF's subordinate forces proved slow and complex. By September 1941, the force comprised some permanent units such as such as anti-aircraft elements and the Newcastle Fortress Command, which operated coastal artillery and associated equipment. But it still relied heavily on units such as the 1st Field Regiment (artillery), 16th Machine Gun Regiment and 8th Garrison Battalion to allocate their periods of continuous training to the NCF.[18] This approach was at odds with initial planning for the Precautionary Stage, which had seen 2nd and 13th Battalions neatly allocated as the two manoeuvre units. Instead, the rotational allocation of part-time units was an adaptation based on necessity and represented the first in a series of such improvisations.

The NCF suffered from the exodus of experienced military officers to the AIF like much of the rest of the CMF. The AIF was raised for overseas service. With war underway, younger officers and soldiers of the CMF frequently transferred to the AIF. This meant that senior command appointments within the NCF were filled predominantly by older officers with First World War service. While such experience appeared to offer significant advantage, historian Garth Pratten has observed that the benefit of having veteran leaders was tempered by the fact that many had not actually served for over

20 years.[19]These veterans were often advanced in rank on rejoining the CMF, blocking younger officers from advancement, despite a lengthy break in service. Meanwhile, the bulk of the captains and temporary majors belonged to a cohort who had commenced military service in the 1920s era of compulsory military training.[20] The junior officers had generally served in the ranks in the late 1930s and were commissioned immediately prior to the Pacific War. The overall effect was that the AMF suffered from a paucity of leaders with contemporaneous combat experience. The loss of substantial amounts of allocated equipment to the AIF overseas, combined with the shortage of leaders, considerably diminished the CMF's capability. [21]

Actions Taken on the Commencement of the Pacific War

On 7 December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, triggering the Pacific War. In response, the NCF was mobilised to full-time duty. It moved to war stations two days later and began occupying defensive positions with forces then available.[22]

On 10 December, the NCF released Operations Order No. 1, which consolidated all of the units allocated for defence in the Hunter region. It allocated the 1st Infantry Brigade (with three infantry battalions) to defend the northern sector, above the Hunter River, including the Williamtown Air Base. The 33rd Infantry Battalion (detached from the 1st Infantry Brigade) was tasked to defend the southern sector, which incorporated the eastern Lake Macquarie area. The designation of 'sectors' constituted an improvised command and control arrangement in lieu of brigades. This command structure was imperfect, for the sectors were soon treated as brigade tasks in all but name.[23]

Mobilisation occurred throughout December. Most officers commenced duty within one week of the commencement of the Pacific War, while others (such as those posted to the 33rd Battalion) were already on duty conducting periods of continuous training.[24] Employment of NCF capabilities was dictated by a hierarchy of unit readiness. Accordingly, units with low levels of readiness and training, such as garrison battalions, were initially placed in static roles. These were generally filled with older soldiers, largely veterans of the First World War. They were specifically raised 'for the local protection of the coast defences'.[25] By now, the NCF had a strength of one infantry brigade and one independent infantry battalion. This was still almost a brigade short of the infantry allocation envisaged for the First Line Component stage that it had now entered, but it would soon grow. On 26 December, Eastern Command released Operations Instruction No. 7, which directed the NCF and 1 Div to battle positions.[26] Most units within the NCF were immediately committed to coastal defence tasks, with only battalion-strength reserves maintained in the northern and southern sectors respectively.

Whereas the 1st Brigade had responsibility for defence of the northern sector, no standing headquarters element was allocated to the southern sector.[27] In response, the NCF improvised by generating its own. Initially, Lieutenant Colonel William James, the Commanding Officer of the 16th Machine Gun Regiment was appointed to command the southern sector, most of whose unit had been task-assigned to other units. The southern sector by now comprised the 8th Garrison Battalion with the 33rd Battalion in reserve. On 3 January 1942, Brigadier John McNeill (who had held the rank of major just three years earlier)[28] was posted from his appointment as Commander 1st Infantry Brigade to command the 32nd Brigade.[29] The 32nd Brigade was formally raised on 19 January 1942 and immediately assumed command of the 8th Garrison Battalion and the 33rd Battalion in the southern sector.[30] The brigade headquarters staff was augmented by officers on temporary loan,[31] and sub-units (including companies of the 16th Machine Gun Regiment and 11 Battery of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment) were force assigned to enable the brigade to generate combined arms effects.[32]

Throughout this period, new soldiers arrived untrained to reinforce existing units or to constitute new ones. The experience of the 20th Field Regiment, an artillery unit, is an illustrative example of this process. On 9 February 1942, the regiment was added to the war establishment of the 32nd Brigade. Lieutenant Colonel Keith Flavelle was appointed to command the regiment on 21 February along with 10 other officers,[33] followed by 462 recruits to bring the regiment up to strength on 2 March. In addition to these troops, the regiment received six obsolete 18-pounder guns on 19 March[34] accompanied by more trained personnel such as Captain Arthur Bruce. He had commanded an 18-pounder section at Ocean Island (present-day Kiribati) for a brief period shortly before the island's capture in early 1942. Having returned to Australia on 8 March 1942, he posted into 20th Field Regiment on 25 March. By 31 March, he was supervising a regimental survey training school.[35]

The new and existing units of the rapidly expanding NCF required significant training to meet the requirements of their mission. On 8 February, less than three weeks after the 32nd Brigade's formation, the 33rd Battalion was directed to conduct a 'free-for-all' exercise on 12 February with one company pitted against another.[36] The fact that such training occurred implies a degree of independent capability among NCF elements, with Battalion Headquarters providing the umpires. No evaluation of this exercise was filed, but subsequent collective training activities would increase in scale for all units in the NCF. For example, on 20 March, a directive was issued that personnel who could not swim were to be given 'sufficient instruction to enable them to have some measure of confidence in the water'.[37] The requirement for water competence reflects the fact that much of the 32nd Brigade's collective training was focused on river crossing,[38] a necessary undertaking in the Lake Macquarie area, which contains substantial waterways. In a further, unusual directive, 'every effort [was to] be made to

train all personnel to ride a bicycle and where facilities exist to be taught to ride a horse'. This directive was in response to the relatively short supply of motor vehicles.

The NCF's ability to quickly raise a new subordinate headquarters and fighting units demonstrated the positive potential of improvisation. Realistic appraisal of the threat, and what the available forces could achieve, was the next step in the NCF's evolution.

Appraisal and Change

It rapidly became apparent that the NCF would not be able to defeat a Japanese invasion with its existing linear, coastal posture. Despite 1 Div previously having appreciated the requirement for 'as large and mobile a reserve as possible', the higher command demonstrated an ongoing bias towards coastal defence achieved through static, coastal deployment and defensive works. Mobile defensive tactics were neither considered nor within the NCF's capability during its early development.

Prior to and during December 1941, Eastern Command regarded landing points as the location where the battle would be decided. In an appreciation conducted on 19 September 1941, Eastern Command attributed to the enemy the advantage of surprise, but emphasised the importance of preventing landing or consolidation.[39] Underscoring its reliance on repelling the enemy at the beaches, on 9 December 1941, HQ Eastern Command issued Operation Instruction No 1—Occupation of War Stations. It stated:

> Owing to the absence of Garrison B[attalio]ns, until mobilised, Covering Force Commanders will make temporary adjustments of their plans for distribution of their forces to ensure that landing places giving access to forts are guarded.[40]

In a memorandum to the Minister of Defence, Francis Forde, on 4 February 1942, Lieutenant General Iven Mackay, Commander in Chief Home Forces, expressed concern about meeting the enemy's first thrusts.[41]

Higher-level doctrine provided minimal guidance on the conduct of mobile defence. The *Field Service Regulations* provided only a short description of defensive operations. *Volume 2—Operations General* devoted just 16 of 220 pages to defensive tactics, with an additional two pages to defence in positional warfare. Here, no distinction was made between tactical methods such as area defence, delay or mobile defence.[42] The pamphlet *Infantry Training*, an edition of tactical doctrine that was directed at the battalion level, briefly mentioned mobile operations but described defensive operations as occurring in well-developed positions with tight control.[43] AMF doctrine at the time reflected the prevailing British doctrine of the inter-war period. As observed by Tim Moreman in his study of imperial military doctrine, '[t]he British Army's defensive doctrine emphasised

painstaking preparation and tight control over the battlefield'.[44] The practical effect is that mobile defence may have been considered innovative or anachronistic in contrast.[45] Tactical-level doctrine could have inspired early NCF planners and leadership to consider a more flexible approach. However, they remained staunchly focused on linear, static, coastal defensive *strategies*. Change was underway, and as early as 6 January 1942, NCF Operations Order No. 3 stated: 'The guiding principle will be MINIMUM of t(roo)ps disposed and MAXIMUM held in reserve'.[46]

The Transition to Defence in Depth

Ultimately, it was from within the NCF that commanders instigated more flexible methods of fighting. This process commenced after a change of leadership at the highest level of the NCF. On 3 January 1942, Major General John Murray replaced Solling as Commander, NCF, with Solling returning to command the 1st Brigade. While it is broadly accepted that Murray was instrumental in driving the NCF towards a defence-in-depth posture, his exact role is unclear. There are few records of his tenure within the NCF and (later) the 10th (Australian) Division, and his memoirs focus on his experiences in the Tobruk campaign.[47] So we cannot be certain whether he had a close role in planning and execution, or whether he delegated these functions. What *is* known is that Murray shared the same characteristics as many of his formation's officers, namely that he was older and of questionable physical fitness. He had been removed from his command of the 20th Brigade after the Tobruk campaign by (then) Lieutenant General Thomas Blamey, Commander 2nd AIF. David Horner notes that, his being overweight, questions were asked about Murray's suitability for the role.[48] Despite any physical limitations, Murray had been awarded a bar to his Distinguished Service Order for his command in the tough conditions of the Tobruk campaign and there seems to have been no question about his professional competence.[49]

In a succinct military appreciation dated 30 March 1942, Murray acknowledged the utter indefensibility of his area of operations by linear means. Rather than contemplate a reduction of security tasks or the total abandonment of the coast,[50] he took a different approach. Specifically, he proposed the generation of the largest possible mobile reserve, drawing on combined arms elements from his most effective CMF battalions. Explaining the purpose of this course of action, he stated:

> A. It will enable me to strike a heavy blow at the enemy whether he chooses to attack from the coast or on my perimeter.
>
> B. It will give me the best means with the forces at my disposal, of protecting vital communications in my area, particularly the WILLIAMTOWN AERODROME.[51]

The use of mobile reserves, delegated to subordinate commanders, was consistent with Murray's experiences at Tobruk.[52] There were differences between the New South Wales coastline and the North African desert; Tobruk utilised a more robust perimeter of fixed-concrete defensive works and was manned by a greater density of personnel. However the importance of reserves was a key similarity of the two defensive plans. Up to this point, the NCF maintained no centralised reserve. Instead, the task was nominally being performed by 2 Div as the Eastern Command reserve in support of 1 Div (the Sydney–Port Kembla covering force), 1st Motorised Division (Coffs Harbour) and the NCF. The issue for Murray was that 2 Div was located at Greta and the Central West meaning that it could not be easily transported and committed to any of his subordinate formations' locations.[53] Accordingly, Murray made no mention of 2 Div as a reserve in his appreciation. It can be inferred from this omission that he anticipated fighting alone.

Murray now departed from the existing reliance on tightly controlled static defence. He adopted the term 'watching posts' to describe observation effects along the coastline. This function would be undertaken by the 8th Garrison Battalion in the southern sector. Meanwhile, the 4th and 33rd Battalions were to be 'held in reserve as a mobile striking force' in the 32nd Brigade area of operations.[54] Importantly, Murray's plan recognised that a defence-in-depth posture would result in the initial capitulation of Australian territory, and that mobile defence placed a considerable burden on newly formed forces. Acknowledging this, he (in effect) delegated to well-resourced subordinate elements the task of repelling any Japanese attack, granting them freedom of action to manoeuvre offensively or defensively as the situation required.

A prominent change in this period was the reorganisation of the AMF. On 9 April 1942, Eastern Command became II Corps under the First Army commanded by Lieutenant General Sir John Lavarack. It was based in Toowoomba.[55] Concurrently, the NCF was formally retitled the 10th (Australian) Division (10 Div), which is the title that will be used for the remainder of this article.[56]

The reorganisation of the AMF was accompanied by progressively more coherent direction to 10 Div from higher headquarters concerning its mission to defeat the Japanese. The formation-level concept that took shape appears to have been an instance of policy catching up with Murray's appreciation of 30 March. It is difficult to determine how 10 Div had already responded to the events unfolding in Australia's near region. However, evidence suggests that it had begun to re-posture to achieve a thinly held coastal zone, supported by reserves, before it was formally directed to do so. On 30 May 1942, 10 Div's Operational Instruction No. 2 was issued. It directed

a reduction in troop presence on the coastline to an observation strength and the generation of the largest possible reserve at each level of command. An extract from the relevant policy issued by Headquarters First Army was appended to the instruction to provide operational-level context.[57] In parallel, training publications were released which publicised new tactical methods. For example, the *Army Training Memorandum* was a monthly bulletin-style publication which promulgated lessons from Australian and Allied forces, initially in the Middle East and then against the Japanese. The war diaries of 10 Div reflect that key editions were disseminated widely.[58] Drawing on lessons from the 8th Division's failed efforts to defend Singapore, the May edition observed:

> The object of the Australian army must be to destroy any enemy force that lands on our shores. This can only be done if troops are disposed so that they can attack the enemy at every opportunity.[59]

Following promulgation of Operational Instruction No. 2, 10 Div effected a significant redistribution of forces. The garrison battalions were progressively allocated the lion's share of fixed defensive roles along the coast, with generally younger, better-trained CMF units consolidated to provide mobile, combined-arms reserves. The defence-in-depth posture that emerged drew on the AIF's earlier combined arms experience during World War I. As Stephen Biddle observes in his description of this as the 'modern system', this approach imparted independence to small units to manoeuvre over a wider area and force the enemy to 'slow down in order to survive, and to extend this period of furtive movement into depth, affording defenders time to respond'.[60]

The redistribution of 32nd Brigade assets clearly illustrates this change in defensive posture. Earlier, on 14 March, a substantial portion of the force was deployed in platoon and company strength astride the coast in what was termed Zone 3—the eastern side of Lake Macquarie.[61] Zones 1 and 2 were further south in the Tuggerah–Broken Bay area and were collectively screened by a motorised company and machine gun platoon. In total, 750 32nd Brigade troops were allocated to Zone 3, operating a variety of crew-served and individual weapons. The balance of 8th Garrison Battalion, 33rd Battalion and 4th Battalion were concentrated at centralised locations approximately 5 kilometres inland and on the approaches to Newcastle, namely Adamstown, Gateshead and Blackall Park.[62] By the time Operations Order No. 3 was released on 17 July, Zone 3 had been expanded to include locations in Newcastle, but the forces allocated to directly defend the beaches had been reduced to three companies (approximately 300 soldiers), all of whom were from the 8th Garrison Battalion. Meanwhile, Zones 1 and 2 further south now consisted of coast reporting posts only. As the only CMF battalion allocated to 32nd Brigade in July, 33rd Battalion was deployed in reserve and centrally placed relative to the Lake Macquarie and Newcastle area at Mount Hutton.[63]

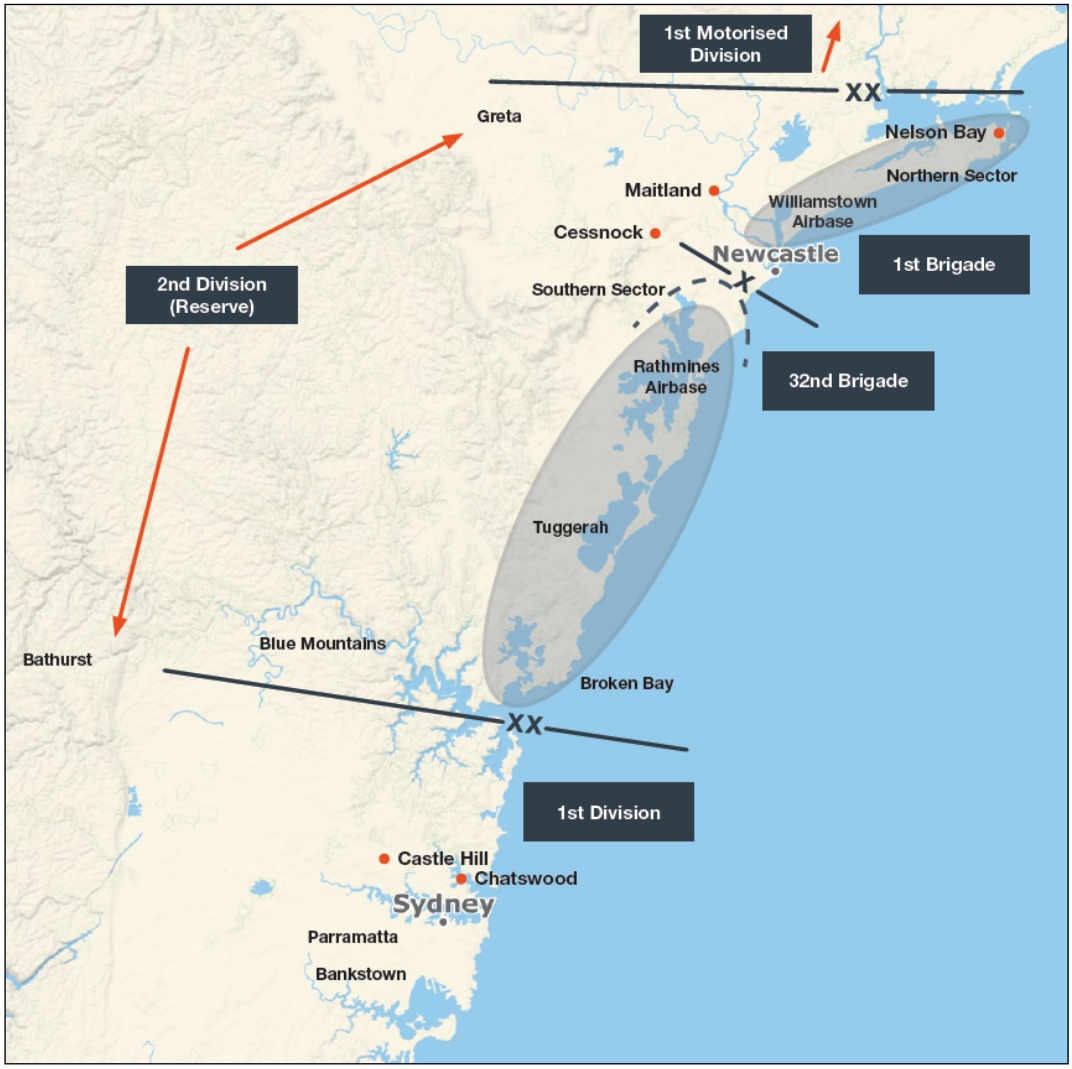


Figure 2. 10 Div Deployment areas

Training

Over just a few short months, 10 Div had reappraised the Japanese threat and the measures needed to defeat a Japanese intrusion, whether a raid or an invasion. While it remained a brigade short of a full division, it had evolved from an improvised covering force to a formation with a standardised structure able to execute a greater range of tactical tasks. The challenge now was to generate a collective training program that accounted for these changes.

While training had been occurring from the early stage of the NCF's establishment, by May 1942 it appears to have become a priority. Training activities undertaken at unit level varied from range shooting to unit-level advances-to-contact and attacks. The latter activities involved the relief in place of entire battalions.[64] The high tempo of training activities paralleled the efforts of other brigades employed on defensive tasks during the same period, including 7th Brigade, which would shortly depart for operations in New Guinea.[65] Further supporting 10 Div's training efforts, lectures were delivered to members of the division from officers who had avoided capture during the Malayan campaign.[66]

The effectiveness of 10 Div's training effort is difficult to gauge. In March 1942, Lieutenant Arthur Duprez (awarded a Military Cross in World War I) filed a highly critical observation report concerning the coordination and fieldcraft in a training exercise undertaken by three companies of 33rd Battalion.[67] However, such criticism is not reflected in other reports included in the relevant war diaries of 32nd Brigade and 33rd Battalion.[68] Regardless, the assessed standard of 10 Div never rose above the level of effective units operating independently, not collectively. In an appraisal of readiness standards issued on 19 July 1942, both brigades of 10 Division were assessed at Standard F: 'Unit training is not yet complete'.[69] The efforts to bring 10 Div to a higher standard of collective readiness achieved only modest results in the time allocated. (Having said this, it is notable that 7th Brigade only achieved Standard D: 'Individual brigades are efficient in a static role' prior to its departure for New Guinea but nevertheless performed reasonably well at Milne Bay.[70]) Evidently, six months was simply insufficient time to raise the military standard of so many raw recruits into an independent infantry division. However, it is fair to say that 10 Div's training efforts were similar to those undertaken by many other formations at the time and, despite their limitations, raised skills considerably in a short amount of time.

Equipment

The allocation of equipment to 10 Div compared favourably with allocations to other AMF elements and to the CMF formations that were deployed to the Pacific. This situation evidently reflected the high priority placed on the defensive role around the Newcastle–Sydney–Port Kembla region under the Plan of Concentration.

The CMF units of 10 Div operated on a war establishment. In this regard, the division benefited from its proximity to the sources of production, its access to training, and the high priority that Army placed on its defensive task. For example, significant universal carrier production commenced in Australia from February 1941 and approximately 1,000 units had been produced by October.[71] The 20 Div's 33rd Battalion was one of a number of CMF infantry units that held an allocation of these relatively scarce vehicles. Bren guns were available throughout the NCF's existence. By contrast, the 39th Battalion lacked Bren guns until July 1942, which was after it had already commenced combat

operations in the Kokoda campaign.[72] 10 Div's artillery regiments were allocated 25-pounder guns relatively quickly: the 1st Field Regiment was equipped with 25-pounder guns by at least January 1942.[73] Subsequently, the 20th Field Regiment received two dozen 25-pounder guns between 5 and 8 June.[74] While this equipment allocation was impressive, in reality much of it was probably misallocated from units that had a greater need of it. In hindsight, it may have been more usefully employed in New Guinea as it was evident that shortages of modern weapons were felt offshore.

Logistics Support

From its earliest days, 10 Div faced significant shortfalls in logistical support. Pre-war planning had envisaged that the defensive role would reduce the burden of supply on the division because local resources would be available.[75] The limited allocation of motor transport and mechanisation prior to the war meant that numbered light aid detachments (which conducted first-line maintenance) only existed at the base district level within each state, at a ratio of about one per division.[76] Gradually, more logistic elements were apportioned to 10 Div at the divisional and brigade levels.[77] The 1st Brigade brought a number of supporting units into 10 Div, including the 1st Field Company (Engineers) and the 1st Field Ambulance.[78] Then, on 1 March 1942, a supply column and a petrol and ammunition company was established as one unit.[79] In addition, light aid detachments were formed at unit level in 1942 to serve the growing number of vehicles and equipment.

In addition to the pre-existing capabilities, 10 Div required significant new logistic enablers to operate effectively. But in the rush to generate combat power these were the last to be raised. They included a divisional ordnance workshop, an ordnance field park, the 311th Light Aid Detachment, the 11th Laundry and Decontamination Unit and a field hygiene section as at 1 March.[80] To operate effectively these units required specialised personnel and equipment that had not existed in the pre-war AMF. A growing gap developed between arms units and support.

Many 10 Div personnel were re-tasked to better match their skills to logistic requirements. The NCF's Routine Orders—Part 1, dated 17 February 1942, stipulated: 'The attention of all Commanding Officers is directed to the urgent need of employing all manpower in such a manner as to provide the maximum results'.[81] Thus, where personnel were regarded as unsuited to field service on the basis of age or other considerations, the orders directed that they 'are to be transferred to Maintenance units etc, and replaced by younger men'.[82] Examples included Lieutenant Hedley Apthorpe, an officer of the 33rd Battalion who was 35 years old and listed his occupation as motor mechanic. He was detached to 10 Div and later in the war posted to instruct on a driver-mechanic course.[83] Commenting on the situation, one source notes:

> While the term 'purge' conjures up impressions of a public defenestration, many (if not most) were quietly pushed aside and offered less physically demanding appointments in keeping with the army's 'gentlemanly' ethos.[84]

While 10 Div's logistics capabilities ultimately improved, they were never properly resolved. These shortcomings, and the division's reliance on garrison support, considerably reduced its tactical flexibility. For example, the 32nd Brigade Operations Order No. 3 of 17 July 1942 allocated supplies of food and ammunition by zones, assuming the presence of either battalion, company or platoon sized headquarters. While some smaller 10 Div elements were allocated seven days food and water, most battalion and company concentrations were allocated only two. Rifle ammunition holdings were generally about 120 rounds per weapon.[85] This allocation probably reflected an expectation that 10 Div would undertake only a short, independent operational role. Certainly, ammunition holdings were insufficient for sustained area defence. This is an example of inadequate logistic support dictating tactics.[86]

Ultimately, 10 Div had grown quickly and without the fundamental inputs to capability that would have enabled it to operate as a balanced force. The failure to generate requisite logistic components, despite the requirement for the force to fight independently, was a significant limitation. There was insufficient material or personnel to address the support shortfalls. By September 1942, Prime Minister Curtin characterised the AMF's level of mobilisation as unsustainable. It was at this point that the division was disbanded and its personnel transferred to other organisations.

The experience of the officers in the 33rd Battalion illustrates the variety of units to which personnel were redeployed. In September 1942,[87] the battalion was disbanded and merged into the 13th Battalion of 1st Brigade. At this time, several of the 33rd Battalion's 40 officers were transferred to infantry or artillery units in the AIF, where they saw active service in the Pacific. At least eight other officers[88] (and many soldiers) were transferred to anti-aircraft regiments, primarily the 103rd Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Up to six officers subsequently served in the machine gun (MG) battalions (formed in late 1942 for defensive roles) and deployed to either Thursday Island (5 MG Battalion)[89] or New Guinea (6 MG Battalion).[90] At least three officers were posted to higher headquarters as staff officers.[91] Only two subsequently saw active service in infantry battalions of the AIF. One of these, Lieutenant Charlie Brennan, became the only one of the battalion's officers who was killed, while serving with the 2/31 Battalion at Tarakan on 3 July 1945.[92] It is difficult to assess whether these reallocations constituted the best use of the battalion's personnel, but it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that they ultimately made a meaningful contribution to Australia's war effort.

The NCF's Phases of Change During the Response to Conflict

The experiences of 10 Div provide valuable insights into how land forces transition amid the uncertainty of pending and actual hostilities. The simultaneous demand for AMF resources imposed an imperfect force on the NCF, and on 10 Div after its establishment following Japan's entry into the war. This situation dictated an imperative to adapt which manifested in two basic forms.

Rapid Force Generation. When 1 Div ceased its task to defend the Hunter Valley region, the resultant capability gap needed to be filled quickly. So new units and formations were raised in a process that was rushed and imperfect. While priority was given to defence of the Port of Newcastle and the industry in Zone 1 (nearest to Newcastle), in the zones further south, which were considered of lower priority, there was an even smaller allocation of defending forces. This allocation was insufficient for the defensive task they had been assigned, and set the scene for a reappraisal of their mission.

Appraisal of the Threat. Once 10 Div had achieved a minimum level of capability, its leaders reflected on what was the best method of defeating the Japanese threat to Australian soil. In the face of the pervading sense of Japanese superiority that existed in early 1942,[93] 10 Div's response was to adopt a defence-in-depth posture, accompanied by more robust official language concerning the division's resolve. This example of appraisal is probably the principal lesson for the contemporary Army as it contemplates homeland defence. It is a truism that plans almost never survive first contact and must change. The case of 10 Div provides an example of the uncertain conditions under which that change might need be effected.

The issues of force generation and appraisal will be critical for the Australian Army if it is to effectively respond to a threat to Australian territorial integrity. The initial imperative will be to quickly assemble forces capable of securing key locations in a manner that is as consistent as possible with the pre-war plans. As greater clarity emerges regarding the mission, a higher degree of freedom and flexibility can emerge from the subsequent appraisal of the threat and the emerging operational conditions. This may be accompanied by acceptance of strategic risk, which in 1942 manifested as a willingness to cede territory to provide a greater chance of defeating any threat. Such an appraisal will need to be accompanied by an assessment of training needs, and the generation of training serials that encapsulate new lessons. In the case of 10 Div, its planning took place against the backdrop of an existential threat to Australian territory. In the future, similar confronting circumstances may provide the context within which operational and strategic planners identify, communicate and manage solutions.

The Importance of Standardised Structures

Until 10 Div was raised, the NCF operated as a bespoke entity, tasked to perform the ad hoc tactical role of a covering force in response to an identified threat. In a future scenario, the shortage of standardised forces may again tempt decision-makers to build bespoke structures to meet specific needs. Indeed, such a situation has already arisen in recent years. An obvious example is the security response task units that were raised by the 2nd (Australian) Division in response to a need for defensive effects that was identified in the Defence Strategic Review.[94] In all but name, these units constitute motorised infantry battlegroups, and they can reasonably be anticipated to function as such.

While the generation of such ad hoc capabilities can help assuage an immediate threat, 10 Div's experience demonstrates the risk that such formations can become unsustainable. Operational formations require their appropriate allocation of support elements, especially logistics, if they are to be expected to act relatively independently. While 10 Div attempted to evolve as closely as possible into a standardised infantry division, ultimately it was unable to do so. The reality is that standardised force structures better permit formations to conduct a wide range of doctrinal tasks in a sustainable manner.

Conclusion

In large part, the NCF (and then 10 Div) needed to translate strategic direction into tactical action. The process of transforming plans issued by higher headquarters into defensive capability was made substantially harder than initially envisaged. This was due to the disruption caused by the reallocation of 1 Div and the requirement for concurrent defensive apportionment. Further, there was insufficient doctrinal guidance to support the tactical effort. This left 10 Div to raise and train much of the force itself, and to conduct its own appraisal of the operational situation and the necessary response.

The life cycle of the NCF and 10 Div demonstrates how change can be achieved by military formations against the competing priorities of operational deployment and force generation. It also shows that the generation of standardised unit structures is ultimately preferable to the establishment of bespoke forces to achieve specific operational tasks. Not least among the reasons for this is the inefficiencies that arise when disparate personnel and organisations are rapidly assembled outside of these structures.

Viewed through the lens of Australia's contemporary operating environment, the task of homeland defence does not need to be tied to pre-war planning. The experience of the NCF and 10 Div demonstrates that strategic and threat challenges will create a dynamic environment that demands evolutions in the plan. When considering how best to achieve the force structure changes that may be needed to secure Australia's territorial integrity against potential threats, it may be worth remembering that subordinate formations are often best placed to recommend change.

About the Author

LTCOL Sam Baumgarten graduated from the Australian Defence Force Academy in 2005 and the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 2006 and served as a Royal Australian Artillery officer in 16 Air Defence Regiment and 1 Recruit Training Battalion. He deployed on Operation Catalyst and Operation Slipper. He transferred to the Army Reserve in 2013 and served as a Royal Australian Engineer officer before transferring to Royal Australian Infantry in 2020. He is a graduate of the Canadian Forces College and in his civilian career has worked as a solicitor.

Acknowledgments

The author is extremely grateful to Colonel Dayton McCarthy, CSC and the two anonymous reviewers who provided definitive guidance on this paper's direction.

ENDNOTES

1 Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023) p. 58.

2 Conference of Senior Military Officers of the Australian Military Force, *Report on the Military Defence of Australia* (Albert J. Mullet, Government Printer: Melbourne, 1920), AWM 1/20/7, 6.

3 David Horner, *Strategy and Command: Issues in Australia's Twentieth-Century Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 90.

4 Brett Lodge, *Lavarack: Rival General* (St Leonards: Allan and Unwin, 1998), pp. 40–51.

5 David Horner, 'Serving Vital Interests: Australia's Strategic Planning in Peace and War', in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *Proceedings of the Australian Army History Conference Held at the Australian War Memorial, 30 September 1996* (Canberra: UNSW, 1996), p. 7.

6 NAA: MP729/6, 16/401/125—Newcastle Fortress, Letter from Commandant 2nd Military District to Secretary of the Military Board—2nd District Base Defence Scheme—Newcastle Fortress, dated 28 April 1939.

7 Dayton McCarthy, 'The First Half Measures: The Australian Militia and the Fitful Path to Mobilisation, 1939–1941', *Australian Army Journal* 20(3) (2024): 168; AWM, 'Eastern Command "G" Branch Registry Files, at: https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2130446.

8 Albert Palazzo, 'Failure to Obey, The Australian Army and the First Line Component Deception', *Australian Army Journal*, Vol 1(1) (2003), 90.

9 NAA: MP729/6, 16/401/125, Newcastle Fortress, Letter from Commandant 2nd Military District to Secretary of the Military Board—Letter from Director of Military Operations and Intelligence to Commandant 2nd Military District—2nd District Base Defence Scheme—Newcastle Fortress; AWM54/243/7/1, Appreciation and Operational Plan Strategic Role 1 Div, dated October 1940.

10 NAA: B4717 DP3, Bundey, E.W., GSO1 of Headquarters 1st Division, correspondence from July–October 1940 was sent from Headquarters 1st Division at Raymond Terrace.

11 2nd District Base Defence Scheme—Newcastle Fortress; AWM54/243/7/1, Appreciation and Operational Plan Strategic Role 1 Div, dated October 1940, 2 para. 2.(b)(2).

12 Graham McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide: Volume 2—Headquarters, Infantry, Cavalry, Armoured and Intelligence Units* (Newport: Big Sky Publishing, 2018), 2.030.

13 War Office, *Field Service Regulations—Volume III* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1935), p. 12.

14 Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Army Techniques Publication 3-92—Corps Operations* (Washington: 2025), para. 5-24.

15 McCarthy, 'The First Half Measures', pp. 171–176.

16 NAA: B884, N14911, Solling, F.P.M., p. 42 of folio.

17 A review of personnel files of staff subsequently posted to the Headquarters of the Newcastle Covering Force at 7 February 1942 demonstrates this mix. Approximately half of those listed on that date had served on a full-time basis with the NCF prior to the commencement of hostilities with Japan.

18 NAA: A1196, 12/501/93 Eastern Command Planning Committee, 'Combined Planning Committee Eastern Command—Appreciation No 1—Appendix B: Eastern Command Defence Plan, para. 5(b), dated 19 September 1941, p. 55 of folio.

19 Garth Pratten, *Australian Battalion Commanders in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 167, 172.

20 These conclusions are primarily based on the records of officers posted to the 33rd Battalion on 30 May 1942—AWM/8/3/72, 33rd Battalion War Diary—'Nominal Roll of Officers on Strength', dated 30 May 1942, p. 145 of folio.

21 McCarthy, 'The First Half Measures', pp. 171–176.

22 AWM52 1/7/4, Eastern Command War Diary December 1941 – April 1942, 'E.C. Operation Instruction No. 1 Occupation of War Stations', dated 8 December 1941, p. 5 of folio.

23 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, NCF OO No 1, dated 10 December 1941, p. 4, p. 9 of folio.

24 McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*, 2.231–2.232.

25 Dudley McCarthy, *Volume V—South-West Pacific Area—First Year: Kokoda to Wau*, Australia in the War of 1939–1945 Series 1—Army (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1959), p. 3.

26 AWM52 1/7/4, Eastern Command War Diary December 1941 – April 1942, 'Eastern Command OPERATION INSTRUCTION NO. 7', dated 30 December 1941, p. 41 of folio.

27 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, NCF OO No 2, dated 25 December 1941, pp. 18–21 of folio.

28 The Military Board, *The Army List of the Australian Military Forces. Part 1, Active List. 1st February 1939* (Melbourne: H.J. Green, 1939), p. 386.

29 NAA B883, NX111868, McNeill, John George Donald.

30 AWM52 8/2/32/1, 32nd Brigade War Diary Jan–Feb 1942, 'HQ NCF Message 22', dated 19 January 1942, pp. 34–36 of folio—authority having been received on 13 January 1942.

31 AWM52 8/2/32/1, HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary January–February 1942, p. 89 of folio—13 as at 17 January 1942.

32 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, Appendix C of NCF OO No 3, dated 6 January 1942, p. 33 of folio.

33 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary—February 1942, dated 9 February 1942, p. 3 (64).

34 AWM52 4/2/34/1, 20th Field Regiment War Diary—February–April 1942 pp. 6–7.

35 NAA: B883, NX12575, Bruce A.L.

36 AWM 8/2/32/1, Annexure 12A to HQ 32 Brigade War Diary—Operations Order No 1 (For Exercise), dated 8 February 1942, p. 36 of folio.

37 AWM 8/2, Appendix No. 8 to HQ Newcastle Covering Force War Diary March 1942—Training, dated 20 March 1942, p. 95 of folio.

38 AWM/8/3/72, 33rd Battalion War Diary—Various newspaper clippings, pp. 81–84 of folio.

39 NAA: A1196, 12/501/93 Eastern Command Planning Committee, 'Combined Planning Committee Eastern Command—Appreciation No 1, dated 19 September 1941, 5, p. 40 of folio.

40 AWM52 1/7/4, Eastern Command War Diary December 1941 – April 1942, 'E.C. Operation Instruction No. 1 Occupation of War Stations', para. 2, dated 9 December 1941, p. 5 of folio.

41 Mackay to Forde Memorandum, 'Defence of Australia', dated 4 February 1942, taken from John Robertson and John McCarthy, *Australian War Strategy 1939–1945: A Documentary History* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), p. 262.

42 *Field Service Regulations—Volume 2* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1935), Chapter VII, pp. 164–165.

43 Army Council, *Infantry Training (Infantry and War)* (London: The Snelling Printing Works, 1937), Chapter 12, pp. 144–166.

44 Tim Moreman, *The Jungle, Japanese and the British Commonwealth Armies*,(London: Routledge, 2013), p. 90.

45 Richard Dannatt and Robert Lyman, *Victory to Defeat: The British Army 1918–1940* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2024), p. 161.

46 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, Operations Order No. 3—para. 6.a., dated 6 January 1942, p. 24 of folio.

47 A.J. Hill, 'John Joseph Murray (1892–1951)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* at: https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/murray-john-joseph-11212.

48 David Horner, *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941–43* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), p. 52.

49 NAA: B883, NX365—Murray John Joseph, p. 14 of folio.

50 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, Appreciation of the Situation, dated 30 March 1942, p. 4, p. 170 of folio.

51 Ibid., p. 10, p. 182 of folio.

52 Robert Lyman, *The Longest Siege: Tobruk* (London: MacMillan, 2009), p. 133.

53 AWM52 1/5/3/4, June–July 1942, 2nd Division War Diary, 2nd Australian Division Operational Instruction No. 4, dated 12 June 1942, p. 2, p. 44 of folio; *Horner, Crisis of Command*, pp. 85–86.

54 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, Appreciation of the Situation, dated 30 March 1942, p. 8, p. 178 of folio.

55 *Horner, Crisis of Command,* pp. 56–66.

56 McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*, 2.050.

57 AWM52 1/5/23/1, 10th Australian Div GS War Diary, Operational Instruction No. 2, dated 30 May 1942, pp. 10–13 of folio.

58 On 8 July 1942, '33 Bn instructed arrange each offr and sec comd to have copy article "section organisation" A.T.M. No 11 p. 41'. See WM52 8/2/32/4, HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary June–July 1942, p. 58 of folio.

59 Australian Military Forces, *Army Training Memorandum (War) (Australia) No 10* (Melbourne: F.J. Hilton and Co, 1942), p. 11.

60 Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 60.

61 AWM52 8/2/32/2, HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary March – April 1942, Operations Order No 2, Appendix A, dated 14 March 1942, pp. 27–28 of folio.

62 Ibid.

63 AWM52 8/2/32/4, HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary June–July 1942, Operations Order No 3, dated 17 July 1942, pp. 88–92 of folio.

64 AWM 8/2/32/2, Annexure 21 to HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary March 1942—Exercise, dated 28 March 1942, p. 53 of folio.

65 AWM 8/2/7, 7th Infantry Brigade War Diary February 1942—Training Instruction Part III No 2, pp. 79–84 of folio.

66 AWM52 8/2/32/3, HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary April–May 1942, p. 3, dated 16 April 1942, p. 4 of folio.

67 AWM 8/2/32/2, 32nd Brigade War Diary April–March 1942—'Report on Field Operations Carried Out on 12 Mar 42 in Conjunction with 33rd Battalion', dated 14 March 1942, p. 33 of folio.

68 NAA: B884, N106257, Duprez Arthur Alexander, p. 20 of folio.

69 Horner, *Crisis of Command,* pp. 302–304. The standards were:

- A Efficient and experienced for mobile offensive operations.
- B Efficient as a formation for mobile offensive operations but not experienced.
- C Individual brigades are efficient for mobile offensive operations, but higher training has not been completed.
- D Individual brigades are efficient in a static role. Additional brigade and higher training is required.
- E Units have completed training. A considerable amount of brigade and higher training is required.
- F Unit training is not yet complete.

70 Horner, *Crisis of Command*, p. 87.

71 'Australia's Bren Gun Carrier Is Superior to Original', *Nambour and North Coast Advertiser*, 9 January 1942, p. 1.

72 Victor Austin, *To Kokoda and Beyond* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), pp. 66, 100. They were flown directly to forward elements after the commencement of the Kokoda Campaign.

73 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, para. 12 of NCF OO No 3, dated 6 January 1942, p. 26 of folio.

74 AWM52 4/2/34/1, 20th Field Regiment War Diary—June 1942, Appendix III—'Report by QM for the Month of June 1942', p. 1.

75 NAA: A1196, 12/501/93 Eastern Command Planning Committee, 'Combined Planning Committee Eastern Command—Appreciation No 1', dated 19 September 1941, 6, para. 16.

76 Ibid, 33–45.

77 See The Military Board, *The Army List of the Australian Military Forces. Part 1, Active List. 1st February 1939*, p. 226.

78 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, NCF OO No 1, dated 10 December 41, p. 8 of folio.

79 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, Appendix A to NCF OO No 4, dated 1 March 1942, p. 54 of folio.

80 Ibid.

81 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, Routine Orders Pt 1, dated 17 February 1942, para. 5, 'Allotment of Tradesmen Classes II and III'.

82 AWM52 8/1/4/1, Newcastle Covering Force War Diary, NCF Routine Orders, No 14/42, dated 26 March 1942, p. 237 of folio.

83 NAA: B883, NX165963, Apthorpe, H.A.; NAA: B883, NX108723, Burgess, A.A.

84 James Morrison, 'The Australian Militia at War 1939–1945', unpublished PhD thesis (UNSW at ADFA, 2022), p. 54.

85 AWM52 8/2/32/2, HQ 32nd Brigade War Diary, March 1942.

86 Ibid.

87 McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*. 2.232.

88 NAA: B883, NX108743, Wilson J.A.; NAA: B883, NX175242, Foreman A.I; NAA: B883, NX108728, Doust K.E.; NAA: B883, NX108744, Wood R.L.; NAA: B883, NX108741 Reeves, G.G.; 'World War Two Service—Veteran Details—Moore, Donald Harold', *Department of Veterans' Affairs*, at: https://nominal-rolls.dva.gov.au/veteran?id=665860&c=WW2#R, 240124 (N19232, NX108737); NAA: B883, NX108727, Davis C.A.; NAA: B883, NX108727, Nicholson, G.A.; NAA: B883, NX108742, Taylor, H.W.H.; NAA: B883, NX108726, Campbell, C.A.H.

89 NAA: B883, NX108722, Black K.L.

90 NAA: B883, NX108729, Egan, C.B.; NAA: B883, NX108740, Quick, T.W.; NAA: B883, NX108732, Leahy, T.J.; NAA: B883, NX167738, Russell. E.B.; NAA: B883, NX165808, McGrath, H.

91 NAA: B883, NX102508, J.R. Atkin; NAA: B883, NX108729, Egan C.B., NAA: B883, NX108730, Hawkins, N.H.

92 NAA: B883, NX110392, Brennan, C.D.

93 Jeremy Black, *Strategy and the Second World War* (London: Robinson, 2021), p. 117.

94 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024* (Department of Defence, 2024), p. 16; Kayla Walliss, 'Northern Airbase Security Kicked up a Notch', *Defence* (website), 28 July 20025, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2025-07-28/northern-airbase-security-kicked-up-notch.

THE AUSTRALIAN GARRISON BATTALIONS AND THE VOLUNTEER DEFENCE CORPS, 1939–1945: A CASE STUDY FOR HOME DEFENCE

Dayton McCarthy

> 'They're old Diggers all right, but not so old *now*,' declared a recruiting officer. 'They will make excellent garrison battalions.'[1]
>
> Surely men who withstood and the survived the ordeal of the last war can be trained and organised as an additional safeguard. The Volunteer Defence Corps hopes to achieve this object by utilising the eagerness of the returned soldier to serve once more.[2]

Introduction

Collectively known as the Australian Military Forces (AMF), the Australian Army of the Second World War was a heterogeneous force comprising five discrete forces: the tiny Permanent Military Forces (PMF), the vastly more numerous Citizen Military Forces (CMF, commonly referred to by its past name, the militia), the 2nd Australian Imperial Force (2nd AIF), the Australian Garrison Battalions, and the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC).[3] At war's outbreak, the PMF provided the Army's staff officers, instructors and some full-time specialists, while the 2nd AIF was a specially raised force for service overseas. The militia formed the backbone of the Army, yet started the conflict as an under-equipped, partially trained, part-time force. From December 1941, as a direct consequence of the emergence of Japan as a national threat, the militia would mobilise and its divisions be activated for full-time service—some abroad, such as the 3rd, 5th and 11th Divisions, but mainly for home defence.

In the context of home defence, the 2nd AIF was raised, under the *Defence Act 1903*, to deploy and defeat the enemy offshore. The militia divisions, meanwhile, were designed to be mobile field forces able to cover strategically important areas and defeat landings on Australia and its mandated territories (including Papua and New Guinea). The youngest and healthiest (and not in a reserved occupation) enlisted and served in the 2nd AIF and the militia. The fourth and fifth forces under the broad AMF model were the garrison battalions and the VDC. The garrison battalions were for local and static defence. The VDC was conceived as a home guard—essentially a force of last resort—and was envisaged to augment some of the garrison battalions and fixed defence sites. Both were a means to integrate an older and/or medically restricted workforce, while the VDC was the sole means for those in a reserved occupation to contribute to the nation's defence. Both organisations were an important part of the overall defence plan for Australia, although from 1943 onwards, the VDC's contribution was markedly less notable.

Combined, both the garrison battalions and the VDC remain generally understudied, and the critical support they provided in freeing up manpower for the militia and 2nd AIF is not well understood. This article remedies this and examines how their structures, organising principles and force employment can provide a valuable case study for a future expanded home defence capability.

'We are on war service and at our war station': the Australian Garrison Battalions

The garrison battalions existed in three iterations. The first was as a prewar concept developed in the final months of peace before the outbreak of the war. The second was the activation and deployment of garrison battalions in September 1939 during the 'business as usual' phase.[4] This period saw them take over the protection of key locations from the militia, which had seen some of its units activated for short defined periods for vital point protection. In turn, this freed the militia to begin the process of calling up tranches of its soldiers for 10 weeks of training under the reactivated Universal Training Scheme. This state of affairs—where the militia trained for block periods but then returned to civilian occupations—existed until the mobilisation of the militia from December 1941. The third period was that of war service from mobilisation until the end of the war, wherein the garrison battalions conducted close defence of coastal batteries and vital point protection, and guarded prisoner-of-war and internee camps.

In these early years of the garrison battalions' existence, the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA, the antecedent to the present-day Returned & Services League, RSL) acted as a facilitator between the Army and returned soldiers community. As early as April 1939, a committee directed by the Military Board (the governing body for the Army) examined the possibility of creating a reserve of former AIF men. The government agreed to the Military Board's plans to use men of this 'Army

reserve' to form eight static garrison battalions, thereby freeing up the active militia to perform its mobile field force role. This Army reserve, which was variously also referred to as the 'AIF reserve', would use the networks in the RSSAILA to gauge interest from its members and pass on the contact details of such men to the Army.[5] Therefore, the Army reserve was the organisational entity that acted as a pool for ex-AIF soldiers or former militiamen, although once war was declared, veterans could and did join the reserve 'off the street'. Those men who were deemed 'Class A'—that is, of good health and under 45 years of age—were allocated as unit reserves in an active militia unit. Those classified as 'Class B' were aged between 45 and 60 years of age and were earmarked as candidates for garrison battalions to be raised for static guard duties. Expectations at this juncture—the war was still months away—were quite low. Reservists would not be issued uniforms, had no expectation to attend parades and, if they did, would not be paid for them. When they were allocated to a garrison battalion reserve, they would be required to attend two muster parades annually. Substantive ranks from prior service in the militia or AIF could be carried over but upon mobilisation, these ranks would be reassessed and new appointments made on merit.[6]

With the outbreak of the war, men in Class B were called out to form the initial eight garrison battalions. Previously, members of this reserve had provided their details to the local military command through the RSSAILA sub-branches, and they now received letters calling them up in batches to attend a nearby drill hall or other commandeered facility for medical assessments. In fact, the RSSAILA sub-branches were asked to undertake preliminary vetting and classify volunteers as 'known favourably, 'not known', 'known unfavourably' or 'known very unfavourably',[7] representing an extraordinary degree of trust by government in this technically private organisation. To be medically fit for service in the garrison battalions, a Class B man also had to be deemed Fitness Class II; that is, fit for any duty other than field formations or where a certain disability was no bar. A newspaper described the duties expected of the garrison battalion as:

> to some extent static and sedentary and call[ing] for a minimum of movement. They are therefore suitable for ex-service men even over the age of 45 years who are medically fit.[8]

Those accepted were then enlisted for full-time service for the war's duration, and could be deployed anywhere within Australia. Upon enlistment, pay commenced and training began. At this stage, membership of the Class B reserve did not in itself entail a binding legal commitment to enlist. The Army did, however, state that:

> applicants for enrolment … give an honourable undertaking to serve if allotted to a garrison battalion and they may be asked in the event of a shortage of volunteers if their services could be made available.[9]

Members of a reserved occupation were ineligible to enlist in garrison battalions.

Key appointments such as the commanding officer, quartermaster, adjutant, regimental sergeant major and orderly room sergeant were appointed first and began bringing together the work of the RSSAILA with the direction of the military authorities.[10] Attention was paid to selecting high-calibre, experienced and decorated leaders to be inaugural commanding officers. For example, among the first 25 officers in the 2nd Garrison Battalion, awards held included one DSO, two DCMs, 14 MCs and three MMs.[11] Normally after a two-week period, the newly appointed CO was ready to begin recruiting for the units. Advertisements were placed in the print media calling for former officers with war experience to volunteer if they were not already registered with the Army reserve. The CO usually personally vetted prospective officers.[12] Newspapers around the nation carried similar stories of 'olds and bolds' joking and jostling with each other, enthusiastically lining up to re-join the Army. After initial promising interest from men in the Class B reserve, recruitment for some of the garrison battalions plateaued. In some cases, there was widespread resentment among returned men who had applied for service in the garrison battalions but were rejected on age and medical grounds.[13] The garrison battalion war diaries indicate that between one-third and one-half of prospective volunteers from the Class B reserves were found to be unfit for duty.[14] In response, the government decided to amend the previous requirement for prior service to secure sufficient physically fit men; in December 1939, eligibility was expanded to allow men between 18 and 20 (those not yet old enough to enlist in the 2nd AIF) to join the garrison battalions, as well those who volunteered for the 2nd AIF but did not meet its physical standards.[15]

The first garrison battalions to be raised conducted a 10- to 14-day 'refresher' training course of 70 training hours comprising drill, weapon handling and range practices, duties of guards and sentries, and powers of arrest. The training syllabus clearly indicated that garrison battalions had a purely static, protective function.[16] The term 'refresher'—widely used at the time—was revealing. It indicated that the Army expected that even after a 20-year hiatus, these former soldiers simply needed to brush up on the military basics and update their knowledge on key areas relating to defensive duties. Further courses of instruction were run for those former AIF officers and NCOs who had successfully passed the selection boards for commissions.[17] Local showgrounds were a popular choice for the conduct of this training; the 2nd and 11th Garrison Battalions, raised in Sydney, trained at the Moore Park showgrounds, while the 1st Garrison Battalion did so at the Brisbane exhibition grounds.[18] Nearby rifle ranges were used for conduct of range practices. The training of the garrison battalions was taken seriously, with allocations of permanent force instructors from the Australian Instructional Corps (AIC) and/or regular staff corps officers provided to each battalion in training.[19] Once the authorisation was received to raise them, the garrison battalions coalesced quickly. For example, the 1st Garrison Battalion, which began recruiting on 11 October, went into camp in Brisbane on 18 October, completed its training by 30 October, and had soldiers deployed for the relief of militia forces by 31 October 1939.[20] By January 1940, the first eight garrisons were deployed:

one in Queensland, two in New South Wales, two in Victoria, and one each in Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia, with a total strength of approximately 5,000 officers and soldiers.[21]

As only small arms were required for training and the intended role, sufficient numbers of short magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE).303 rifles and Lewis machine guns were available to equip the units. Similarly, sufficient trucks were available for moving troops between the training locations and, later, guard posts. Making a virtue of the national logistical pressure of equipping the 2nd AIF and militia divisions at the same time, the government announced that the garrison battalions (characterised as the 'AIF' garrison battalions) would wear First World War-vintage breeches and puttees rather than the new-issue long trousers and short gaiters. It was explained that:

> [to] maintain as far as possible the traditions and distinctive appearance of the original AIF, the garrison battalions would wear the well-known uniforms adopted for the expeditionary forces during the last war.[22]

In addition, the garrison battalions would be allocated a distinctive colour patch of a black shape (square, circle, oval, diamond, rectangle) superimposed with a smaller green shape. Linkages to the original AIF were also maintained by men wearing a miniature version of their old colour patch above the larger black/green garrison battalion colour patch.[23]



Members of the 12th Garrison Battalion form up on parade at their barracks in November 1943. Clearly evident are the older ages of the soldiers, the green diamond on a black oval colour patch and the smaller colour patch signifying the soldiers' old AIF battalions.
Image: Australian War Memorial 139933.

As there was no set establishment for the battalions, their strengths and structures varied across the regional commands. For example, the 1st Garrison Battalion had five companies for most of the war, whereas the 15th Garrison Battalion was a two-company unit for all but four months of its existence.[24] At this point in the war, with no apparent direct threat to Australia, most garrison battalions might have one or two companies on full-time duty with the balance of its sub-units remaining part-time. The intention was that with arms, uniforms and training provided, and with pay rates equivalent to those of the 2nd AIF, sufficient personnel would enlist in the garrison battalions 'with the minimum interference with civilian occupations and with a definite job to go to in the event of extreme national emergency'.[25]

Table 1: List of garrison battalions raised for home defence, 1939–1946

Unit name	Area of operations	Role	Raised	Disbanded
1st Aust Grn Bn	South Queensland	Internal security	September 1939	December 1946
2nd Aust Grn Bn	Sydney, Newcastle, Port Kembla	Close defence	October 1939	February 1945
3rd Aust Grn Bn	Port Phillip Bay	Close defence / coast defence	September 1939	February 1942
4th Aust Grn Bn	Adelaide and surrounds	Close defence / internal security	October 1939	October 1944
5th Aust Grn Bn	Fremantle and surrounds	Close defence	October 1940	November 1944
6th Aust Grn Bn	Hobart	Close defence / coast defence	October 1939	End of war
7th Aust Grn Bn	North Sydney Beaches then South Queensland	Close defence (NSW) / internal security (QLD)	November 1940	October 1943
8th Aust Grn Bn	Newcastle and surrounds	Close defence	November 1940	November 1942
9th Aust Grn Bn	Port Phillip Bay	Close defence / coast defence	November 1940	December 1943
10th Aust Grn Bn	Rottnest Island	Close defence / coast defence	November 1939	June 1946
11th Aust Grn Bn	Metro Sydney	Internal security	October 1939	May 1944

Unit name	Area of operations	Role	Raised	Disbanded
12th Aust Grn Bn	Regional Victoria	Internal security	October 1939	January 1944—became 12th Garrison Coy in February 1944
13th Aust Grn Bn	Port Kembla, Brisbane, Cape York	Coast defence	November 1940	October 1943
14th Aust Grn Bn	Brisbane, Cape York, Thursday Island	Close defence / coast defence	November 1940	Became 62nd Infantry Bn in December 1942
15th Aust Grn Bn	Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton	Internal security	October 1940	End of war
16th Aust Grn Bn	Hay Internment Camp	Internment camp	July 1940	April 1945
17th Aust Grn Bn	Tatura Internment Camp	Internment camp	July 1940	July 1944
18th Aust Grn Bn	Adelaide beaches then Sydney	Close defence / coast defence	November 1940	November 1942
19th Aust Grn Bn	Bunbury, Geraldton then NW Western Australia	Close defence / coast defence	August 1940	November 1944
20th Aust Grn Bn	Newcastle and surrounds	Close defence	December 1941	May 1943
21st Aust Grn Bn	Liverpool Internment Camp	Internment camp	July 1941	April 1945
22nd Aust Grn Bn	Cowra POW Camp	Prisoner of war camp	May 1941	April 1945
23rd Aust Grn Bn	Murchison and Dhurringile POW Camps	Prisoner of war camp	January 1941	July 1945
24th Aust Grn Bn	Myrtleford and Dhurringile POW Camps	Prisoner of war camp	December 1941	July 1945
25th Aust Grn Bn	Loveday, Moorook and Woolenook Internment Camps	Internment camps	April 1942	November 1944

Unit name	Area of operations	Role	Raised	Disbanded
29th Aust Grn Bn	NW Western Australia	Internal security	March 1942	November 1944
30th Aust Grn Bn	Hobart and surrounds	Internal security	March1942	April 1944
31st Aust Grn Bn	Central NSW	Internal security	April 1942	End of war
32nd Aust Grn Bn	Brisbane and surrounds	Internal security	May 1942	June 1943
33rd Aust Grn Bn	Loveday Internment Camp	Internment camp	November 1942	September 1943

Note: Table collated from information in Graham McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*, Volume 2.

From June 1940, the RSSAILA, determined to make an ongoing and demonstrable contribution to the home defence effort, formed the RSL Volunteer Defence Corps (RSL-VDC).[26] The VDC was organised and operated at the RSSAILA branch level and was a means for returned soldiers to contribute to the defence of their communities, and an opportunity for those in reserved occupations to serve. At this early juncture, the VDC received no support from the Army and undertook only elementary training under RSSAILA initiative. Its stated role was to 'augment the local defences of the State by providing static defence of localities … and by giving timely information regarding enemy movements to superior military organisations'.[27] In practice, this meant that VDC units located in metropolitan areas were affiliated with a local garrison battalion as a 'battalion reserve'.[28] The status of this 'battalion reserve' was unclear and required official clarification on multiple occasions. For example, an April 1941 article in Brisbane's *The Sunday Mail* called for former soldiers to join the 14th (Reserve) Garrison Battalion, despite no such unit existing. In reality, the article called for returned men to join one of the two part-time companies of the 14th Garrison Battalion. To further confuse matters, Northern Command (the Army's state-based geographic command, in Queensland) clarified that a returned soldier could be a member of a part-time (reserve) company of the garrison battalion *and* remain a member of the RSL-VDC. This clarification added that:

> [enlistment in this] garrison reserve in no way renders a man liable for full time duty except in the event of general mobilisation. Recruits in the reserve cannot be called upon to fill vacancies in the full-time garrison battalions.[29]

This distinction would change from October 1941, when the Army took ownership of the VDC and organised it as standalone force.

From 1942 onwards, garrison battalions began to accept former 2nd AIF personnel who were no longer categorised as Medical Class I, and 'universal service personnel' (USPs)—the title given to men called up under the Universal Training Scheme. This scheme, which had been suspended (but not formally abolished) in 1929, had recommenced in January 1940. USPs undertook 10 weeks of training and then, upon completion, were placed in the militia reserve. In essence, the militia reserve kept these USPs 'on the books', notionally linked to a militia unit. Thereafter universal service trainees had an ongoing requirement to complete an annual 12-day refresher camp and 12 days of home training. Every three months thereafter, further tranches of universal service trainees would be called up and commence the 10-week training cycle. In mid-1940, the call-up was extended to all unmarried men and childless widowers aged between 18 and 35. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the government called up Classes 2 and 3—that is, married men and childless widowers aged between 35 and 45, and married men and widowers (with children) aged between 18 and 35.[30] The influx of former 2nd AIF personnel and the USPs meant that over time, the average age of the garrison battalion soldier became much younger than that of the initial cohort that first formed the battalions in late 1939. In May 1942, for example, the 15th and 32nd Garrison Battalions each received 200 USPs who had been called up.[31]

Once activated, trained and deployed, the initial garrison battalions took over the role of 'security troops'. This role had been previously undertaken by militia troops on short-term, fixed periods to protect key installations and infrastructure. From January 1940 onwards, the militia underwent its designated periods of compulsory training. Then after general mobilisation in December 1941, it commenced its mobile field force role. The garrison battalions, therefore, were among the first Australians deployed operationally in the Second World War—a point not lost on Lieutenant Colonel JJ Scanlon DSO, commanding officer of the 6th Garrison Battalion, raised in Tasmania. In December 1939, he stated to his battalion:

> We are on war service, and at our war station. In this important fact, the 6th Garrison Battalion differs from members of the 2nd AIF, who are still training for active service, and are not yet at their war station.[32]

What then was the nature of this 'war service'? Although they would perform a static role, the battalions themselves were not rooted in one location. As they were part of the Army, they could be, and were, redeployed to different parts of the country. For example, the 19th Garrison Battalion, raised in August 1940 from across southern Western Australia, variously served across the breadth of that state, from Albany in the south through to Geraldton and northwards to Broome.[33] The first garrison battalions were broadly classed

as either internal security (guarding vulnerable points) or close defence (close protection of the coastal artillery batteries), although some necessarily did both in the early stages of the war. The list of vulnerable points around the country was extensive; this list grew after December 1941, when invasion fears were at their peak. The 11th Garrison Battalion, headquartered at Victoria Barracks, Paddington, was purely an internal security battalion responsible for 18 vulnerable points around Sydney. These included 11 wireless towers or broadcast stations, five oil storage depots, Mascot aerodrome, the Rose Bay flying boat station and the ammunition and ordnance stores at Leichardt and Moorebank. The 15th Garrison Battalion—which had sub-units in Townsville, Rockhampton, Cairns and Thursday Island—had an almost identical set of vulnerable points: seven wireless stations, four oil depots, one aerodrome, one flying boat station and five ammunition and ordnance stores.[34] Several other garrison battalions guarded similar types of vulnerable points, with some geographic variations including submarine cable landing points and key bridges.[35] Some of the protected areas had guard facilities for the troops (normally platoons so they could maintain a 24-hour guard and rest cycle) but most did not. Often the soldiers slept in tents (later with floorboards), while special arrangements had to be made with contractors to provide ablutions and, in some cases, access to fresh water.[36]

The 2nd Garrison Battalion, raised in Sydney in late 1939, was a close defence unit responsible for guarding the coastal gun batteries located on key headlands from Newcastle southwards to La Perouse. A mixture of permanent force and militia gunners operated these batteries.[37] It also provided guards on the wharves and aboard merchant vessels and troopships berthed at Circular Quay. The 20th Garrison Battalion, raised in November 1940, was tasked to protect the fixed defences around Newcastle. Like other garrison battalions in similar roles, it was responsible for the defence of fixed works, leaving the artillery units therein free to operate the guns. This placed the responsibility for defensive wiring, lighting and minor field works upon the garrison battalion.[38] Its Operation Order Number 2 stated:

> Dispositions will be by company and platoon areas. The principle of perimeter defence will be followed where practicable. Mutual support between platoons and sections and defence in depth will be considered in siting sections post and gun positions. Fire plans will be tied in with fire plans of adjacent units.[39]

As these batteries had well-established accommodation and messing facilities, or were located within residential areas, sub-units allocated to these tasks generally enjoyed better conditions than those employed to far-flung vulnerable points.[40]

Regardless of role, all members of a garrison had to remain aware of the limits of their authority in relation to the arrest or shooting of civilians. A Military Board Instruction released in October 1939 stipulated that officers and soldiers could only arrest a civilian if that civilian was caught in the act (or was escaping after completing said act) of committing an offence under the *National Security Act 1939*. Such offences included sketching or photographing military installations, interfering with telephone/telegraph infrastructure, and trespassing on military land. Officers and soldiers could only fire on a civilian offender attempting to escape after an arrest had been made; if they killed a civilian committing a misdemeanour, then the officer or soldier would be charged with murder. Likewise, if a sentry was attacked by an offender they were attempting to arrest, the sentry could respond with reasonable force—including, if such force was justified, killing the offender. However, the burden of any proof was on the sentry. Accordingly, garrison battalion commanders were instructed to ensure that their men understood and did not exceed their legal authorities.[41] Several war diary entries record that suspicious persons detained were handed over to the civilian police or that the local police station was called if unusual activity was sighted but did not immediately threaten the protected asset or area. However, from February 1942, when invasion fears were at their zenith, such reticence disappeared. Instead, new instructions stated that sentries:

> will take any action required to ensure the safety of their posts or to defeat the activities of enemy or suspected enemy agents. If necessary, they will fire upon or otherwise attack any persons threatening the safety of theirs or engaging in hostile actions. The sentry must use his intelligence and sense of responsibility, as to whether he will shoot or not, but he must be careful not to allow any suspected persons to approach so close that he can be rushed and overpowered.[42]

This more liberal and permissive interpretation of the legislation was a product of the heightened security environment of the period. While the legislative wording remained unchanged, the reinterpretation of the rules of engagement transformed the task from ‘monitoring’ with police protection, to one of proper military point protection of national assets.

Initially the garrison battalions used what vacant military buildings (in particular the old militia drill halls) and camps were available for their battalion and company headquarters. However, as the Army mobilised from December 1941, new facilities needed to be acquired. Sometimes buildings were gifted from local organisations (such as a church hall) or businesses, but often premises had to be formally acquired through compulsory possession by the Commonwealth. Executed under the provisions of regulation 54 of the National Security (General) Regulations, payment for use of such

facilities was managed by the Directorate of Hirings in each geographic command (and, later, line of communications area). For example, from February 1942 through to the end of the war, elements of the 20th Garrison Battalion occupied the Broughton School in Newcastle, the premises being hired from the local Church of England diocese.[43]

As the war progressed, several garrison battalions were split to form new battalions with new roles. Some garrison battalions took over from militia units and undertook a coast-watching role. Other battalions were raised to guard prisoner-of-war and internment camps. Previously the guarding of the small number of German and Italian internees had been undertaken by a sub-unit of an established garrison battalion. However, after the Australian Government agreed to take over custody of thousands of German internees from Great Britain in mid-1940, dedicated garrison battalions were assigned to guard five internment camps established in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Here, the garrison battalions supervised work parties, facilitated visits by the Red Cross and representatives of the protecting power (neutral observers under humanitarian law), and searched accommodation for contraband. Not surprisingly given the nature of their task, these garrison battalions were augmented by a legal officer, several medical officers, dental technicians, a field hygiene section, and Lutheran and Catholic padres for the German and Italian internees respectively.[44] Likewise, three prisoner-of-war camps were established, each requiring a dedicated garrison battalion, including the ill-fated 22nd Garrison Battalion, which was present for the infamous August 1944 Cowra breakout.

From 1940, five regionally based garrison brigades were formed to command the battalions; a brigade commanded a mix of both close defence and security battalions.[45] These brigades were short lived, as the subordinate garrison battalions were transferred to new organisations created once the Army mobilised in December 1941. For example, the 14th Garrison Battalion—which guarded coastal defences on the islands off South-East Queensland—was transferred from the 1st Garrison Brigade to Headquarters, Brisbane Covering Force. Similarly, in December 1943, the 11th and 31st Garrison Battalions in New South Wales were transferred from the 2nd Garrison Brigade to Headquarters, New South Wales Line of Communications Area.[46]

Table 2: List of garrison brigades, 1940–1943

Unit name	Headquarters location	Garrison battalions commanded	Raised	Disbanded
1st Aust Grn Bde	Victoria Barracks, Brisbane	1st Garrison Bn 14th Garrison Bn 15th Garrison Bn 32nd Garrison Bn 7th Garrison Bn *	November 1940	December 1943
2nd Aust Grn Bde	Sydney Showground, Moore Park	2nd Garrison Bn 11th Garrison Bn 16th Garrison Bn 7th Garrison Bn * 8th Garrison Bn 13th Garrison Bn 20th Garrison Bn 31st Garrison Bn 18th Garrison Bn #	July 1940	December 1943
3rd Aust Grn Bde	Flinders Street, Melbourne	3rd Garrison Bn 12th Garrison Bn 17th Garrison Bn 9th Garrison Bn	July 1940	December 1941
4th Aust Grn Bde	Warradale, Adelaide	4th Garrison Bn 18th Garrison Bn #	October 1939	July 1942
5th Aust Grn Bde	Swanbourne, Western Australia	10th Garrison Bn 5th Garrison Bn 19th Garrison Bn 29th Garrison Bn	August 1940	May 1942

Notes:

* The 7th Garrison Battalion transferred from 2nd Garrison Brigade to 1st Garrison Brigade in June 1942.

\# The 18th Garrison Battalion transferred from 4th Garrison Brigade to 2nd Garrison Brigade in June 1942.

Information drawn from Graham McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*, Volume 2.

During the war, 33 garrison battalions were raised, with the maximum strength achieved in late 1942 to early 1943. Based on the three-battalion brigade structure, this equated to more than two divisions worth of troops dedicated solely to internal security, close defence or internee/prisoner-of-war camp duties, albeit without the supporting arms and

logistics enablers such formations normally contain. Regardless, these units therefore freed up several militia divisions to be redeployed around Australia in their mobile field force role. Their existence also enabled the defence of critical infrastructure and military assets around Australia, protecting it from possible sabotage or enemy action. From early 1943, with the Japanese threat receding and the need to re-prioritise manpower towards industry, militia and garrison units began to be disbanded. Some soldiers were transferred to other units, while others returned to civil vocations. Some units, like the 10th Garrison Battalion, served on until 1946. When it was eventually disbanded in June of that year, the adjutant, who maintained the war diary reflected:

> The disbandment of the 10th Garrison Battalion brought to end service which commenced in September 1939, during which some thousands of all ranks served with the unit, and at all times, gave honourable and efficient service to the Australian Military Forces.[47]

‘Living, fighting and feeding in their own districts’: the Volunteer Defence Corps

While the RSSAILA played a big part in facilitating enlistment of returned soldiers into the garrison battalions, it was also fundamental to the creation of the VDC. Indeed, the VDC owed its existence almost entirely to the persistent lobbying of the government by the RSSAILA. As early as October 1936, this organisation had advocated some sort of ‘home guard’ style force, comprising returned men, that was *funded, raised and controlled by the RSSAILA*. Even by June 1940—nine months into the war—the Australian Government showed little appetite for such a force, noting that Australia was not yet under immediate threat, with the 2nd AIF serving offshore, the garrison battalions protecting key points, and the militia undergoing periods of continuous training in tranches. Importantly, the government did not wish to support a force analogous to a ‘private army’—especially after the well-documented linkages between some returned soldiers and the right-wing private armies of the 1930s.[48]

By July 1940, after sustained lobbying in the press and in parliament, the government directed the Army to consider how returned men could usefully contribute to home defence. The Military Board considered an expansion to the Army reserve the best way to achieve this, essentially creating a pool of men who, upon mobilisation, could bring the existing militia and garrison battalion units up to strength. So, on 15 July 1940, the Military Board informed the RSSAILA that it could form the ‘RSL-Volunteer Defence Corps’, which was to consist solely of returned men with war service.[49] The government would not provide uniforms, equipment, weapons or training, with the RSSAILA responsible for funding and raising the force. Importantly, there was no defined role for the VDC other than being a source of Class B (aged 45 to 60) personnel for the Army reserve.[50]

Even so, the RSSAILA sub-branches went ahead and raised VDC units. But with no defined role or national standardisation, the results varied widely. The VDC battalions would be numbered sequentially in each state, so, for example, there were six separate battalions named '2 VDC Battalion'. Some VDC units drilled, while others tried to use the services of adjacent rifle clubs to conduct some weapon practice. Moreover, the Army decreed that as the RSL-VDC was a voluntary, non-military organisation, it was not to have ranks. However, as units had to be led and managed somehow, a de facto appointment structure developed, signified by a colour-coded armlet. The leader of a battalion-sized VDC unit wore a yellow armlet, while that of a platoon-sized entity wore a white one. Despite equating to officer ranks, these appointments had no standing outside the RSL-VDC. The matter of ranks and VDC leadership plagued the fledgling organisation in other ways. The local RSSAILA sub-branch selected leaders for its supported VDC unit. Some selected leaders had no desire to update their antiquated military knowledge. Others were selected based on their standing in the local RSSAILA sub-branch, regardless of their competence. Further grievances arose among some men who had held commissions in the AIF during the last war and now refused to serve under former officers who had previously held a more junior rank than they had last held.[51] Perhaps expectedly, personal relationships, petty jealousies and ego blighted the organisation's early existence, with a concomitant impact on effectiveness.

A *cri de coeur* letter written by a Tasmanian VDC member in April 1942, addressed to the Minister for the Army, Mr Francis Forde, captured the poor state of the organisation due to lack of role, lack of equipment, and poor leadership:

> I have been a member for over a year and my platoon, which is composed of graziers, trappers, horse keepers, farmers and garage and station hands is quite a representative cross section of opinion within the force. For over a year, these men have stuck to a disheartening job, many men come some distance paying, too, their own petrol and in many cases, they have to use their own meagre ration tickets. They have had no training or personal equipment, and they have had to suffer from the depressing effect of bad leadership and administration.[52]

The bad leadership to which the author referred was the perception (not universally held, but prevalent in some quarters) that all leadership positions were held by RSSAILA office holders, regardless of the competency of those men. It also established the perception that the VDC turned away interested volunteers who were not returned men from the last war. This opinion was maintained to some degree, despite the VDC opening up enlistments to non-returned men from late 1940.[53] The minister duly referred the letter to local military command, which requested a response from the commanding officer of the VDC battalion in question. In response, the CO highlighted all the courses offered

for the junior leaders in the VDC, but noted that the main military instructor was located some distance from the training area and was not funded for much of the training needed. The CO continued:

> Our authorised strength was 530 men, we have enrolled approximately another 500 men, and organised and trained these extra men to the best of our ability with what weapons we could acquire … Altogether I have 21 centres to direct and train, over an area of 10,000 square miles. This has been done at my own expense. The battalion funds being sufficient for only a small portion of our costs, personally I have not drawn one penny for myself. It is quite impossible for me to visit each centre more than twice a year, and this I have done.[54]

Besides officers and men being out of pocket through attendance at training, the fact that the VDC was a private organisation and not part of the military meant that its members were ineligible for compensation if killed or injured while on VDC duty. Poor (effectively, no) conditions of service, the lack of equipment and weapons, and no defined role continued to militate against both the attractiveness and the viability of the VDC. Still, the RSSAILA aspired for the VDC to be part of the AMF and to be integrated into the order of battle as part of the home defence system.[55]

The deteriorating strategic circumstances from late 1940 provided much needed, if belated, justification for the invigoration of the VDC. From early 1941, the Army gradually softened its stance towards the VDC, realising that if it was to integrate it usefully into home defence plans, the VDC had to be funded by the federal government and therefore needed to be part of the AMF. From February 1941, the government purchased 50,000 uniforms for the VDC. In May, it approved a capitation allowance that funded training travel and other unit administration expenditure. During this time, a conference attended by state and federal RSSAILA officeholders, the Chief of General Staff and the Army Adjutant-General resolved that the Army would take control of the VDC. This decision took effect in May 1941. This had an almost immediate effect on the VDC units, including the provision—albeit in very limited quantities—of.303 SMLE rifles and ammunition.[56] In addition, once the VDC was incorporated into the Army, other aspects of military professionalism infused the part-time force. This included the issue of a bespoke VDC colour patch; the formalisation of command structures that placed VDC units under military formations; unit administration; the cross-posting of personnel from the AIF, the militia or the garrison battalions into the VDC; and the panelling of VDC personnel (especially officers) onto the multitude of training courses held at the various schools established throughout each military district.[57]

The growing threat to the nation from December 1941 and into January 1942 provided further impetus to remedy the poor state of the VDC. Not all VDC units were issued uniforms, and none had been issued greatcoats. 'The approach of hostilities [to mainland Australia],' wrote one commander, 'makes it imperative that VDC units be supplied now with a proportion of weapons, explosives and engineer stores'.[58] This was necessary for the VDC if it was to undertake its two newly allotted roles. Category 'A' roles comprised beach defence, coast watchers, permanent guards on vulnerable points, and guarding the reserved demolitions placed by engineers.[59] Such VDC units would be under command of the military formation operating in that area. Category 'B' units were those that performed a 'home guard' style role, which could include action against paratroopers, guerrilla and anti-sabotage actions, protection of railways, creation of roadblocks, intelligence gathering about enemy movements, and cooperation with other Australian units in the area. These units would come under command of the line of communications headquarters of that region. However, the limitations and capacity of these VDC units were clear:

> Their activities will be limited by the absence of organised supply and transport. Their operations will, therefore, be confined to the close vicinity of their home areas. When transport is required, they will have to depend on privately-owned motor vehicles or horses supplied by themselves.[60]

These circumstances had an operational impact. For example, a proposal that VDC units relieve garrison battalions guarding vulnerable points was rejected in many commands. The reasons were manifold: the vital points were often in remote areas with few VDC members nearby; it cost the VDC members time and (their own) money to reach the vital points in question, and the sheer quantity of VDC troops required to sustain the same guard effect over multiple rotational shifts (to work around their protected employment) was not feasible. Some VDC members also voiced the opinion that 'enlistment in the VDC does not entail duty of this nature until an emergency necessitating the VDC being called up for continuous service'.[61]

In some cases, local councils and other government bodies used the VDC as free labour. One instance at Lilydale in Victoria, prompted Southern Command to write to the Premier's office reminding them that the VDC was a 'static body of troops whose role is local defence of their own areas'.[62] As they were 'not a regular military organisation' they could not, unless called out, 'be ordered to undertake any task'. Instead, the commander suggested:

> as they are a voluntary body every help should be given to the VDC by local persons and organisations to carry out the tasks which are ordered for an emergency in the defence of the country.[63]

These conditions of service were inadequate and barely compensated for the tasks demanded of the VDC. For example, the VDC was widely used to assist the garrison battalions by undertaking weekend and night shifts, thereby affording opportunities for rest and local leave. Despite the 'out of hours' nature of this duty, VDC soldiers were given a subsistence allowance in lieu of being supplied rations. These circumstances remained until mid-1943, when direction from no less than the Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General John Northcott, authorised the provision of dinner and breakfast to VDC personnel conducting night shifts on anti-aircraft, coast defence and searchlight batteries.[64] The poor conditions of service were largely viewed as consistent with the VDC 'living, fighting and feeding in their own districts' and being 'a semi-military organisation' wherein 'administrative difficulties [were] bound to occur'.[65] It is difficult to reconcile the VDC's evident lack of administrative capacity despite being an authorised part of the AMF—an organisation that was able to raise, feed and administer the 2nd AIF overseas and the militia at home and in Australian territories.



Members of the Volunteer Defence Corps loading a 6-inch coastal defence gun in Sydney, 30 May 1943.
Image: Australian War Memorial 052212.



The badge of the Volunteer Defence Corps as worn on armlets and colour patches. Image: Australian War Memorial 062114

After the Army mobilised, the government authorised the expansion of the VDC from 50,000 to 80,000 men, and the call-up of 5,000 VDC men for aerodrome protection and coast-watching duties.[66] At this peak, the VDC fielded 111 battalion-sized units. However, the vast majority of VDC personnel remained on part-time duty, undertaking training on weekends and providing what volunteer service they could in units that were close to their home locations. The number of VDC men on full-time duty never exceeded 3,000—approximately three per cent of the paper strength of the VDC at its strongest.[67] In the Queensland Line of Communication Area in September 1942, for

example, 15,815 VDC men (all ranks) were on part-time duty, compared to the 979 on full-time duty. About three-quarters of VDC personnel on full-time duty were allocated to vulnerable point or coast defence positions, the remainder being key command and administrative staff.[68] Based on operational needs, some VDC personnel could volunteer for full-time duty for certain periods. This avenue of service was not open to those who were members of reserved occupations. However, if 'enemy action was imminent and civil life can no longer continue undisturbed', personnel in reserved occupations could be called up for full-time duty with the understanding that they were to be returned to civil industry as soon as possible.[69] VDC personnel volunteering or called up for full-time duty had to pass the same medical standard as soldiers in the garrison battalions (Medical Class II). Therefore, it remained that the attractiveness of part-time duty in the VDC was that it was the sole means for personnel in reserved occupations to contribute to the defence of the nation. This obvious social good must, however, be considered against the readiness ramifications of allowing reserved occupations to serve. A defence emergency would surely have seen many of the VDC's members directed to remain at work in the reserved occupations, requiring VDC units to cross-post or amalgamate to create operationally viable units.

The Army's view on the role of the VDC matured and evolved through 1942. Initially, it was content for it to be a guerrilla-style organisation, with enough training and equipment to harass enemy incursion. However, if the VDC was to undertake an ongoing and formal operational augmentation of the garrison battalions or other units, the Army understood that it had to train and equip it appropriately.[70] This was especially so if VDC troops were to be given loaded weapons for their various duties.[71] The VDC was therefore directed to 'carry out the maximum training possible … they will not be given an operational role until they have undergone a minimum of two weeks intensive training'.[72] This meant the provision of instructors and full-time cadre staff, standardised syllabi and, perhaps most importantly, enough weapons and ammunition. Certainly SMLE.303 rifles were not abundantly supplied to the VDC; instead.310 cadet rifles and.22 rifles had to fill that gap, with range practices adapted accordingly. Likewise, small quantities of flares, anti-tank mines, grenades and explosives with detonators were provided.[73] The new syllabus of 90 hours (equivalent to two weeks' training) emphasised weapon handling, fieldcraft (camouflage, fire and movement, infantry minor tactics, map reading and signalling) and planning for the defence (siting of pits, guns and wiring).[74] There was also the recognition that, as the VDC was often employed on the night shift, at least one night training parade per week should be 'spent in the dark on patrols, direction finding, and guides leading units to specified points'.[75]

In addition to the various guard tasks allocated, the VDC performed a useful intelligence collection role. This was divided into two components. The first aspect was to report on the state of transport infrastructure such as the condition of roads (many of them

unsealed) and the capacity of bridges. The need for this information was made clear to Queensland VDC units as 'topographical information is of great value because movement of formations may have to occur during the wet season in any part of the state'. The second aspect was to gauge the mood of the local population. In addition to watching for evidence of subversive activities, the VDC was to report on the 'public reaction to recent legislation' and the 'public support to [the] war effort and public morale in general'.[76]

From 1943, with the threat of invasion diminishing and therefore the need for a counter-invasion guerrilla force reduced, the Army determined that the best use of the VDC was to man the searchlight, coastal artillery and coastal artillery batteries in all areas south of Townsville. In doing so, the Army considered it a justifiable risk to reassign full-time personnel in these establishments and replace them with part-time VDC personnel. To achieve this, the VDC units were required to generate and coordinate several part-time shifts to replicate the previous full-time effect.[77] It also required VDC units to reconfigure themselves from infantry battalions into small gun and searchlight teams, and upskill its members in these more technical roles. Not all VDC members were willing or able to adjust to these new functions.

As the expectations of the VDC evolved, so too did its organisation and composition. The thorny issue of VDC ranks arose again. It was widely recognised that the system of appointments (not ranks) was increasingly unworkable. But there was reluctance in the Army to allow VDC officers, of untested competence, to have command authority over AMF officers. In 1942, after much deliberation, the Military Board approved the granting of commissioned, warrant officer and NCO ranks in the VDC. When this was instituted, it was made clear that a commission in the AIF or the militia took precedence over one in the VDC. Therefore the ranking VDC officer—the Director VDC—became a brigadier. VDC groups (rather than brigades) consisted of several VDC battalions in a state and were commanded by a lieutenant colonel; battalions and companies were commanded by majors and captains respectively. The connection between the VDC and RSSAILA necessarily became more distant as the war progressed. By December 1942, only 20 per cent of the VDC were returned men. This meant that the VDC's image evolved. It became less an organisation of old veterans, transitioning to an organisation in which men in reserved occupations (or with minor medical conditions), of all ages, could serve. As a result, by February 1944 the average age of a VDC member was 36 years.[78]

As the fighting moved northwards away from Australia, the need for the VDC diminished. Throughout 1944, therefore, the majority of the VDC were placed on a reserve list with no training liability. Demobilisation began well before the war's end, with the priority to get men back into industry rather than giving them a means to provide military service at home. Ultimately the utility and effectiveness of the VDC was never tested, though it may be assumed that the VDC's presence freed up an unknown number of younger,

fitter and more available men for service in the militia or 2nd AIF. At a farewell dinner for the disbandment of the 18th Battalion VDC in October, its former commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Chenery posited:

> The VDC had been accused of being a surplus body, spending money unnecessarily. My reply is that it was the cheapest army Australian ever had, and if this country had been invaded the people of Australia would really have realised the value of the corps.[79]

Assessment—the Fundamental Inputs to Capability

The experience of the garrison battalions and the VDC provides a rich case study in force expansion in support of home defence needs. Certain lessons are obvious, such as harnessing the services of older or medically downgraded personnel for national defence, thereby freeing up younger and fitter soldiers for more arduous roles. Likewise, the nexus between funding, equipment and training to achieve even a modest military capability needs no further comment. That said, history suggests that decision-makers must be reminded that a nation only gets the military capability it is prepared to pay for. History also demonstrates that governments grossly (perhaps wilfully) underestimate the breadth and quantity of military tasks and the concomitant forces required to meet all these tasks.

Instead, this article concludes with an assessment viewed through the prism of eight fundamental inputs to capability (FIC) and how they may be pertinent to any future force expansion requirement facing Army.[80]

Command and management. In time, both the garrison battalions and the VDC were organised along tried and tested military lines with the commensurate command structures in place. This included the provision of suitable staff officers and the training of garrison battalion and VDC officers to ensure they could undertake their command appointments. If doctrine is a command enabler, any future force engaged in home defence must be more like the garrison battalions and less like the VDC. Doctrine must understand the specific nuances of operating within Australia, among the civilian population, and in conjunction with other government departments—most notably law enforcement.[81]

Organisation. Before the war, the Army identified the need for several static guard battalions that could be deployed anywhere in Australia. While there was no fixed establishment for these units, they were remarkably homogenous given that each

regional command raised them independently. The standard infantry battalion (albeit varying between two and five companies) was an appropriate organisation for this task. Companies were responsible for areas and could parcel out platoons (and sometimes sections) to protect key assets and infrastructure within those company areas. The organisational nomenclature afforded operability with other AMF units in the area. In time, some companies became the basis on which to build new battalions, adapting to a new role of guarding internees and prisoners of war.

By contrast, the VDC struggled to define a role for itself. Starting its life as a non-Army entity, with wildly fluctuating strengths and structures, the VDC was an organisational orphan for half of its existence. Even after its incorporation into the Army, its role was never clearly articulated or set. Was it to be a guerrilla army? Reinforcement for the garrison battalions? A part-time home guard? Form follows function, and the absence of a clear role for the VDC militated against a sound organisational structure. During the peak period for home defence of 1942–1943, 21 garrison battalions were deployed throughout Australia protecting vulnerable points and key defence installations. Roughly (noting the variation in battalion size discussed above) this equated to approximately 84 companies. The nature and types of 'vulnerable points' may differ in the modern context, but the quantity of vital assets and key infrastructure would surely be greater. If 84 companies, specially raised and trained for static defensive duties, was considered sufficient in 1942, researchers and planners must consider what quantity would be required today.

Personnel. Although the VDC came under Army control, it was never really part of it. As such, it found itself outside the conditions of service enshrined in the various Acts and regulations that covered service in the AMF. Matters of pay and allowances, rationing, injury and death benefits were unclear and required constant administrative workarounds to achieve practical and equitable results. From a force generation perspective, the VDC was never a guaranteed workforce. The confusing status of call-out provisions meant lingering uncertainty as to who in the VDC (and for what duration) could be called out. It was never clarified whether, in case of a defence emergency, the priority for the VDC's members was VDC service or their own reserved occupation.

The early creation of the Army/AIF reserve successfully provided a partially vetted manpower pool from which to create the garrison battalions. The role of the RSSAILA was fundamental; in effect the Army outsourced much of its recruiting and some of its personnel management functions to this non-Army entity. Although the RSSAILA's other efforts in establishing the VDC were less successful, its contribution as the interface between returned men and the Army was, initially at least, a useful one.

The Army currently employs Service Category (SERCAT) 2 and 3 groupings to manage service liability for former members. This suggests there is no present-day requirement for the RSL or any of the modern ex-service organisations to act as an interlocutor. Likewise, successive modifications to the Defence Act have clarified (and expanded) how part-time forces can be used. Nonetheless, there remain disparities in the conditions of service as they apply to regular and reserve forces, while the recall, vetting and training of SERCAT 2 and 3 personnel has not been tested.

Collective training. The training required for the static duties performed by garrison battalions was minimal. Widely describing it as 'refresher training', the Army took the risk that even with a 20-year hiatus, former soldiers could be brought back up to a certain standard quickly. The two-week course was pared back to only the basic skills needed for the role. Even so, the Army made sure that the professional instructors of the AIC were available to conduct the training. As the Army was structured around geographically based regional commands or military districts, this training was conducted at distributed centres in each area. A syllabus was provided, but the training itself was executed in a decentralised manner. It proved to be fit for purpose, just in time, not exquisite, and later sufficient to train off-the-street recruits to a 'good enough' standard.

The VDC was hampered by the part-time nature of its service and the limited availability of weapons and ammunition. This made reaching a minimum standard difficult, despite the best efforts of instructors and the dedication of the VDC members themselves. This was further exacerbated later in the war when the VDC had to crew searchlight, coastal and anti-aircraft batteries, which had a higher technical training liability.

If force expansion for home defence is required in the future, the garrison battalions will provide an excellent example of a useful lower-tier force with a substantially reduced training burden—and that training can be conducted in several distributed locations. Even so, the experience of the garrison battalions highlights how a small investment in high-quality trainers paid off in the quality and quantity of the training throughput.

Major systems. There were no major systems, as understood in the modern FIC construct, that were part of the garrison battalions and the VDC. In many ways, that was the very attraction of these two types of auxiliary formations: they offered value for money compared to AIF or militia divisions. Although not major systems of the VDC, searchlight, anti-aircraft and coastal defence batteries were nonetheless crewed by its member in the latter stages of the war. These were the anti-access/area denial (A2AD) systems of their day. What A2AD systems might be required in the future? Who will crew them? Does technology afford an 'ease of use' dividend that would allow older or medically downgraded personnel to contribute to the A2AD home defence system?

Supplies. Necessarily, the garrison battalions and the VDC were a lower priority than the AIF and the militia. Generally, garrison battalions had sufficient quantities of key classes of supply to undertake its missions. The issuing of older uniforms and weapons was not only an appropriate use of war stocks but also had no detrimental impact on garrison battalions' effectiveness. The VDC, by comparison, struggled to maintain even a rudimentary level of effectiveness, with training ammunition in particular being in short supply. If a capability is expected and needed, then it must be funded and supplied appropriately. While risks can be taken and corners can, in extremis, be cut, a 'minimum viable capability' still incurs a cost. The garrison battalions achieved a minimum viable capability but the VDC probably did not. This can be reduced to a simple explanation: one was funded and supplied sufficiently, while the other was not.

Support. Noting the historical context of the period studied, it is difficult to make any real assessment of the 'support' provided to these two organisations. However, as one was part of the Army and the other was only partially so, it is not surprising that the VDC was often orphaned from the wider home defence support system.

However, if a more expansive view of support is taken, some different and interesting insights emerge. What of 'society as support'? Both the garrison battalions and the VDC in particular relied on the support of the RSSAILA. Likewise, both organisations (especially the VDC) lived in the Australian community and, with the 2nd AIF overseas and the militia deployed into various covering positions, garrison battalions and the VDC were the face of the Army in the community. In return, by being based at home, both organisations were supported (to varying degrees) by the military districts and line of communications headquarters. This allowed the Army to take more risk in using older and medically restricted personnel; both organisations were closer to the military and civilian medical systems in urban and regional Australia.

Perhaps the most important 'support system' in a home defence context is the integration with civilian police forces. In the Second World War, both organisations understood this; any future home defence organisation must understand it also.

Facilities and training areas. The garrison battalions used a combination of extant military training areas, vacated militia drill halls, sports and show grounds; and, where none of these existed, hired privately owned buildings for their headquarters and accommodation. Tents were seen as only a temporary fix. There was a far larger extant military footprint of drill halls—many built for earlier universal service schemes—than exist in modern Australia. Home defence is likely to require extensive hiring of real estate and facilities to provide the necessary raise, train, sustain and headquarters footprints, made more complex and expensive by a reduction in the Defence estate.

One benefit of the VDC was that it had a minimal facilities requirement. When on duty, it largely used extant facilities (although some did in fact need to be hired in the first instance), and when off duty, VDC members went home to their own accommodation.[82] Any future home defence plan should consider an option of a 'serve at the base, sleep at home' model for some types of part-time service.

Conclusion

Though based on the Second World War experience, analysis of the role that Australian garrison battalions and the VDC played in national defence remains relevant today and for the future. Both organisations provided economical capabilities due to the use of older and medically downgraded personnel and older equipment. In doing so, both freed up younger and fitter personnel for more demanding tasks. However, any expanded home defence capability, no matter how innovative in its use of personnel, will not be cheap. The garrison battalions and the VDC still required training, equipment, rationing, accommodation and personnel support. Conditions of service and concepts of employment will likewise need to be determined if such force expansion is undertaken again—especially if it is to be generated to the scale it was between 1939 and 1945.

About the Author

Colonel Dayton McCarthy CSC is the Director Force Modernisation and Futures at Headquarters 2nd (Australian) Division. A defence analyst in his civilian career, he is the author of several books including *The Once and Future Army. A History of the Citizen Military Forces, 1947-1974, The Battle of Maryang San, The Oboe Landings* and *The Worst of Both Worlds: an analysis of urban-littoral combat*. His latest book on the history of the 2nd (Australian) Division was released in May this year.

ENDNOTES

1 ‘Diggers Answer the Call’, *The Newcastle Sun*, 2 October 1939, p 7.

2 ‘RSL Volunteer Defence Corps’, *The Gloucester Advocate*, 17 September 1940, p. 3.

3 The PMF comprised the small cadre of Duntroon-trained staff corps officers, the professional NCO instructors of the Australian Instructional Corps (AIC), and the permanent gunners and engineers who operated the coastal batteries.

4 The term refers to Prime Minister Robert Menzies’s radio broadcast informing the Australian population that the country was at war with Germany. During the broadcast, he asserted that ‘our staying power, and particularly the staying power of the mother country, will be best assisted by keeping our production going; by continuing our avocations and our business as fully as we can; by maintaining employment and with our strength’. See James Morrison, ‘The Australian Militia at War, 1939–1945’, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2022, p. 22.

5 The shortened acronym ‘RSL’ was also used widely at the time.

6 ‘Emergency Reserve Particulars, *The Port Stevens Pilot*, 12 May 1939.

7 AWM 52, 8/7/5/1, ‘1st Garrison Battalion, September–December 1939’, war diary entry for 24 September 1939.

8 ‘Forming Garrison Battalions’, *The Advocate*, 29 September 1939.

9 ‘Garrison Battalion’, *The West Australian*, 28 September 1939.

10 AWM 52, 8/7/15/1, ‘11th Garrison Battalion, October–December 1939’, war diary entry for 6 October 1939.

11 AWM 52, 8/7/6/2, ‘2nd Garrison Battalion, January–June 1940’, ‘Nominal Roll—17 June 1940’.

12 Ibid.

13 ‘Selection of Men for Garrison Battalion. Returned Soldiers “Sorely Disappointed”’, *The Advocate*, 5 February 1940. The doctors conducting the assessment were either Australian Army Medical Corps members, doctors on the Reserve of Officers or civilian GPs hired by the Army. The list of medical conditions tested was extensive, with eyesight, hearing and skeletal deformities paid particular attention to. See Allan S Walker, *Australia in the War of 1939–1945 Series 5 (Medical): Volume II, Middle East and Far East* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1953), pp. 34–36 and p. 422.

14 AWM 52, 8/7/10/1, ‘6th Garrison Battalion, September–December 1939’, war diary entry for 23 October 1939 and 11 November 1939; AWM 52; 8/7/16/1, ‘12th Garrison Battalion, October 1939–February 1940’, war diary entry for 22 January 1940.

15 ‘Men Required for Garrison Battalion’, *The Advocate*, 1 December 1939.

16 AWM 52, 8/7/10/1, ‘6th Garrison Battalion, September–December 1939’, ‘Routine Orders’, November 1939.

17 Likewise, after the garrison battalions were established, members attended ongoing promotion and other specialist courses as required.

18 ‘Garrison Battalions’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 October 1939.

19 The AIC was a specialist corps of NCO instructors analogous to present-day Australian Regular Army training warrant officers in an Army Reserve battalion. Staff corps officers were Royal Military College Duntroon graduates who served in key roles in the militia such as adjutant and brigade major. AWM 52, 8/7/6/1, ‘2nd Garrison Battalion, October–December 1939’, war diary entry for 16 October 1939.

20 ‘Refresher Course for Diggers’, *Brisbane Telegraph*, 18 October 1939.

21 Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of Its Organisation* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 137; and Graham R McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide: The Australian Army, 1939–1945*, Volume 2 (Newport: Big Sky Publishing, 2018), pp. 2389–2409. McKenzie-Smith’s six-volume collection is the definitive work on the organisation of the Army in the Second World War. It chronicles every unit raised and demonstrates the sheer size and breadth of the Army, giving due recognition to the largely unknown units that stayed home in Australia to support either home defence or forces deployed abroad.

22 ‘Refresher Course for Diggers’, *Brisbane Telegraph*, 18 October 1939.

23 ‘Gaiters Out Puttees. Uniform Change in Army’, *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 18 October 1939.

24 McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*, Volume 2, pp. 2389–2409.

25 'Home Defence. Returned Soldiers for the 13th Reserve Garrison Battalion', *The Queanbeyan Age*, 14 March 1941.

26 Note that contemporary sources such as newspapers referred to the organisation as the 'RSL VDC' In time, the organisation was simply referred to as the 'VDC'.

27 Palazzo, *The Australian Army*, p. 186.

28 Obviously this arrangement was predicated on the presence of a proximate garrison battalion and thus was an opportunity largely afforded to VDC units in metropolitan areas.

29 'Call to Old Diggers to Join Reserve', *The Sunday Mail*, 27 April 1941.

30 Dayton McCarthy, 'The First Half Measures: The Australian Militia and the Fitful Path to Mobilisation, 1939–1941', *Australian Army Journal* 20, no. 3 (2024): 172–174.

31 AWM 52, 8/7/1/1, '1st Garrison Brigade, October 1940–December 1942', war diary entry for 1 May 1942.

32 AWM 52, 8/7/10/1, '6th Garrison Battalion, September–December 1939', 'Special Order No 1', 20 December 1939.

33 Graham R McKenzie-Smith, *Australia's Forgotten Army: Volume 2 The Ebb and Flow of the Australian Army in Western Australia—1941 to 1945* (Chapman: Grimwade Publications 1994).

34 AWM 52, 8/7/19/1, '15th Garrison Battalion, September–December 1940', '15th Garrison Battalion', 1 December 1940.

35 AWM 52, 8/7/5/1, '1st Garrison Battalion, May–December 1942', war diary entry for 5 July 1942.

36 AWM 52, 8/7/15/1, '11th Garrison Battalion, October–December 1939', 'Report on VPs', 9 November 1939.

37 Coastal, heavy artillery was a distinct subset of the prewar permanent artillery.

38 AWM 52, 8/7/24/1, '20th Garrison Battalion, December 1941–July 1942', 'Command—Close Protection Units', 11 February 1942.

39 AWM 8/7/24/1, '20th Garrison Battalion, December 1941–July 1942', 'Operation Order No 2', 22 March 1942.

40 AWM 52, '2nd Garrison Battalion, January–June 1940', multiple war diary entries.

41 AWM 52, 1/7/34, 'Western Command, August–November 1939, Part 1', 'Arrests of and Shooting by Sentries at Civilians', 27 October 1939.

42 AWM 52, 8/7/22/1, '18th Garrison Battalion, January–February 1942', 'Routine Orders Part I—Power to Fire on Suspected Persons', 12 February 1942.

43 National Archives of Australia (NAA), SP16/4, 1057, 'Hire of Broughton School', 'Requisition of Property, EC (AH) 1057', 20 February 1942.

44 AWM 52, 8/7/29/1, '25th Garrison Battalion, April–June 1942', 'Field Return of Other Ranks', 4 April 1942; 'Field Return of Officers', 5 April 1942; and multiple entries in the war diary detailing daily occurrences. If a Lutheran padre was not on the establishment, often a local pastor visited the camps to administer to the internees.

45 Previously the garrison battalions had reported to the military district / regional command in which they were located.

46 McKenzie-Smith, *The Unit Guide*, Volume 2, pp. 2, 126–122, 129.

47 AWM 52, 8/7/14/11, '10th Garrison Battalion, January–June 1946', war diary entry for 20 June 1946.

48 Graham Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps, 1940–1945', Master of Arts thesis, University of New South Wales, 2016, p. 24. Philpot's thesis provides excellent context for this lobbying, including the RSL's political influence at the time and its involvement (tacit or otherwise) with the various 'private armies' of the interwar period. Together, these illustrate some of the reasons why the government was reluctant to countenance another type of 'private army' run by the RSL.

49 As noted previously, the organisation was referred to as the 'RSL-VDC' using the shorter version of the organisation's acronym.

50 Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps', pp. 39–41, 8–51.

51 Ibid., pp. 53–55.

52 NAA, P617, 534/1/16, 'Report by Commanding Officer, Number 2 Battalion re: Volunteer Defence Corps', 'Letter by Mr J.C May, 9 February 1942'.

53 Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps', pp. 56–57.

54 NAA, P617, 534/1/16, 'Report by Commanding Officer, Number 2 Battalion re: Volunteer Defence Corps', 'Letter by Col A.C Blacklow, CO No 2 Bn VDC', 10 March 1942.

55 Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps', pp. 68–74.

56 AWM 52, 36/1/7/1, 'Headquarters Volunteer Defence Corps Tasmania, June 1940 – December 1943', war diary entry for 27 May 1941.

57 Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps', pp. 83–90; and NAA, B6390, 'Routine Orders Part 2, Corps Headquarters Volunteer Defence Corps Queensland, Order (Officers Only)', 1 November 1943.

58 NAA, SP 1048/7, S9/5/48, 'Duties to be performed by Volunteer Defence Corps', Minute, 7 February 1942.

59 Ibid.

60 NAA, SP 1048/7, S9/5/73, 'Minute: Volunteer Defence Corps', 16 April 1942.

61 NAA, MP 508/1, 286/701/1019, 'Guarding of Vulnerable Points by the Volunteer Defence Corps, Minute from WA L of C Area to Allied Land Force Headquarters', 10 September 1942.

62 NAA, P617, 534/1/13, 'Volunteer Defence Corps Posts', 'Home Guard—Lilydale Municipality', 27 December 1941.

63 Ibid.

64 NAA, P617, 534/1/78, 'Employment of VDC Personnel in Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence', Minute 264/14/178, 23 June 1943.

65 NAA, P617, 534/1/14, 'VDC Launceston, Complaint re: organisation', 'Minute from Commandant', 6 MD, 27 January 1942.

66 NAA A2676, 1882, 'War Cabinet Minute No 1882—Volunteer Defence Corps', 10 February 1942; NAA A2671, 343/1941, 'War Cabinet Agendum, No 343/1941, Partial Mobilisation of AMF', 11 December 1941.

67 Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps', p. 93.

68 NAA, MP 508/1, 286/701/1039, 'Volunteer Defence Corps Quarterly Strength Returns 30 June and 30 September Australia Wide', 'Weekly Strength Return, Volunteer Defence Corps FTD and PTD Week Ending 25.9.42'.

69 NAA, SP 1048/7, S9/5/73, 'Minute: Volunteer Defence Corps', 16 April 1942.

70 NAA, 1979/574, Folder 1, '6th Battalion VDC', 'Training', 16 December 1942.

71 AWM 52, 36/1/7, 'Headquarters Volunteer Defence Corps Tasmania', war diary entry for 15 December 1941.

72 NAA, SP 1048/7, S10/1/650, 'Use of Volunteer Defence Corps in demolition and defence duties', 'Employment of VDC of FTD', 6 June 1942.

73 NAA 1979/574, Folder 1, '6th Battalion VDC', various untitled ammunition receipts and range instructions, circa mid-1942.

74 NAA, 1979/574, Folder 1, '6th Battalion VDC', 'Training', 16 December 1942.

75 NAA, 1979/574, Folder 1, '6th Battalion VDC', 'No 6 Batt VDC Training Programme, 1942–1943', n.d.

76 AWM, 52, 361/5/1, 'Corps Headquarters Volunteer Defence Corps, Queensland 1943—March 1943', 'Pro Forma for VDC (Q) Intelligence Report', no date.

77 Philpot, 'The Volunteer Defence Corps', pp. 114–118.

78 Ibid., pp. 90–102.

79 'Final VDC Parade Was a Gigantic Affair', *The Gundagai Independent*, 8 October 1945.

80 The author notes the existence of 10 FIC but has not considered 'industry' and 'data' due to the lack of applicability to this subject matter.

81 For more on this consideration, see Dayton McCarthy, 'Anything but Simple and Clear Cut: The Utility of Mission Command Within Domestic Security and Response Operations', *Australian Army Journal* 21, no. 3 (2025).

82 This was greatly facilitated by the fact that the VDC did the night and weekend shifts and so were not occupying facilities while the parent units were present.

LAND FORCES IN THE DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA: THE NEED FOR A *KRIEGSBILD* FOR THE ROLE OF ARMY AND ARMY RESERVES IN MAJOR WAR

Stephan Frühling

For the first time in many decades, the defence of the Australian continent is now at the core of Australian defence policy. What consequences flow from this for the role of the land force in general, and of the Army Reserve in particular? Understanding the role of the 2nd (Australian) Division (2 Div)[1] (and possibly a re-raised 3rd (Australian) Division) today requires consideration of three related but quite different questions: What is the role of land power in great power conflict facing Australia? What role within that is suited to Reserve formations? And how do armed forces think about future conflict in a way that can help develop coherent answers to these questions?

This article argues that the latter question is crucial for Army today. In a period of rapid reorganisation and change, there is an ever-present danger of latching onto specific ideas about capability, concepts or organisational structures on the basis of decontextualised historical analogies or nascent technological development. Rather than engaging with the changing character of war or implications of geography in abstract, general terms, or with specific tactical or operational concepts and challenges in isolation from their political context, Army must develop a coherent image of future war—or *Kriegsbild*—that captures the implications for land power of future war in the specific technological, geographic, and geostrategic and political context of Australia today.

Current policy prioritises ADF operations in and from Australia's north and its northern approaches, where the 1st (Australian) Division (1 Div) would contribute to denial and deterrence through littoral operations. But Australia's strategic centre of gravity in war against great powers was and remains its economic, logistic and political ability to remain in the fight against an adversary that has the ability and motivation to directly attack its main centres of population and industry. From a historically informed *Kriegsbild* of

the defence of Australia in major war, the article develops implications for coastal and territorial defence that point to the centrality of the Army Reserve, the strategic role of 2 Div and arguments for a possible re-raised 3rd Division.

Regular and Reserve Forces and the Impact of Changing Policy Concepts

Defence planning needs to link the structure and posture of a country's armed forces with the threats that a nation seeks to be able to meet with armed force.[2] For the regular land forces, different frameworks bring changes in the balance between the combat arms branches, in the geographic scope of future operations (with resulting implications for strategic mobility and the expected climate, geography and human terrain for operations), and—especially if conscription can swell the ranks—overall size. Current changes to 1 Div that focus it on littoral operations in Australia's approaches are but the latest of such changes, which include the 'core force' of the 1970s and 1980s; the post-1987 Army structured for low-level conflict in the north, which culminated in the 'Army in the 21st Century' and 'Restructuring the Army' transformation of the late 1990s;[3] and the 'Plan Beersheba' structure that supported continuous and concurrent global operations of limited scale.

But beneath these fluctuations there is also a considerable permanency on which the regular Army can form a more enduring identity and purpose.[4] Its members and units can expect to deploy and operate together. Regardless of the threat environment, the regular Army remains the nation's custodian of professional mastery of arms in the land domain, and thus has an incentive—one might say a duty—to remain concurrent with the changing technological character of war on land. Whatever its role in the overall defence strategy, the reason for its existence ultimately lies in its character as a force-in-being able to seek out to capture or destroy the enemy, to hold and to take terrain in major battles.

In contrast, the role and identity of the reserve component of Army is much less fixed, and impacts of changes in the strategic policy framework on it are even more profound.[5] Indeed, one can argue that while the purpose of the regular Army is to provide a capacity for combined arms manoeuvre in (relatively) short-warning conflict, serving as an enduring anchor, it is the changes in the role and structure of the reserve component that provide the necessary flexibility for land forces as a whole to adapt to changes in the strategic context. Hence, historically reserve forces have been skeleton units for eventual mobilisation (as during the 'core force era'), personnel pools for the round-out of regular units with individual personnel (especially in the 1990s and beyond), or formed units akin to those in the regular force (at lower readiness) to as a second echelon (in the 1987 Defence of Australia (DoA) framework). Some have or had unique and

enduring operational responsibilities in their own right, such as the Force Surveillance Unites, that complement but are significantly different from those of the regulars, but require similar readiness timescales to those of the regular force. But despite this variability, the role of reserves has often received much less attention than that of the regular force. Hamish Mundell uses the term 'first battle bias':

> 'The natural tendency of institutions [is] to prepare for the most immediate, visible challenge. Forces that must demonstrate readiness are under pressure to prioritise capabilities that are rapidly deployable, easily exercised and politically expedient. This creates an incentive to invest in exquisite platforms and headline capabilities; and a corresponding tendency to neglect less demonstrable forms of resilience such as reserve forces, deep stockpiles and industrial mobilisation'. [6]

Army and the Defence of the Australian Continent

When examining the strategic role of 2 Div and the role of Army Reserve in general, it is thus particularly important to examine the broader strategic context in which we conceive of having to defend Australia. In the era of Imperial Defence, local dominion defence was part of a broader strategic framework that had as its core the ability of the Royal Navy and the Commonwealth collectively to deploy and concentrate forces across the globe. The main implication at the time was that the threat would be (amphibious or air) raids rather than invasion, leading to an Army organisation in Australia that emphasised coastal and territorial defence of main population centres. In the era of forward defence, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) withered as attention shifted to 'forward defence' in South-East Asia.[7] When Australia grappled with the question of how to prepare for its defence when there was no obvious threat to the continent after the Vietnam War, it first tried to prepare for future conflict through the 'core force' concept. Army adopted a light-medium-heavy brigade structure in its regular Army to maintain professional skills, but structured for its ability to expand to a total of five divisions for counter-invasion operations.[8] After the 1986 Dibb Review, the answer then changed to a focus on 'low' and 'escalated low' level conflict in the north, loosely modelled on Confrontation with Indonesia.[9] This new approach led to the 1st Brigade moving to Darwin and the development of the Bushmaster for mobile operations in the north. In the era of the 'balanced force' of the early 21st century, any practical requirement for DoA then seemed to reduce to supporting civil power in domestic counterterrorism, border protection (including through Army's Regional Force Surveillance Units) and disaster relief.

That era has now also ended. The 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS) endorsed the recommendation of the 2023 Defence Strategic Review (DSR) for the ADF to become a 'focused force' and called for '[a]n Army optimised for littoral manoeuvre with a long-range

land and maritime strike capability'.[10] The brigades of 1 Div are thus being reorganised and co-located with new amphibious vessels in Australia's north. The DSR called for Army Reserve brigades to 'provide area security to the northern base network and other critical infrastructure, as well as providing an expansion base and follow-on forces', and for 'select capabilities' within them to be 'postured in Northern Australia'.[11] Commander of 2 Div, Major General David Thomae, commented in 2023 that his division thus 'must generate, deploy, and then sustain security and response task units to protect key areas in Australia's north', and 'be able to do so quickly or at least with minimal warning time'.[12]

Debating the Role of Land Forces

But littoral operations in, from and beyond Australia's north are only a very partial answer to the question of what is the role of land power in the defence of Australia as a whole. The notion of littoral operations in the north says little about the wider conflict within which they would need to be conducted—and hence also little about the operational or political motivations of an adversary to attack Australia itself. As Mark O'Neill has pointed out, the notion of 'littoral operations' is rather unmoored from any clear notions of what these operations are to achieve, and in what circumstances.[13]

In the context of the adoption of 'adaptive campaigning' in the ADF, Chris Smith bemoaned in 2018 that Army tended to spend a lot more time on purported solutions than on analysis of the problem it had to solve. According to Smith, Army had an institutional bias towards 'intentional' concepts that focus on developing and refining a prescribed approach or solution, resulting in concepts that were an awkward mix of unduly specific and definite statements with banal generalities.[14] He contrasts this with the way the German Reichswehr developed the concepts for what was later termed *Blitzkrieg* in the 1920s and 1930s as an example of exploratory development, noting:

> 'Rather than begin with a clear end or goal in mind, one begins with a question expecting that in the attempt to answer it, something valuable will emerge'.[15]

This then raises the issue of how we should frame the questions about future conflict to which Army's preparations can be developed as the solution, in a way that avoids the pitfalls of both 'intentional concepts' and 'first battle bias' (and a general lack of interest in supposedly undemanding home defence).

In Australia, geography[16] has long animated debates about the meaning of DoA[17] and its links with Australian strategic culture,[18] and it echoes in notions of the 'land–sea–air gap' and 'land bridge' to Australia's north—notions that are also conveniently apolitical in a country where any naming of potential adversaries remains politically fraught.[19] If not in geographical terms, the 'changing character of war'[20] can be dissected as to its various

facets from the influence of urbanisation,[21] to drone technologies, to its impact on the profession of arms, while equally staying on safely apolitical grounds.[22] But examinations of geography and character of war, or the 'intentional concept' of littoral warfare, are ultimately not very fruitful avenues for thinking about future conflict if they are not grounded in an examination of the actual wars the nation is preparing to fight. Colin Gray highlights that in the context of the 'vital distinction drawn by Clausewitz between war's "grammar" and its policy logic', it is important to consider both in context:

> 'Future warfare, viewed as grammar, requires us to probe the probable and possible developments in military science concerning how war could be waged. From the perspective of policy logic, we need to explore … motivations to fight'.[23]

Army is far more comfortable situating its role in discussions of the former than in the latter. Compartmentalisation focuses on practical problems and minimises straying onto sensitive grounds. The NDS itself emphasises 'littoral manoeuvre' and denial while avoiding a discussion of the kind of conflict in which these would need to be applied.

It is tempting to argue that the question of what future conflicts to prepare for is one for government, informed by intelligence and political assessments of the international environment, with armed forces simply being shaped in response to strategic guidance. But strategic guidance tends to be indeterminate in terms of many practical implications, and does not absolve Army of its responsibility as the nation's custodian of land power to question, develop, test—and contest—the role of land power in meeting the nation's strategic challenges. How can Army not just engage with geography, character of war or specific 'intentional concepts' but also explicitly integrate what Gray termed 'the motivations to fight', by Australia and its future adversary, into the thinking about the role of Army in the defence of the continent?

Kriegsbild: Imagining Future War in a Defined Setting

Chris Smith is not the only observer to highlight the German development of *Blitzkrieg* as an example of military innovation and adaptation. Rather than (just) the result of a specific procedural approach, military innovation and adaptation in the German Army in the 1920s was grounded in a way of war that was shaped by the enduring challenge of how to wage war if surrounded by generally larger adversaries in a continental, logistically well-developed theatre. Geography and changes in the character of war were crucial for how Germany approached this problem—but not in isolation from each other, or from the political context and objectives in and for which Germany expected to go to war.[24]

Since at least the early 20th century, and to this day, Germans thus discuss future war through a term that has no direct English equivalent, which captures the totality of the

geographic, technological, societal and political aspects of the future war that the nation is preparing for. The term *Kriegsbild*, literally 'image of war',[25] emphasises the unity of future war from the individual-tactical to the political-strategic and societal level.[26] It is grounded in Clausewitz's dictum that war can take different forms,[27] and focusing on the *Kriegsbild* reflects his comment:

> 'The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish … the kind of war on which they are embarking'.[28]

A *Kriegsbild* thus never exists in the abstract but always refers to the image of the war that is underlying defence preparations in a specific country at a specific time.

In German (and Austrian) writing, examining the underlying *Kriegsbild* is thus used as a way to examine how different countries structure their forces for war,[29] as well as for practical questions such as the qualities and competencies required by military leadership and officer corps.[30] It rose to particular prominence in the Cold War as the question of how to prepare for a major land war on a nuclear battlefield was a pressing and daunting question with profound implications for technology, operational concepts and doctrine, defence strategy and society, as well as even the individual soldier's motivation to fight.[31] Today, Germany's 2026 equivalent to the NDS, which explicitly places Germany as a geographic and strategic linchpin for collective defence of Europe against Russia, also contains a chapter entitled 'Kriegsbild' that examines implications of technology as well as adversary strategy in such a conflict—noting for example that 'Our adversary will deliberately undermine the distinctions between homeland and battlefield, civil and military, internal and external security, war and peace, and combatant and noncombatant'—and highlights the need for national resilience 'in view of Russian interference'.[32]

Even if the term *Kriegsbild* itself is rather Teutonic, developing a coherent image of war that synthesises geographic, political and technological considerations into an overall image of war suitable to guide defence preparations is not uniquely German.[33] Of particular note is the development and evolution of the US War Plan Orange for war with Japan in the interwar years. Taking the guise of an operational plan, it correctly predicted the overall phasing of the war in the Pacific based on the consideration of possible causes of war in their geographic context, and led to the development of key capabilities including amphibious doctrine, long-range submarines and patrol aircraft.[34]

Rather than approaching future war through decontextualised discussion of geography, character of war or intentional concepts, if we are to examine what the defence of Australia means for the ADF and Army we must thus ask: what is the 'image of war' or *Kriegsbild* that we have in mind as the war in which Australia needs defending?

Since 2020, Australian defence policy has squarely focused on the risks from great power competition and conflict. But there are significant differences between competition and limited or major war.[35] The 2023 DSR observed that it was important to:

> 'assess different potential levels of conflict, as the core strategic risks in each are different. This is critical to ensure Defence priorities are developed on the basis of the levels of conflict that are credible now and for the foreseeable future, and the time available to develop military capability to respond'.[36]

But despite the above recommendation, levels of conflict have not been taken up in the public version of the 2024 or 2026 NDS. Hence, it is thus not surprising that the 2024 Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves primarily advanced workforce issues rather than the strategic role of the reserves in general, and 2 Div in particular. To borrow Clausewitz's dictum, the Australian government has yet to make 'the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment … to establish … the kind of war on which they are embarking'. But that does not mean that the concept of a *Kriegsbild* is not useful for understanding different levels of conflict in which Australia itself will be under direct threat.

The *Kriegsbild* of Low-Level (or 'Grey-Zone') Conflict

Historically, the 1987 turn to the north during the DoA era occurred on the basis that Australia was preparing for 'low-level' or 'escalated low-level' conflict, with a hypothetical regional adversary that had strong parallels with Sukarno's Indonesia during Confrontation.[37] The fictitious Kamarians that were the training adversaries for generations of the Australian Army reflected Indonesia's tactics during Confrontation[38] and caused endless frustration among Army members of the period who found themselves on exercises guarding water tanks and other infrastructure against possible sabotage. In terms of technology, Australia only contemplated regional adversaries that lacked long-range force projection capabilities beyond the north; and sought to maximise its 'capability' edge from access to advanced technology—'asymmetry' in today's parlance. In theory, even then, Australia's strike capabilities through F-111 and submarines provided it military options other than protracted defensive operations in the Top End. But in practice, political-diplomatic considerations by both sides in what would today be called 'grey-zone' or 'hybrid' conflict would have placed significant limits on such escalation.

While this *Kriegsbild* arose from hypothetical conflict with Indonesia, its core tenets also remain valid for grey-zone conflict with a great power. In conflict where competition escalates to covert and overt political-military pressure, political constraints on escalation remain paramount for both sides: for Australia, as it would seek to avoid escalation

against a great power; for China, because its strategy of grey-zone coercion seeks to avoid open use of armed force that would trigger a wider international reaction. The 2020 Defence Strategic Update, for example, expressly specified that the ADF should operate to 'prevent … coercive or grey-zone activities from escalating to conventional conflict'.[39]

As in the 'low-level' conflict of old, Australia's strategic centre of gravity would be the ability to keep domestic, economic-political and international diplomatic costs of managing a conflict at tolerable levels.[40] The strategic role of the ADF, including Army, would be to reassure the public through presence and demonstrated ability to react to provocations, work with international partners to demonstrate that Australia was not isolated, and maintain civilian life and enable continued economic activity in the country if we were harassed by adversary air and naval forces. The ability of 1 Div to maintain persistent presence for collective deterrence in the archipelago to Australia's north and to provide military and political support to regional partners through forward presence[41] would be an important element of this, as would be the ability of 2 Div to secure rear areas and military bases, maintain situational awareness and project anti-access capabilities from within Australia's north. All of this is very much consistent with the overall policy direction of the 2024 and 2026 NDSs, with their emphasis on littoral operations, counter-coercion through denial, and collective deterrence—although the 2023 DSR explicitly required the new 'focused force' to leave the tenets of 'low-level conflict' behind.

A Historically Informed *Kriegsbild* of the Defence of Australia in Major War

There is, however, also a second, coherent *Kriegsbild* of a conflict in which the Australian continent comes under attack, which leads to notably different priorities and roles for land forces—and it is the kind of conflict that Australia actually fought in 1914 and 1939–1945. In major war with a great power, restraints on escalation, if they exist at all, are mostly limited to fears of retaliation in kind, rather than stemming from political-diplomatic considerations. Victory rests not on exploiting political, diplomatic and legal restraints and conventions below the threshold of open war, but on the physical disruption and destruction of the enemy's armed forces, and the economic and political exhaustion of its society. Against a great power and in major war, Australia's strategic centre of gravity is the societal will, economic strength and military capacity required to stay in the fight, despite direct and indirect attacks on Australia's centres of population and industry.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Army posture for the defence of the continent was thus very different from that which emerged in the 1980s, and focused on the defence of major population centres in the east, south and south-west. Regular personnel manned coastal defence batteries at all of Australia's major port cities, and manoeuvre units—which,

given fiscal constraints, were largely skeleton units of the part-time militia of the day—were aligned to repel raids against main centres of population and industry.[42] As spending increased in the late 1930s, priorities were again placed on coastal defences, and on increasing the ability to defend the industrial centres of Sydney and Newcastle in particular.[43] After 1939, making up for perennial underfunding of the militia organisation had to compete with the concurrent raising of the Second Australian Imperial Force. But Army did create regional defence commands and assign substantive forces to local defence tasks in all major population centres at the outset of war in Europe, with the Eastern District (Newcastle and Sydney) as the 'centre of gravity for home defence during this period'.[44]

This does not mean, of course, that there would not be fighting in the north. In 1914, an Australian expeditionary force evicted the German presence in New Guinea. In 1942–1944, US and Australian forces turned back the Japanese advance through the same islands, and Darwin and other ports and airfields were repeatedly bombed. But in the end the German bases were a problem for the same reason for which the Japanese sought to push into the South-West Pacific: to interfere with Australia's logistic and economic links to its allies, to disrupt Australian and allied mobilisation, and ultimately to be able to deploy force against Australia's main centres of industry and population to end Australia's participation in the war by force. Given the technology available at the time, access to bases in Australia's northern approaches would have been necessary for direct Japanese attacks on Australia's main centres of population and industry to become economically and politically crippling.

But the mantra of the post-Vietnam era that a threat to the continent must come 'from or through' the archipelago was already not true in either of the world wars. Japan mounted strikes across vast geographic distance against major basing areas to destroy Allied naval forces and disrupt and delay their ability to mount a counteroffensive. This includes the major carrier raid against Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941, and the raid against British bases on Ceylon in April 1942—a raid that could as easily have been directed against Australia's main bases at Fremantle and Perth. Submarines ranged all around the Australian coastline,[45] laid mines, sank ships (including inside Sydney Harbour), and in mid-1942 shelled Newcastle[46] (as well as Ellwood in California).[47] In both world wars, German 'auxiliary cruisers'—converted civilian vessels with concealed armaments—disrupted maritime communications. Given technology at the time, their ability to attack land targets was limited, but KMS *Emden* landed forces to destroy the cable station at Cocos Islands in 1914.

In the end, the attempt by Axis powers to interrupt the British Empire's mobilisation had only limited success in both world wars, and the Axis powers' attempts to quickly overwhelm Western democracies before they were ready for major war failed in 1940–1941. But in the two world wars, direct and indirect targeting of the adversaries'

homelands to undermine their industrial economy, food production and national will were key elements, including the Allied blockade of Germany in World War I, unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany in both wars (and by the US against Japan), and strategic bombing from Germany's Zeppelin and Gotha raids in World War I, and the mass destruction wrought by conventional (and, in the end, nuclear) strategic bombing in World War II. The priority placed on the defence of Australian centres of population and industry in the interwar years thus reflected enduring strategic incentives and dynamics in major war, even if the combination of remote geography and limitations on technology meant that Australia (like Canada and the continental United States) was far less directly exposed to attacks on its homeland than most other countries.

The Need for Persistent Coastal and Air Defence

The strategic dynamics that have shaped interwar defence preparations and the pattern of conflict in both world wars are thus substantially different from those which have shaped common understandings of DoA since 1986. What technological and strategic considerations would need to be taken into account in developing these historically based patterns into a coherent *Kriegsbild* for the defence of Australia in major war today? What does this mean for what will be required of Australian land forces, and the role of the reserves in particular?

A first point relates to the overall pattern and phasing of the conflict. The basic pattern of war in the Pacific that was correctly predicted by War Plan Orange consisted of a rapid, surprise attack to destroy adversary forces in the Western Pacific, so as to maximise the window of opportunity for Japan before the US and Commonwealth could recover and project substantial combat power across the wide distances of the theatre; this was followed by a phase to halt the Japanese advance, and then slowly roll it back and attrit Japan's forces (and economy) in a long war.[48] This phasing was rooted in geography, the relative disposition of forces, and the (correct) assumption that major war would be initiated by Japan and at a time of its choosing. All of these factors apply in equal measure to China today, leading to predictions of very similar phasing for a major US–China war.[49] It is thus useful to think about future major war in terms of an initial attack with limited warning that aims to destroy and disrupt military forces across the Pacific, if not the globe, followed by consolidation and a likely protracted war thereafter.[50]

Targets in Australia whose destruction would be feasible and that would materially affect the near-term battle in the Western Pacific at the outset of such a war would include submarines and major surface combatants, especially in ports; major aviation fuel stocks; aircraft that would enable long-range operations from and beyond the continent (especially the RAAF's KC-30 tanker, E-7 Wedgetail AWACS, P-8 anti-submarine, MQ-4 Triton surveillance, MC-55 Peregrine electronic warfare

and C-17 transport planes), and some communications and intelligence facilities. As in World War II, Australia's role would increase in importance over time as US forces flowed from North America to Australia's northern bases, so general disruption of Australia's international lines of communication by attacks on harbour and airport infrastructure—much as German raiders caused disruption in the world wars—would be militarily beneficial, if only by binding mobile air and naval forces and complicating convoy schedules and routing. Air attacks on northern air bases (and the infrastructure that supports them) may help delay the flow of US forces but, given the distance and number of munitions required to disable air bases for long periods of time, may well be of a lesser priority in the initial stage.

Australia will still benefit from geography. The cost of deploying ordnance onto the main home bases and sustainment areas of the ADF in south-east and south-west Australia is very expensive as it requires intercontinental missiles or scarce long-range delivery platforms, especially strategic bombers with air-launched ballistic missiles, or naval surface-action groups or submarines that can launch land-attack cruise missiles.[51] In the initial stage of a conflict, such launch vehicles and munitions are likely to have higher priority employment in the Western Pacific, although major naval surface vessels and submarines in port would likely be tempting targets. The circumnavigation of the continent in early 2025 by a Chinese surface-action group also demonstrates that presence of such capabilities around all of Australia is likely to become increasingly normalised.

But the advance of technology and China's huge commercial transport and fishing fleets multiply the opportunity for such disruption, compared to the world wars. Given old Soviet programs and, at the time, Iranian and Indian experimentation with firing ballistic missiles from barges, covert shipborne attack using ballistic missiles was already part of US (and Australian) discussions of national missile defence systems in the 1990s and early 2000s.[52] Today, thousands of container vessels ply the globe's oceans, many coming directly from overseas ports to Australian waters.[53] China is developing modern-day versions of Germany's 'auxiliary cruisers'—ostensibly civilian vessels which could wield containerised missile batteries, including for land attack, and which could be deployed near major international ports at the outset of a major conflict.[54] There have been numerous attempts by Chinese nationals to gain access to or fly drones over sensitive military sites in a range of countries.[55] Ukraine's Operation Spider's Web, in which it destroyed a significant number of Russian long-range bombers using covertly deployed short-range drones,[56] also demonstrates a new attack vector that could be used by such vessels if closer to shore or in harbour.[57]

A key consideration for the role of land forces in the defence of Australia arising from this is the need to provide defence against air (cruise missile) and drone attack for targets

whose destruction would have a direct impact on the ability to deploy air and naval forces into the Western Pacific within the first few days and weeks of the conflict. Many, if not most, of these targets will be in southern states, especially ships and submarines in naval bases and naval repair facilities in Fremantle/Henderson, Adelaide and Sydney; RAAF Edinburgh, Richmond and Williamtown in South Australia and New South Wales; the Navy Ammunitioning Facility at Twofold Bay; and national command infrastructure in the Canberra region. A key element of the *Kriegsbild* of major war must thus be that the Army and the ADF have to be prepared to find themselves under direct kinetic attack right from the start of the conflict, and in the heart of the population centres in which they—and their families and other loved ones—reside. This has profound consequences for the psychological preparation and readiness for conflict, as well as for the organisation of Army and the role, composition and posture of the Reserves.

Given the importance of surface vessels as possible launch platforms for cruise missile and drone attack, anti-ship capability is an integral, left-of-launch part of air defence in the southern part of the continent. Especially in the early stages of a war, when there will be hundreds, if not more, of unvetted and uninspected but potentially hostile civilian vessels on the worlds' oceans, protection against surprise attack will require robust enforcement of maritime quarantine zones and inspection before ships are allowed to proceed to within strike range of the coastline. While enforcement will call for strike assets, inspection will require civilian control of shipping and small boat (and possibly helicopter-borne) operations. RAN reserves once did provide port force protection and civilian control of shipping, and operated coastal and auxiliary craft in past wars, but they are not currently structured, resourced and trained to so today.[58] While such operations may also draw on civilian assets, the regional brigades of 2 Div would probably have important supporting roles to play, as would deployable radars of the kind Army is, in small numbers, acquiring to support long-range fires.[59]

As the initiative at the strategic and tactical levels in this stage would lie with the enemy, coastal air and anti-ship defence of fixed installations calls for exactly the characteristics that Army itself has identified as its main contributions to the NDS: presence (to provide reassurance to the population), persistence and value.[60] If anyone argued in the 1920s or 1930s that Army coastal defence batteries would not be required since the RAN could park a battleship off every port, they were rightly not heard. And yet, given the still rather small number of both NASAMS and HIMARS systems and associated radars in Army and their concentration with 10th Brigade, a lot of this defensive burden today would fall on more expensive, more vulnerable and less persistent RAAF and RAN assets.

Besides inadequate numbers, we thus need to question the concentration of the Army's air and coastal defence assets with 10th Brigade. Operators of the air defence and anti-ship capabilities for Australia's main population centres need to be familiar with the

local conditions and be able to operate in an urban environment, including civilian air and naval traffic and a dense electromagnetic spectrum. They do not need to be trained and equipped for strategic mobility, but they will require significant (organic) close-range drone defence capabilities against pre-positioned threats from within the large urban areas within which they will operate.

Given that the initiative lies with the enemy, these radar, air defence, anti-ship and counterdrone capabilities need to be in place before the outset of hostilities, raising the key question of when this deployment should occur, its political significance, and possible hesitation to take this step in a crisis. The threat and cost may not justify permanent deployment of such defences, as Japan practises with a permanent installation of a Patriot system on the grounds of its Ministry of Defence in Tokyo. But in addition to the operational benefit of training as one fights, regular exercising of these systems in major population centres can normalise their deployment politically and for the local population and make it less escalatory to activate them in a crisis. Serious consideration thus needs to be given to transfer of radar, air and anti-ship defence assets to regionally aligned units in the reserves, where they could be operated by personnel drawn from the local area.[61] This would leave 10th Brigade free to focus on supporting littoral manoeuvre forces, and allow the differences between expeditionary and stationary operations of these systems to be reflected in different tables of organisation and training.

The Societal and Protracted Nature of Major War

After the adversary's initial campaign in the Western Pacific culminates, a major war is then likely to enter a protracted phase wherein both sides seek to rebuild forces, undermine each other's industrial ability to do so, and seek victory through attrition and exhaustion. The ability to maintain military operations in the north will be increasingly taxing as attrition of forces and infrastructure takes its toll. In the Top End, 1 Div, as well as RAAF and allied forces, will depend on rear-area security and logistics support that will have to surge through mobilisation of 2 Div. Given the small local population in the north, these forces will continue to have to be raised and deployed from the southern population centres, and be able to operate in austere environments. The increasing need to disperse air assets, in particular, for survivability will only raise the need for such support across large areas. Hence, there will continue to be a need for the ability to mobilise forces within the Army Reserve who can deploy and operate across the large distances of the continent and the austere environments of a logistically denied north.

As the war progresses, conventional munitions will run low and long-range attack capabilities will be attrited on both sides. Unfortunately, this does not mean that the threat to and challenge of operating in the north will decline. Exactly as conventional

operations become more challenging, there is a real possibility of escalation to limited nuclear use.[62] Loss of nuclear escalation control in a widely dispersed maritime theatre like the Indo-Pacific would probably be a lesser risk than it was in the concentrated, land-based theatre of Cold War Europe. US and Australian forces operating out of remote bases in northern Australia would in that case be particularly attractive targets: they are not located in US territory; nor would attacks in the Top End cause large-scale civilian collateral damage; and they are sufficiently remote to make it plausible that they could have remained relatively unscathed by intense conventional fighting up to that point. Today, the Australian Army retains some limited decontamination capability within 7th Brigade.[63] But there is little doubt that ability to recover and reconstitute operations on a nuclear battlefield will require the raising of far more substantial chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) capabilities than exist today. For 1 Div, this will mean increasing organic capabilities in units that are likely to be operating dispersed in littoral operations. In contrast, 2 Div would be a suitable formation to develop more substantial, dedicated capabilities to support post-attack reconstitution for the joint force across the north.

The exhaustion phase of the conflict will, however, also place particular challenges in Australia's core centres of population and industry. In this phase, the number of relevant targets will significantly expand and may even include purely symbolic ones whose destruction may aim at demonstrating impunity, undermining national will and dividing Australia from its allies via a separate peace: the logic of coercive strategic bombing has a very mixed historical record,[64] but that does not mean that countries have stopped trying. Widespread disruption could be caused by non-kinetic means in the cyber and space domains. If an adversary saw a political opportunity to undermine Australia's will to stay in the fight, they might well surge significant forces, such as nuclear submarines armed with long-range strike missiles, for a strike campaign that would aim to achieve politically significant destruction. 'Will Australians really have the stomach to stay in a war after the Opera House or Sydney Harbour Bridge lie in ruins?', the adversary may ask themselves. If not prepared, Australia runs the risk of finding out.

What seems clear is that the need for air (and to a lesser extent naval) defence of major population centres will persist throughout the conflict. In addition to air and coastal defence, the ability to provide widespread critical infrastructure protection against sabotage and special forces (and now also drone) attacks, and to deal with large-scale disruption of basic services, will also be critical in protracted conflict. While the general need for widespread deployments is in little doubt, determining the specific objects requiring protection, tasks to be undertaken, and specific basic services that will break down, requires not only separate analysis but also acceptance of a significant amount of residual uncertainty.

The global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted Australia's vulnerabilities arising from supply chain disruptions, but these experiences would pale in comparison to the consequence of total cessation of trade with China. Disruption of cyber and space domains could bring daily life to a halt: the financial system heavily depends on GPS timing signals for electronic transactions, for example,[65] and simply maintaining the physical distribution of food and other essential items to the population could become a major challenge if such systems break down. In part, specific priorities will also depend on the enemy's strategy. For example, the naval blockades of World War I and World War II, and US targeting of fertiliser factories in its plans for a long war with the Soviet Union,[66] all demonstrate that maintaining the ability to grow and distribute food for urban societies is a vulnerability that adversaries can and do target in protracted major war. Japan and South Korea depend on imports for more than 50 per cent of their food supply,[67] and it is not inconceivable that, in a long war, at some stage Army might find itself protecting critical elements of the agriculture sector such as seed and fertiliser production.[68] What is in little doubt is that the ability of the Australian Commonwealth (and states) as a whole to mobilise, deploy and sustain personnel to protect essential infrastructure and maintain daily life will far outstrip the capabilities currently existing in Australia's Army Reserve.

Territorial Defence Before and During Conflict

The need for increased territorial defence capabilities will not arise only in later stages of a major war. Real and imagined sabotage will be a real challenge through damage to critical infrastructure as well as to social cohesion even in a pre-conflict time of major tensions. In fact, it is already a well-documented feature of modern state-on-state conflict that is enabled by new technologies. Russia today is conducting an extensive campaign of sabotage using criminals for hire recruited in Europe via the internet,[69] and Iran used the same approach to sponsor terrorist attacks in Australia in 2025.[70] In Europe, suspected Russian drones have been sighted over a range of sensitive installations, leading to significant public concern.[71] Ostensibly civilian merchant vessels in international waters or exercising their right of passage seem to be a major factor in these campaigns.[72] Mass internment of enemy nationals, as happened in both world wars, seems almost inconceivable today—certainly short of open war. But this only increases the importance of maintaining a dispersed and visible presence to deal with actual and perceived threats of sabotage.

Hence, even in a situation where Australia is 'only' subject to a concerted grey-zone campaign of political-military pressure, there is a high likelihood that this will generate a requirement for dispersed force and asset protection, and visible presence not least for

reassurance of the Australian population. 2 Div is creating the ability to generate 'security and response' task units within its brigades, but these would be 'force generated from within all units within a brigade',[73] and thus hollow out other units required to support operations in the north. In practice, this means that if 2 Div were also activated for its other tasks, most of the fixed asset protection in Australia's main population centres today would still be left to police forces with little surge capacity, or to civilian contractors. While ostensibly a civilian law-enforcement issue during a grey-zone conflict, the potential scale of these threats, the military need to be able to control force protection capabilities to conduct operations, and the different legal basis and practical approach to the use of force by law enforcement and armed forces in wartime mean that—as throughout history—territorial defence has to be a military function, not purely a civilian one.

In the past, Australia had a residual capacity to mobilise personnel for such roles in its militia and later CMF forces.[74] European countries that are now rebuilding capability for major war are also once more raising territorial defence forces of significant size. France, for example, announced in 2026 that it will create a new 3rd Division consisting largely of reservists for territorial defence tasks. This builds on a significant expansion of its army reserves through new entrants, which is already underway, with an average age of 38 years (as opposed to 32 years for the regular Army).[75] It is also introducing a voluntary 10-month national service scheme for personnel who would only serve within France itself.[76] Germany also established a *Heimatschutzdivision* (homeland defence division) in 2025, which is to grow to a 'high five digit' number of personnel and will mostly draw on voluntary national service and direct recruitment of reservists who want to serve to protect their local area.[77]

In contrast, the Australian assumption seems to be that, if required, there would be time to generate such forces through recall of inactive reserves and new recruitment—even assuming that the political decision to undertake such a momentous step in a crisis would be taken in a timely manner. This assumption seems to have little basis in light of the *Kriegsbild* for either grey-zone or major war laid out herein. Hence, serious consideration needs to be given to a significant expansion of the reserves to create new territorial defence units. Insofar as their core task would be closely related to aid to the civil power in peacetime and crisis, these units should be held at relatively high readiness for that role, but the training, physical standards and equipment of such forces does not need to reflect the different role of the infantry manoeuvre units in the current formations of 2 Div. Overseas examples such as France and Germany suggest that dedicated units which are (only) trained and equipped for local defence tasks would provide a distinct and meaningful motivation for service, including for those willing to serve a gap year in the ADF.

Conclusion

The question of what the defence of Australia entails for Army is something of a paradox. On the one hand, generations of officers have dissected, critiqued and at times lambasted the historical concept and policy of DoA in countless discussions and staff course papers. On the other hand, in political debate as well as in defence policy discourse, the term has become increasingly unmoored from the specific questions of against whom, why, and how Australia would have to fight in its own defence, and what this war might entail for the ADF and the country.

Understanding the role of land forces in the defence of Australia requires an image of war—a *Kriegsbild*—that places geography and technology into the political and strategic concept of a future conflict and can guide understanding of the implications of future conflict from the Chief of Army down to the individual enlisted soldier. If Army is to prepare for the defence of Australia, it must develop an image of the war it will have fight to do so, including the political constraints and motivations of Australia and the adversary in that war; keep debating and developing that image over time; and place the role of regular and reserve forces within it. Dispersed and amphibious 'littoral operations' will be an important part of this, not least for collective deterrence and defence as part of the alliance and coalition in which Australia would fight. But they are a sensible answer if the question is 'What kind of (supporting) operations should 1 Div be able to conduct beyond the continent?'—not if the question is about the role of land forces in the defence of Australia overall.

The considerations in this article are only a starting point for such a debate, and should be further tested and contested. But they already raise significant questions about the alignment of current preparations with likely demands. For operations in the north, considering the role of 2 Div as a rear-area support force that protects the bases from which the joint force can project into the region to Australia's north is appropriate, although the relatively low capabilities in CBRNE point to some challenging questions about the preparedness for escalation. But the strategic centre of gravity in a major conflict with a great power is the military and political wherewithal to stay in the fight, even as the adversary can project force against Australia's main population centres. Operations in the north can mitigate that ability to some extent but not remove it, and the land force must carry primary responsibility for the defence of Australia's main centres of population and industry and key military facilities in the south of the continent against direct and indirect attack.

Two tasks are inherent in this. The first is persistent coastal and air defence, including radars for surveillance. There seems little reason why these could not be provided by reserve units, which would enable 10th Brigade to focus on support to the manoeuvre

forces of 1 Div in austere regions in the north, including in littoral operations. Training and tables of organisation for both should reflect their stationary versus expeditionary wartime roles. Reserve air and coastal defence units need to be familiar with the specific electromagnetic, geographic and human urban context in which they would operate, and need to guard against sabotage, including covert drone attack. Their wartime deployment in the heart of some of Australia's largest cities needs to be normalised through exercises and reduce the political significance of increased readiness in crisis. As Hamish Mundell put it, ultimately 'it is irresponsible to conceal the prospect of war from a population you will call on for second and third echelon reinforcements'.[78]

The second task is the provision of significant numbers of personnel for territorial defence that need to be able to mount static defence of critical infrastructure and provide support to civil authorities. What they do not need to be able to do is operate as manoeuvre forces in austere environments. International comparisons suggest that they would probably be required in divisional size, but also that a distinct unit identity and mission of defending their local (state) communities could well be a profile that is able to attract new recruits or gap-year personnel who may be deterred by the implied need to deploy in the infantry units of the current 2 Div. Decades of base 'rationalisation' have made raising such units increasingly challenging, but the stationary role and light equipment need of such units should make it more feasible to base them on an equally light geographic footprint, which might for example make use of existing infrastructure such as larger council depots.

In combination, the operating context and required capabilities for the defence of major population centres are quite different from 2 Div's continuing role in reinforcing the north. Both are concurrent needs. Hence, for cultural as much as organisational reasons, the re-raising of a 3rd (Australian) Division focused on non-deployable, territorial defence units should be given serious consideration. For this new division, Garden Island rather than Shoalwater Bay will be a representative training environment.

Light infantry in Australian urban areas, air defence and anti-ship missiles on Sydney heads, and physical destruction from cover and overt, kinetic and non-kinetic attack in the heart of Australia's cities—the *Kriegsbild* that needs to guide Army and the role of Army reserves in the defence of the continent is very different from that of the 1987 White Paper that remains so influential today. Reflecting a realistic *Kriegsbild* of major war will thus have profound organisational as well as psychological consequences for all of Army—as well as ultimately the Australian population, who will inevitably be able to observe these changes. Army does have historical precedents for coastal defence and territorial roles that have, for many decades, seemed outdated and irrelevant—but so after all, we thought, was the possibility of major war. This has now changed, and Army will have to change with it.

About the Author

Professor Stephan Frühling researches and teaches at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, and has widely published on Australian defence policy, defence planning and strategy, nuclear weapons and NATO. Stephan was the Fulbright Professional Fellow in Australia-US Alliance Studies at Georgetown University in Washington DC in 2017. He worked as a 'Partner across the globe' research fellow in the Research Division of the NATO Defense College in Rome in 2015, and was a member of the Australian Government's External Panel of Experts on the development of the 2016 Defence White Paper.

ENDNOTES

1 2 Div is a formation for the 'raise, train and sustain' function that reports to Army Headquarters. Its operational form when activated is Joint Task Force 629, reporting to Joint Operations Command. Likewise, its regional brigades become joint task groups on operations. For simplicity's sake, this article will refer to '2 Div' throughout in both contexts.

2 Stephan Frühling, Defence Planning and Uncertainty: *Preparing for the Next Asia-Pacific War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

3 Renée Kidson, 'Army in the 21st Century and Restructuring the Army: A Retrospective Appraisal of Australian Military Change Management in the 1990s', Masters thesis, Australian National University, 2016, at: http://hdl.handle.net/1885/117069.

4 Or 'Theory of the Army'.

5 For a discussion of different approaches to mobilisation in Australian policy in the DoA era, see Stephan Frühling, Graeme Dunk and Richard Brabin-Smith, 'The Concept of Mobilisation and Australian Defence Policy Since Vietnam: Lessons and Cautions for Army in the Post-DSR World', *Australian Army Journal* 20, no. 3 (2024): 215–244.

6 Hamish Mundell, 'The Long War: Fighting Beyond the First Battle', *Royal United Services Institute* (website), 20 October 2025, at: www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/long-war-fighting-beyond-first-battle.

7 Dayton McCarthy, *The Once and Future Army: A History of the Citizen Military Forces 1947–74* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

8 David Connery (ed.), *The Battles Before: Case Studies of Australian Army Leadership After the Vietnam War*, Australian Military History Series no. 3 (Canberra: Army History Unit, 2016), pp. 1–25.

9 For the difference between planning and force structuring approaches of the 'core force' and Dibb Review, see Frühling, *Defence Planning and Uncertainty*.

10 Department of Defence, *National Defence Strategy 2024* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), p. 40.

11 Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), p. 58.

12 Robert Dougherty, '2nd Australian Division Transitions to Security and Response Role', D*efence Connect*, 16 October 2023, at: www.defenceconnect.com.au/land/12974-2nd-australian-division-to-transition-to-security-and-response-from-2025.

13 Mark O'Neill, *In Denial: The ADF and Littoral Manoeuvre,* Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 26 (Canberra: Australian Army Research Centre, 2025).

14 Chris Smith, 'On Future Thinking and Innovation: How Military Concept Writing Can Unwittingly Suppress Innovation', *Australian Army Journal* 14, no. 1 (2018): 121–140.

15 Ibid., p. 133.

16 Andrew Carr, 'What Is Australia's Strategic Metageography? Island, Continent or Archipelago?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 80, no. 2 (2026): 226–245.

17 See, for example, Michael Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance: Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of War 1901–2005*, Study Paper No. 306 (Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2005).

18 See, for example, David J Kilcullen, 'Australian Statecraft: The Challenge of Aligning Policy with Strategic Culture', *Security Challenges* 3, no. 4 (2007): 45–65.

19 Richard Dunley, 'Australian Defence and the Nebulous "Archipelago"', *The Interpreter*, 19 March 2025, at: www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australian-defence-nebulous-archipelago.

20 See for example the 2024 essay competition of the Army's *The Cove* site on 'The Changing Character of War', at: https://cove.army.gov.au/article/cove-competition-2024-changing-character-war.

21 Major General Chris Field, 'Adapting to the Changing Character of War in the Indo-Pacific Region: Three Australian Army Innovations for Mass Urbanisation in the Littoral', *The Cove*, 29 November 2024, at: https://cove.army.gov.au/article/adapting-changing-character-war-indo-pacific-region-three-australian-army-innovations-mass-urbanisation-littoral.

22 Chief of Army Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession', speech, Australian National University National Security College, 25 November 2024, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2024-11-25/challenges-australian-army-profession.

23 Colin S Gray, *Another Bloody Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005), p. 39, cited in Warren Chin, *War, Technology and the State* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023), p. 88.

24 See Robert M Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005).

25 Words and terms shape thinking, and despite the large number of (19th century) German military concepts and terms, especially originating with Carl von Clausewitz and Hans Delbrück, that have become adopted in either German or translated form in other languages (such as *Kesselschlacht*, *Schwerpunkt*, *Abnützungskrieg* (war of attrition), *Auftragstaktik* (mission command) and *Friktion*), *Kriegsbild* remains a concept largely limited to the German-language discourse. For example, the German title of André Beaufre's *La guerre révolutionaire: les formes nouvelles de la guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 1972) was *Die Revolutionierung des Kriegsbildes: Neue Formen der Gewaltanwendung* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1973).

26 For one of the few English-language discussions of the need to have a holistic 'image of war', see Carl H Builder, *The Masks of War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 115–123.

27 Johann Schmid, 'Das Kriegsbild im 21. Jahrhundert und Seine Strategischen Ableitungen für Europäische Streitkräfte', *Strategie und Sicherheit* 2014, no. 1 (2014): 415–427.

28 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976 [1832]), p. 88.

29 E.g. Schmid, 'Das Kriegsbild im 21', pp. 415–427; Friedrich Wiener, *Die Armeen der NATO-Staaten: Organisation, Kriegsbild, Waffen und Gerät* (Munich: JF Lehmann, 1968).

30 Jörg Keller, 'Der Militärische Führer nach dem Jahr 2000: Analyse des Einsatz-/Kriegsbildes und Ableitung von Qualifikationsanforderungen an den militärischen Führer', *Sicherheit und Frieden* 17, no. 2 (1999): 77–83.

31 See Florian Reichenberger, *Der Gedachte Krieg: Vom Wandel der Kriegsbilder in der Bundeswehr* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), pp. 33–62. Major General Wolf Graf von Baudessin, a leading figure in the early Bundeswehr, wrote several books on the question of the evolving *Kriegsbild* in the 1960s.

32 Ministerium der Verteidigung, *Gesamtkonzeption Militärische Verteidigung* (Berlin, 2026), pp. 15–17. Quotes are from the English edition. While the German edition entitles the relevant chapter 'Kriegsbild', in the English version this has simply become a more general 'Warfare', while the French version—more poetic even than the German term—uses the title 'Physionomie de la guerre', or 'Physiognomy of war'.

33 See also Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017).

34 See Edward S Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

35 Stephan Frühling, 'Reassessing Australia's Defence Policy (Part 2): What Are Our Strategic Priorities?', *The Strategist*, 31 January 2020, at: www.aspistrategist.org.au/reassessing-australias-defence-policy-part-2-what-are-our-strategic-priorities.

36 Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), p. 50.

37 See Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 1986), pp. 52–55.

38 Jim Sinclair, 'The Evolution of Australian Army Training Adversaries: 1948–2018', *Australian Army Journal* 15, no. 1 (2019): 95–115. While the Kamarians most closely resembled Indonesia during Confrontation, Indonesia also received significant Soviet arms supplies and—as is now known—direct aid from Soviet personnel for possible operations against Dutch West Papua in 1962. See David Easter, 'Active Soviet Military Support for Indonesia During the 1962 West New Guinea Crisis', *Cold War History* 15, no. 2 (2015): 201–220.

39 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence Strategic Update 2020* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2020), pp. 27–29, 35.

40 Ibid., pp. 27–29, 35.

41 Stephan Frühling and Andrew Carr, *Forward Presence for Deterrence: Implications for the Australian Army*, Occasional Paper No. 15 (Canberra: Australian Army Research Centre, 2023).

42 Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, Centenary History of Defence vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 83–86.

43 Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901–2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 113–123.

44 Dayton McCarthy, 'The First Half Measures: The Australian Militia and the Fitful Path to Mobilisation, 1939–1941', *Australian Army Journal* 20, no. 3 (2024):162–184, quote from p. 169.

45 See David Stevens, *A Critical Vulnerability: The Impact of the Submarine Threat on Australia's Maritime Defence, 1915–1954*, Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs No. 15 (Canberra: Sea Power Centre, 2005), especially Appendix V.

46 '75-Year Anniversary of Night Newcastle Was Shelled by Japanese Submarine During WWII', *ABC News*, 8 June 2017, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-08/75-year-anniversary-of-night-newcastle-was-shelled-by-japanese/8575490.

47 Vic Cox, 'Submarine Shelling of Ellwood Oil Field in 1942', *Santa Barbara Independent*, 2 October 2011, at: www.independent.com/2011/10/02/submarine-shelling-ellwood-oil-field-1942.

48 Miller, *War Plan Orange*, pp. 19–38.

49 Rowan Allport, *War Plan Taiwan: Oplan 5077 and the U.S. Struggle for the Pacific* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2026), pp. 195–215.

50 On the issue of a protracted war, see also Hal Brands, *Getting Ready for a Long War with China* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2022).

51 For a discussion of the vulnerability of Australia to strikes originating in the Chinese homeland, see Peter Dean, *Protecting the Homeland: Accelerating Ground-Based Air and Missile Defence for Australia* (Sydney: USSC, 2025), pp. 7–8. Of note, this is also a difference from the United States, which is within range of cruise missiles launched from Russian (and soon Chinese) long-range bombers. Hence, it maintains significant air assets to defend against this threat. As US defence planning focused again on major war with Russia or China after 2014, US homeland defence squadrons received radar and other upgrades to improve their ability in the counter–cruise missile defensive role (John A Tirpak, 'Saving Old Fighters', *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, 28 July 2017, at: www.airandspaceforces.com/article/saving-old-fighters). Analysis by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments has identified an enduring need for 140 non-stealth fighters for homeland defence against cruise missiles (Mark Gunzinger, Carl Rehberg, Jacob Cohn, Timothy A Walton and Lucas Autenried, An Air Force for an Era of Great Power Competition (Washington: CSBA, 2019), pp. 126 –129).

52 See Stephan Frühling, *Ballistic Missile Defence for Australia: Policies, Requirements and Options*, Canberra Paper on Strategy and Defence No. 151 (Canberra: ANU, 2003), pp. 24–25.

53 In 2022–23, 6,103 vessels made 16,840 trips from overseas directly to Australian ports. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, *Australian Sea Freight 2023–24* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025), p. iv, at: www.bitre.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/asf-2023-24.pdf.

54 Zane Tremmel, 'Containing the Threat of Containerized Missiles', *War on the Rocks*, 6 January 2026, at: https://warontherocks.com/2026/01/containing-the-threat-of-containerized-missiles; Ethan Gossrow, 'Container Ship Turned Missile Battery Spotted in China', *Naval News*, 25 December 2025, at: www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2025/12/container-ship-turned-missile-battery-spotted-in-china.

55 E.g. Gordon Lubold, Warren P Strobel and Aruna Viswanatha, 'Chinese Gate-Crashers at U.S. Bases Spark Espionage Concerns', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 September 2023, at: www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/chinese-gate-crashers-at-u-s-bases-spark-espionage-concerns-cdef8187; Manolo Serapio Jr, 'Marcos "Very Disturbed" as More Suspected Chinese Spies Surface', *Bloomberg*, 31 January 2025, at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-01-31/marcos-very-disturbed-as-more-suspected-chinese-spies-surface; Lee Hae-rin, '11 Chinese Spying Attempts Detected on Airbases in Past Year: NIS', *The Korea Times*, 30 April 2025, at: www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/society/20250430/11-chinese-spying-attempts-detected-on-airbases-in-past-year-nis.

56 Daniel Fiott, 'Enemy in the Crates: The Risks of Pre-Deployed Covert Payloads for European Defence', *Brussels School of Governance: Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy*, 16 June 2025, at: https://csds.vub.be/publication/enemy-in-the-crates-the-risks-of-pre-deployed-covert-payloads-for-european-defence.

57 Pre-deployment of such systems into Australian territory cannot be excluded, but would carry risk of discovery through customs and afterwards that make this a less plausible option. China also controls vast numbers of high-sea fishing trawlers through its 'maritime militia' (Jason Fang, 'These Fishermen in the South China Sea Get Paid for Their Time on Water—Not to Fish', *ABC News*, 24 April 2026, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-24/south-china-sea-state-funded-fishing-boat-militia/106570054; Alison O'Neil and Daniel Shats, Silent Shadows: *Tracking Disguised PRC Vessels in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea* (Washington: Institute for the Study of War, 2026).) These vessels could be used for sea mining and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in areas with no overt People's Liberation Army Navy presence. Precedents for such covert capabilities include the commerce raiders of both world wars, and Libya in 1984 also probably used a civilian freighter to deploy mines in the Red Sea that damaged several vessels (See Central Intelligence Agency, 'Mining of the Red Sea', 28 August 1984, at: www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R001301990001-0.pdf). Clearing Australia's maritime approaches from such vessels would be another high-priority task in the initial stages of a conflict, although one that would fall more to RAN and RAF as well as the riverine and littoral capabilities in 1 Div.

58 Jennifer Parker, 'Reinvigorating Australia's Naval Reserve', *The Interpreter*, 3 February 2026, at: www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/reinvigorating-australia-s-naval-reserve.

59 Richard Marles, 'Investing in Australian-Made Radars to Support Army's Long-Range Fires Capability', media release, 12 February 2025, at: www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2025-02-12/investing-australian-made-radars-support-armys-long-range-fires-capability.

60 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2024), pp. 21–22.

61 The US Army National Guard, for example, also operates Patriot units using part-time personnel.

62 Andrew Metrick, Philip Sheers and Stacie Pettyjohn, *Over the Brink: Escalation Management in a Protracted War* (Washington: CNAS, 2024).

63 Robert Dougherty, 'ADF Decontaminates Heavy Vehicles During Hazards Testing', *Defence Connect*, 22 June 2023, at: www.defenceconnect.com.au/land/12204-adf-decontaminate-heavy-vehicles-during-hazards-testing.

64 Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996).

65 Dan Glass, 'What Happens If GPS Fails?', *The Atlantic*, 13 June 2016, at: www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/06/what-happens-if-gps-fails/486824.

66 Scott D Sagan, *Moving Targets: Nuclear Strategy and National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 44–47.

67 See summary of FAO data at: https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/net-food-trade-as-a-share-of-domestic-supply.

68 That Australia is itself heavily dependent for many agricultural inputs just reinforces this point.

69 Piotr Arak, 'Russia's Shadow War: How the Kremlin Uses Sabotage to Wear Down Europe', *Atlantic Council* (website), 20 November 2025, at: www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russias-shadow-war-how-the-kremlin-uses-sabotage-to-wear-down-europe.

70 Kirsty Needham, 'Iran Link to Australian Synagogue Attack Uncovered via Funding Trail, Spy Agency Says', *Reuters*, 27 August 2025, at: www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/iran-link-australian-synagogue-attack-uncovered-via-funding-trail-spy-agency-2025-08-27.

71 Luke Cooper, 'Shadow Drone War Against European NATO Countries Blamed by Many on Russia', *ABC News*, 15 October 2025, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-15/russias-shadow-drone-war-against-europe-nato-explained/105867182; Daniel Salisbury, 'Drones Targeting European Nuclear Weapons Infrastructure', *IISSS*, 12 December 2025, at: https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2025/12/drones-targeting-european-nuclear-weapons-infrastructure.

72 Johanna Urbancik, 'Russian Spy Drones Over Germany Turn Into an Even Greater Threat', *EuroNews*, 10 September 2025, at: www.euronews.com/2025/09/10/russian-spy-drones-over-germany-turn-into-an-even-greater-threat.

73 Major General Matt Burr, 'Maintaining Momentum: The 2nd (Australian) Division's Response to the National Defence Strategy', speech, Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales, 31 March 2026.

74 See McCarthy, *The Once and Future Army*; and McCarthy, 'The First Half Measures', as well as other articles in the issue of the *Army Journal* in which this article appears.

75 Nathan Gain, 'L'armée de terre va se doter d'une troisième division', *Forces Operations Blog*, 18 April 2026, at: www.forcesoperations.com/larmee-de-terre-va-se-doter-dune-troisieme-division.

76 'France to Reintroduce Voluntary Military Service Amid Growing Threat of War with Russia', *ABC News*, 28 November 2025, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-28/france-to-restore-voluntary-military-service/106076506.

77 See 'Bundeswehr Plant Heimatschutzregiment im Großraum Berlin', *RBB24*, 18 January 2025, at: www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2025/01/berlin-brandenburg-bundeswehr-heimatschutz-division.html.

78 Mundell, 'The Long War'.

RESISTANCE AS A COMPONENT OF AUSTRALIA'S DETERRENCE BY DENIAL STRATEGY

Andrew Maher

Introduction

Australia's Department of Defence affirmed the centrality of deterrence by denial with the release of the 2026 National Defence Strategy (NDS). Deterrence will operate within the context of an evidently changing character of war, leveraging 'asymmetric operational advantage by combining innovative technologies with adaptive concepts of employment and command'.[1] The NDS asserted this objective, informed by lessons derived from the war in Ukraine and recent Middle Eastern conflicts, and rightly recognised the imperative to adapt command approaches and concepts to this rapidly changing character, particularly regarding uncrewed systems.

The NDS also offers a more subtle aspect of deterrence by denial that relates to our necessary conceptual adaptations with the introduction of the term 'national defence'.[2] Indeed, an entire chapter of the NDS is written on this topic, which seeks to improve civil preparedness and national resilience. This is new to Australian strategic documents and, being new, it requires analysis as to where it might lead.

The NDS offers little detail regarding what is meant by national defence, despite several parallels to what a dozen European nations term 'total defence' and to the wealth of doctrine and recent academic work oriented to this theme.[3] The language of total defence carries significant meaning by encapsulating the European response to today's changing character of conflict and competition; hence, it is worthy of detailed analysis in the Australian context. Total defence can encompass a broad range of societal resilience functions, many of which also include what are termed 'resistance' capabilities. This facet is exemplified by Latvia (2016), Lithuania (2017),[4] Estonia (2010 and 2022),[5] Czech Republic (2015),[6] Sweden (2015 and 2024)[7] and Finland (2017 and 2025).[8] Resistance has been defined as:

> a nation's organised, whole-of-society effort, encompassing the full range of activities from nonviolent to violent, led by a legally established government (potentially exiled/displaced or shadow) to re-establish independence and autonomy within its sovereign territory that has been wholly or partially occupied by a foreign power.[9]

In an Australian context, the threat of even partial occupation is very unlikely—but the threat is markedly different in Taipei, Manila, Tokyo, Seoul and Hanoi (and indeed, perhaps also in other countries). While national defence looks to be a major shift in Australia's conceptual and command approach to conflict preparations, similar concepts of improved resilience and civil–military coordination are being pursued by our regional neighbours. The under-explored form of adaptation that resistance concepts offer as part of a total defence strategy is highly relevant to Australia's region, given that European states now provide models that might be rapidly emulated particular to national context. Indeed, a comprehensive analysis of total defence doctrine (including analysis of what lessons might be drawn from the European experience) appears in recent and forthcoming Australian Army Research Centre papers.[10]

In our region, the acute sense of threat that certain countries perceive means that a resistance element within a form of total defence strategy either exists, might soon exist, or probably should exist. This description includes Indonesia's Total People's Defense and Security System (*Sistem Pertahanan dan Keamanan Rakyat Semesta: Sishankamrata*), Singapore's Total Defence,[11] the Philippines Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units, and possibly Taiwan's Overall Defence Concept (2021).[12] Indeed, Indonesia recently announced its intention to raise at least 150 new battalions to 'guard vital state assets', expanding upon traditional doctrinal ideas of 'protracted warfare, total people's defence and guerrilla warfare'—i.e. resistance—within the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Armed Forces).[13] Further, Australia has historically engaged in support to resistance warfare in the face of a more powerful aggressor. The vignette of Sparrow Force's resistance to the Japanese invasion of Timor during World War II is instructive in this regard.[14]

In short, Australia has seemingly well assimilated the need for technological adaptation, but the NDS's call for 'conceptual' or 'command' adaptations illuminates the potential for both unilateral actions and partnered efforts to support adaptation in our region. Conceptual and command adaptations might leverage the experience of European nations and, indeed, a broad range of recent lessons born from conflict.

This paper thus explores the issue of 'conceptual' and 'command' facets of asymmetry through the mechanism of support to resistance. This issue matters because the 2024 and 2026 NDS identified asymmetry as a central tenet of Australia's warfighting paradigm. It is also a prescient issue: Ukraine had between a 5:1 and 10:1 disadvantage across

most metrics of military power in February 2022, yet it managed to resist and grow a credible capability while in contact with the enemy. Yet Ukraine has thus far endured and has denied the more powerful actor its primary objective. In part, the use of uncrewed systems has aided in such efforts, but delegated command and control—employing unorthodox and innovative operational concepts—has also demonstrated the efficacy of such concepts. In other words, a focus solely upon technological asymmetry would misunderstand the full potential that the Ukrainian experience heralds.

A broader and more holistic exploration of asymmetry matters for Australia if it is to deter powerful adversaries from military offensive action in our region. Australia might anticipate that ADF elements projected forward into the region against the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) may well find themselves out-massed and out-gunned, like Sparrow Force. Army can learn from its own history, but recent conflicts have also demonstrated the efficacy of modern resistance warfare, which can inform our development of asymmetric concepts.

Resistance and Strategy in the Indo-Pacific During World War II

On 17 December 1941, Sparrow Force, consisting of the 2nd Independent Company, 2/40th Battalion, and approximately 1,000 Dutch troops, landed to defend Dutch and Portuguese Timor.[15] Sparrow Force was one of several forces that the Allies deployed forward across the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), Portuguese Timor, Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia. The original purpose of these forces was to support an air striking force from Darwin using forward advanced bases in the NEI at Ambon and Koepang.[16]

Sparrow Force's mission was soon overtaken by events due to the speed of the Japanese advance across a broad front. This speed was enabled by a range of factors, including technological evolution in carrier-based air power, combined operations and practised amphibious operations. Relevant to this inquiry, the Japanese also conducted years of 'grey zone' subversive activities and intelligence collection operations prior to Pearl Harbor. Indeed, the narrative of 'Asia for the Asiatics' landed on fertile soil in the then NEI and British Malaya, leading to 'fifth columnist' activity that supported Japanese operational campaigning.[17]

On 20 February 1942, the Japanese landed in Timor, while a guerrilla resistance was formed and centred upon the 2nd Independent Company (later the 2/2nd Independent Company (2/2 Ind. Coy)). Over a period of just under a year, and at the cost of some 50 members of the company, 1,500 casualties were imposed on the occupier.[18] These actions tied up nearly a division of Japanese troops in occupation duties and clearance operations against the 250-odd men of the 2nd Independent Company.[19] While 2/2 Ind. Coy was ultimately forced to withdraw to Australia, its well-trained, disciplined and

comparatively independent resistance to the Japanese bought time and denied the Japanese the use of troops elsewhere—an important consideration as the battles of Guadalcanal and the Kokoda Track were being waged.

Despite this gallant achievement, the vignette of the 2/2 Ind. Coy in Timor is not the ideal to which Australia should aspire. It was certainly heroic, but prudent strategy should steer clear of ad hoc situations which might otherwise have been avoided, or which might have been substantially enhanced. The British Special Operations Executive understood this lesson from the experience of the German invasions of Poland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France in 1939–40. Consequently, strategic decisions to prepare stay-behind networks were made to avoid these ad hoc situations. The logic was that the coordination of a local resistance force is far more difficult to achieve once a nation has been overrun. There was also hoped that such efforts might be apparent and could deter further Japanese expansion.[20] This history of British policy illuminates the failure to communicate resistance preparations and thus to contribute to the deterrence of the Japanese. This point matters; many European nations (notably, half of the 32 NATO member states) are currently employing resistance forces as a component of total defence, and these forces might frustrate an aggressor's efforts to achieve a fait accompli or a rapid decision—a deterrence by denial dynamic.[21]

Despite the failure of the communicative aspect of deterrence, British strategists learned the need to prepare stay-behind networks *ahead* of aggression. The British attempted to effect such efforts by working through the Commonwealth to create coordinated responses worldwide.[22] In South-East Asia, this effort was termed the Oriental Mission, which aimed to develop 'stay-behind' resistance forces in South Thailand; for equipping a strong stay-behind party in the New Territories, Hong Kong; and for fostering sabotage in Indo-China, Hainan, and the Treaty Ports.[23] Oriental also included the raising of Mission 204 in February 1941 to support the raising of 10 Nationalist Chinese guerrilla battalions that would force the Japanese Kwantung Army 'to lock up the maximum forces'.[24]

The Oriental Mission was supported by the establishment of No. 101 Special Training School (Scapula), raised in Malaya in July 1941, which trained 'stay-behind' operatives.[25] Scapula was inhibited in its preparations for resistance due to fears that it might trigger a loss of confidence in British military preparations. Scapula thus experienced a dilemma of preparedness versus discretion, similar to that of Mission 204.[26]
As war with Japan grew increasingly likely, Scapula famously engaged the Malayan Communist Party, establishing stay-behind teams totalling approximately 25 British and 150 Chinese soldiers across Malaya. There was simply not enough time for alternative or further preparations.[27]

The Oriental Mission was too little, too late—it had less than six months of preparations before war arrived. Its efforts did not include preparations in Portuguese Timor, nor

in the NEI. The modest efforts that *were* undertaken were hindered by British officers who viewed such preparations as 'defeatism'.

Interestingly, the intent of the mission to organise pre-prepared resistance was aided in execution by the phenomenon of *emergent* resistance networks following the Japanese invasion of certain countries. For example, in the Philippines, harsh Japanese occupation policies had led to a self-mobilising national network of Filipino guerrillas who fought local battles against the occupier. Over time, and working with isolated US Army officers, the Filipino resistance managed to tie down a staggering 150,000 Japanese troops in occupation duties in 1944.[28]

A third phenomenon emerged in South-East Asia during World War II which might best be termed 'nationalist resistance' and was best exemplified by events in Thailand. In 1941, Bangkok prudently cooperated with the Japanese to avoid confrontation. A rapid surrender to invading Japanese forces in December 1941 was an element of this non-confrontational posture. This allowed the Thais to maintain national sovereignty and to keep military and policing forces relatively intact. This policy position also included the development of clandestine networks that did not engage the Japanese in open hostilities. The network served to exfiltrate downed Allied airmen and prisoners of war, ultimately saving some 400 men.[29] The network additionally secretly trained Thai police and military personnel for paramilitary operations, ultimately creating a clandestine army 50,000–90,000 strong.[30] The secret force was therefore armed, distributed and disciplined, and upon the Japanese surrender it rapidly reasserted Thai government control.

One implication of this history is that countries, ethnicities and even local villages will respond to the rapidly changing situation that conflict precipitates. Occupied territories will incur a need for the occupier to rapidly assert dominance and control the conquered territories and populations, which might absorb significant combat power. Occupation, historically speaking, is highly likely to elicit a form of armed response by elements of the local population, who are very likely to be killed absent some form of training or preparation. The maturity within total defence strategies is to deliver relevant and tailored training to prevent emotive and ineffectual resorts to violence, and to instead tailor civil efforts towards subtle support to the joint force, such as intelligence, logistics support, flank security, and disruption in depth. Second, the Thai case demonstrates a nuance within internationalised conflict where a 'with us or against us' mentality is unhelpful and, indeed, may prove counterproductive. Finally, pre-prepared resistance efforts require time to build—waiting for conflict will only guarantee that any efforts will fail to deliver any value towards a coordinated defence. Furthermore, if no preparations for resistance are undertaken pre-conflict, they cannot contribute to an integrated deterrence message that might well cause an aggressor to avoid escalation in the first place.

The asymmetry demonstrated by the 2/2nd Ind. Coy against a much larger force is highly instructive. Resistance to the Japanese occupiers was primarily waged via ambush and with sharpshooters using hit-and-run engagements at long range, leveraging the hunting skills developed by many of the men in the company from living on the land in Western Australia. In other words, the skills that the men of 2/2 Ind. Coy brought with them from civilian employment were applied to military campaigning.

The lesson from such history becomes apparent if we work backward from the worst-case Australian context of escalation into conflict, involving an aggressor seizing territories from which coercive effects can be brought to bear against Australia's sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and potentially against the Australian continent. Today's modern version of guerrilla warfare against an occupier would tap into extant civilian skills in robotics and other STEM-related fields. The development of uncrewed systems extends the tactical range of the find, fix and finish targeting cycle of high-value targets out to hundreds of nautical miles, as has been well demonstrated by the Ukrainians against the Russian Black Sea Fleet.[31] What 2/2 Ind. Coy was doing with ambushes at 400–500 metres away may well be occurring at 400–500 kilometres today. Certain uncrewed systems will require civilian skills in robotics, engineering, fabrication, programming, use of civilian communications bearers, and open-source intelligence analysis. Conceptually, the idea that guerrilla warfare draws upon civilian skill sets and integration with a local population remains the same, even though the means of exercising violence is changing.

Furthermore, the analogy of 2/2 Ind. Coy might mislead given that it was an ad hoc response. Ideally the future guerrilla will not be Australian, the effector might not be West-manufactured, and the target acquisition and tracking method might leverage regional civilian systems. The analogy is also no longer land-centric; it may very well be persistent and multidomain by design that could threaten SLOCs in isolation and prove highly disruptive when layered with broader ADF joint capabilities. Indeed, the respective geographies of Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia yield tremendous latent power to influence the global economy utilising such concepts.

Unconventional Methods of Deterrence by Denial

A 2015 article discussed the challenges of neutralising an access-denial/area-defence (A2/AD) system—terminology that was ironically born from Iran's recognised capability to deter the United States by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz—and included scenarios that might be emulated in our region.[32] The enduring nature of the South China Sea's archipelagic geography is, as Robert Kaplan describes it, 'Asia's Cauldron'.[33] The logic of exploiting this geography to contain remains today. By working with partners for

basing arrangements and acquiring long-range anti-ship missile capabilities, the PLA Navy might face a similar dilemma to that which the United States presently faces in the Strait of Hormuz and at the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

The Chinese military is adapting to this reality, adapting its historical Maoist concepts to the contemporary context. Summarising the lessons born from a survey of the military history of China, Professor Harold Tanner argues that:

> China will still use 'people's war'—mobilisation of civilians and civilian infrastructure in support of the military. However, this mobilisation will no longer be a matter of organising logistical support for a guerrilla or infantry force. In its twenty-first-century iteration, the people's war has become the mobilisation of 'civilian scientific and technological capabilities … and resources … to support military operations'. The principle of 'active defence' has been refined from a homeland defense to a forward defense.[34]

In other words, Chinese military doctrine has legacy total defence concepts that have stood the test of time. Indeed, the campaign to seize the Paracel Islands in 1974 demonstrates the subversive use of Chinese trawlers—perhaps better termed 'little blue men'—to provoke the Vietnamese and thus justify a PLA Navy response.[35] Continuity in Maoist 'people's war' at sea and in cyberspace is evident today.

Conflict in the Indo-Pacific region would thus prove to be extremely complex and difficult to fight. The intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) challenge of finding highly potent A2/AD systems in the cluttered urbanised littoral, not to mention then effecting a timely neutralisation strike, favours the defender. This logic has only gained greater resonance and validity over time, particularly once the Australian Army's littoral transport capability (complementing existing Air Force tactical airlift and Navy amphibious force projection capabilities) is fielded. Indeed, as Elbridge Colby had highlighted, the argument of similarly employing A2/AD capabilities to contain Western competitors has a certain enduring appeal:

> Just as Beijing has sought the ability to deny US forces' ability to operate inside the first island chain, so the United States, Taiwan, and other allies should seek to be able to deny Chinese forces' ability to operate in the Taiwan Strait.[36]

The United States has begun to adapt to the argument Colby presented. The United States Marine Corps (USMC) has demonstrated the greatest adaptation in conceptual and command asymmetry across the US military by adopting the idea of stand-in forces (SIF). The USMC defines SIF in an aspirational manner as:

> small but lethal, low signature, mobile, relatively simple to maintain and sustain forces designed to operate across the competition continuum within a contested

> area as the leading edge of a maritime defense-in-depth in order to intentionally disrupt the plans of a potential or actual adversary.[37]

The theory argues that SIF might help to deter conflict due to the threatened ability to impose significant costs through multi-domain strike, creating such asymmetry due to the ISR challenge favouring the defender.

In an Australian context, some adoption of the SIF concept may soon be possible.[38] The dilemma, however, becomes apparent when Australia's limited Army asset is considered: establishing company-sized SIF astride key terrain in the archipelago would quickly culminate the 1st Division. Importantly, however, regional nations also have a say. A unilateral application of the SIF concept simply doesn't work if the permissions and authorities to first deploy to and then engage from these third-party regional locations are not forthcoming. Large footprint and overt presence can present political challenges for such regional partners, which challenges a wide-ranging application of this concept.

The conception of leveraging Asia's geography for presenting an A2/AD challenge that is instead founded upon the capabilities of partners—as opposed to unilateral operations—represents a robust ADF 'Plan B' for the conduct of joint warfighting. The necessary conceptual adaptation, then, is the logic of developing the ability of regional partners to resist armed coercion or occupation, based in part on the efficacy of such concepts as demonstrated by Ukraine. Australia *might* have sufficient time for one or more SIF detachments to reinforce a point of contention, but reliance upon sufficient warning time to secure necessary approvals, deploy, and then manoeuvre is an assumption that might well prove bold in the face of significant coercive pressure. Indeed, such was the case for Portuguese Timor in 1941.

If we reframe the challenge, however, we realise that for these regional partners, their forces are inherently 'SIF', as their homes, shopping malls and workplaces are within weapon engagement zones, their families will face the stress of becoming collateral damage, and their options for trading time for space are limited. When this challenge is understood, the provision of light-footprint training teams to enhance regional capabilities towards the SIF ideal—as the USMC defines it—might very well be possible. Often, such training will be focused upon non-violent functions: the safe communication of intelligence, information warfare / propaganda functions, avoidance of the occupying military forces in sweeps and checkpoints, provision of clandestine logistics networks etc. These defensive skills, developed with the host nation government, enable the imposition of costs against the occupier—not all of which are delivered by the resistance movement itself. Indeed, a resistance will have greater endurance and effectiveness when external military forces are those visiting violence upon the occupier. The lethality of such defensive concepts might also aid in deterrent messaging if it is communicated —addressing the failure of the British Oriental Mission.

Somewhat importantly, such SIF capabilities need not be real to contribute to deterrence—they only need to be *perceived* to be real. The Sacred Sword of the Patriot's League, the fake resistance network created by US Special Forces during the Vietnam War, tied down three divisions of North Vietnamese Army troops in rear-area security operations throughout the period 1965–1968.[39] This vignette illuminates that an asymmetric 'shell game' can further deplete the availability of valuable ISR assets by a relatively small psychological operations staff.

The geography of the region to Australia's north highlights that the inability of an adversary to project force from one of our regional neighbours (due to the determination of that nation to maintain its sovereignty) serves to protect Australia from most military threats. If Indonesia enforces the sovereignty of its airspace, it is difficult for an adversary to launch air strikes. If Papua New Guinea can effect sea denial, Australian waters in the immediate north are protected. These statements are important, as the implication is that Australia's defence benefits from any resistance by regional neighbours to an adversary from further afield. Akin to the Thailand example in World War II, neutrality or enforced sovereignty in particular locations can be of benefit to Australian defence interests.

The region's geography must also be viewed in the context of the SLOCs through which most global trade flows. A former CEO of Stratfor, George Friedman, applied this economic reality to the Australian context, articulating that Australia was a nation whose arteries ran external to its body.[40] The same metaphor could be applied to any industrialised economy in Asia. The People's Republic of China (PRC), for example, recognises this through its own articulation of its 'Malacca Dilemma'.[41] This recognition suggests the potential for further asymmetry: even a threatened effect against SLOCs would be likely to elicit a disproportionate response in Beijing for the damage it would inflict on China's economy. This realisation also posits the question of how our 'arteries' are to be hardened against interdiction; regional countries are critical in this regard.

A Plan B of enhancing regional resistance capabilities thus forms a metaphorical 'shield' which might be coupled with the 'spear' of long-range strike from platforms hidden within the cluttered archipelago.[42] This logic has an enduring nature based upon the geography of the region, but it is influenced by the transition from the colonial context of World War II conflict in South-East Asia to today's context of sovereign nations scattered across this vast region.

The logic of enhancing partner capacity through asymmetric concepts and capabilities is not for the purpose of reinforcing the remnants of a global rules-based order, although such objectives might be supported via this means. Enhancing partner capacity enhances Australia's security. The cognitive shift that would build upon Australia's NDS is:

> the need to develop security *with* Asia, as opposed to security *against* Asia (as in the Defence of Australia strategy of the 1990s) or security *in* Asia (the Forward Defence strategy of the 1950s–1970s).[43]

Adopting Asymmetric and Unconventional Means

The disparity in power that Australia faces vis-à-vis the PLA requires the use of asymmetric methods, which prompts a need to review the scholarship that might guide the employment of asymmetry. Andrew Mack, in the context of the US and allies' exit from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1975, wrote compellingly about how a big nation could lose a small war.[44] He tellingly recognised both that it was important for the lesser power to impose a steady accumulation of costs on their opponent and that it was not enough for the lesser power to be undefeated; they had to be *seen* to be undefeated.[45]

Such comments seem prescient in the context of Western defeat in Afghanistan and point towards the importance of the informational or cognitive domain. In this context, the next NDS should not only address the need for asymmetric methods but also recognise the importance of information operations capabilities that might deliver deterrence messaging in unambiguous terms. Further investment in what are now termed 'information advantage' capabilities is thus essential to realising potential asymmetry.[46]

But a narrative of success is more effective when a military force is indeed being successful. In this regard, unorthodox defence concepts have been on full display in recent years, merging innovative concepts, command structures and contemporary technologies. Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) aided in denying Russia a fait accompli in the opening days of the full-scale invasion and have since maintained a low-level insurgency in occupied territories and in the Black Sea.

These unconventional methods can be aggregated into a simple idea that I term 'unconventional deterrence'. What makes these methods unconventional is deliberate engagement with the 'human terrain'—civilian services relevant to enabling military effects.[47] This is different from and augments the military-to-military capacity building the ADF undertakes daily. What is meant here is engaging with partner civilians, policing forces, intelligence forces, businesses, levels of government and the military.

Australia has little choice but to adapt strongly if it is to generate asymmetric concepts that might deter escalation into conflict, assimilating ideas advanced by the terminology of unconventional deterrence. Furthermore, the ADF needs to do so quickly; emulating concepts that others have taken the time to refine, test and implement may well prove the fastest pathway. The driver for such change is simple: as a so-called middle power,

Australia's capabilities are diminutive in comparison to those of the PRC across all prominent metrics of conventional military power—firepower, mass, technology, industrial base, and perhaps even its ability to generate tempo. These facts also have implications regarding how asymmetry should be adopted. After all, asymmetry is an inherently relative and hence competitive dynamic—the competitor must also be considered.[48]

Reliance upon technological asymmetric means appears to be a losing bet. The PRC has enormous scientific and industrial efforts directed towards developing military capabilities against which Australia is either unlikely to be able to compete, or able to compete only fleetingly before the advantage is lost through a PRC-developed countermeasure. A view that uncrewed systems will deliver the ADF from its present mass inferiority vis-à-vis the PLA is negated by the PRC's already enormous market share in first-person view (FPV) drone manufacture (estimated as 90 per cent of the global consumer market in 2024).[49]

We cannot ship-build our way out of our present dilemma; and we cannot treat uncrewed systems as a form of deliverance.

Conceptual and command adaptations, however, offer a certain jujitsu dynamic given the rigidities of the Chinese Communist system of governance. Empowerment of lower echelons is anathema to this system. Innovation and experimentation by lower echelons can carry certain political risks when these new actions veer from or challenge dictated policies. Furthermore, the sheer mass of the PLA demands a certain doctrinaire approach to warfighting, particularly given the limited combat experience across the force. One must, however, be careful with over-emphasising such statements, as Maoist 'people's war' doctrine blends military with civilian functions and the use of broader forms of contestation, such as subversion.[50] While the PRC's leadership demonstrates some continuities with its Maoist doctrinal legacy, it may well be aware of the limitations the PLA may well face in combat—hence the present focus upon 'grey zone' or subversive methods that might 'win without fighting'.

As Ukraine has well demonstrated, unorthodox employment concepts vis-à-vis autocratic regimes might buy time, impose costs and erode the will of the aggressor. Better yet, demonstration of asymmetry through unorthodox concepts and command structures might serve to deter, even if only for a while. Deterrence might not even be direct; the Houthi ability to engage just 1 per cent of maritime vessels transiting the Bab el-Mandeb in 2024–25 had second- and third-order effects upon approximately 50 per cent of global maritime traffic. These effects, which included increased maritime insurance and longer transit times, added costs to supply chains that permeate through national economies.

Recognition that such asymmetry has been on display for the past 20 years, in varying forms of lethality and reach, is a critical cognitive reframing that opens new apertures to how the ADF adapts. While the NDS did recognise the need to learn from recent

conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, what is inferred is adopting uncrewed systems at scale for use in conventional warfighting. It is unconsciously implied that Australia's own lessons from engaging in conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan seemingly offer little to learn from or to guide our present challenges. This implied message reflects a narrative that has crept into Australia's national security discourse in which such commitments were a 'distraction'. This heuristic is a mistake.

The ADF gained some 20 years of conceptual knowledge regarding the prosecution of fleeting and hard-to-discover targets. In Operation Okra, the commitment to defeat Islamic State, targeting included the processes of drawing information from our Iraqi partners within highly urbanised environments. The necessary command adaptation was the establishment of a strike cell—a team which could remotely coordinate fires in support of Iraqi partners, based primarily on open-source information.[51] US and UK militaries likewise gained experience with this adaptation. The strike cell function also enabled delegated command responsibilities of target engagement authority, gathering evidence that unsurprisingly demonstrated that centralised fires coordination was less effective and less responsive, particularly in the cluttered environment of the largest urban combat that had then been witnessed since World War II— the Battle of Mosul.[52]

Innovation under fire was aptly demonstrated through what the reporter Ben McKelvey described as an air strike near al-Asad air base in Western Iraq that was coordinated through a 'pipeline of an Australian mobile phone, an Iraqi wi-fi hotspot and Viber'.[53] The unorthodox pathway ADF personnel employed is only one facet of this vignette; far more important is the scalability of ISR collection, aggregation and analysis that might be achieved through partners utilising today's communications technologies. This type of 'crowdsourced' ISR is a highly asymmetric vector given the 'cluttered' nature of South-East Asia and its waterways.

Our US and UK colleagues expanded upon their experience from Iraq and Syria to Ukraine in what was a highly asymmetric option, reportedly involving only some 50 UK Special Forces personnel during the period 2022–23.[54] Remote advise and assist functions that had been learned in the Middle East were an appropriate solution for overcoming 'boots on the ground' limitations prior to the Russian escalation and as full-scale hostilities commenced.[55] Procedural controls for classified information that could support combined targeting efforts had already been developed and thus were quickly repurposed to the Ukraine context. Derivation and verification of open-source information from partners was already a well-practised routine using applications like ATAK (Android Team Awareness Kit).

Such conceptual and command adaptations were continued by our US and UK colleagues beyond the Iraq–Syria theatre. The 10th Special Forces Group began to assist Ukrainian Special Operations Forces (UKRSOF) from as early as 2015 through

the mechanism of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force 10 (CJSOTF-10) and its Task Group—Ukraine (TG-U).[56] TG-U fielded a remote advise and assist cell to 'coordinate live streaming battlefield awareness for UKRSOF and their supported conventional units'.[57] Through TG-U and UKRSOF, training and preparing the TDF followed Ukraine's 2021 establishment of resistance within its national defence strategy.[58] Similar support missions are being undertaken by CJSOTF-10 pre-emptively with Baltic and other European nations, seeking to disseminate the lessons derived from Ukraine's resistance to Russian incursions.[59]

These virtual networks enable what is meant by the terminology of 'support to resistance' that is used by US and UK special operations capabilities. While Ukraine's employment of drones has drawn significant attention, it is this conceptual approach and unorthodox command network that is critical to the intelligence requirements of deep or operational and strategic strike using these uncrewed systems against air, land and naval targets. This narrative is important given the absence of recognising these conceptual and command adaptations that our US and UK colleagues have been assimilating.

Therefore, Iraq and Afghanistan were not distractions; in some ways they were training grounds for today's asymmetric ability to frustrate the Russian military. Furthermore, it is these networked functions that enable asymmetry in the form of limited personnel in harm's way. This narrative is also important because an entire generation of Australian Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) personnel gained very similar experience and procedural understanding, albeit of procedures that have since evolved further in Ukraine.

In other words, along with our 'five-eyes' partners, a very small footprint of personnel deployed forward into the region have the knowledge and experience to rapidly leverage 'crowdsourced' ISR networks to impose cross-domain costs at scale, and to do so in support of aiding the territorial sovereignty of their hosts. Communicating this message unambiguously can enhance Australia's deterrence messaging and support the objectives of the NDS.

In the NDS, barely a dozen words articulate what is needed from SOCOMD to contribute to Australia's ability to deter. Such limited guidance, in the context of the adaptive processes our US and UK colleagues are continuing to undertake, suggests a limited recognition of the potential for Australian SOCOMD (and other ADF elements) to rapidly field *partnered* intelligence networks and multidomain strike capabilities, and to support the ability of regional partners to resist invasion and occupation. It is this indirect approach, as Liddell Hart might describe it, of operating through local populations that makes this policy option unconventional, and thus differentiates it from the present adaptation Army, Navy and Air Force are undertaking with the Ghost suite of systems and FPV drones.

The 2026 NDS can be enhanced by assigning this 'support to resistance' mission to SOCOMD in the context of drawing and applying the lessons derived from our own conflict experience in the Middle East. This mission codifies our historical lessons derived from Sparrow Force in World War II and leverages the geographic realities of Australia's northern approaches. This mission will require cyber and information advantage capabilities if the concept is to be fully realised and thus contribute to deterrence.

Improving the resilience—and, in some cases, resistance—capabilities of our neighbours thus might constitute a core but understated element that is needed to realise Australia's 2026 NDS.

Conclusions: What Next?

We are presently experiencing the highest level of armed conflict globally since World War II, with some 65 active conflicts—the majority of which are intrastate (irregular or civil wars) and internationalised intrastate (or proxy irregular wars).[60] The global trend, unequivocally over the past 80 years, is towards an increasing democratisation of violence where non-state actors play a major role in conflict. The lesson that should be drawn from Ukraine's experience is the manifestation of this phenomenon within a conventional war. This experience, exacerbated by Russia's efforts to coerce, intimidate and divide NATO, illuminates why several European nations have adopted total defence strategies, some of which include pre-prepared resistance networks.

The character of war is changing, demonstrating an 'emptying' of the battlespace through uncrewed systems and their increasing range capabilities. What is needed is a conceptual approach that is cognisant of these trends. Whether a revolution in military affairs has occurred with such trends is yet to be fully understood, but vignettes such as operations Spider's Web, Grim Beeper and Rising Lion—examples David Kilcullen has termed 'asymmetric strategic strike' —suggest a revolutionary effect. When special operations and intelligence organisations pair uncrewed systems with irregular networks, directed towards otherwise inaccessible strategic targets, highly asymmetric outcomes have been demonstrated as feasible.[61]

As Australia adapts to the proliferation of uncrewed systems, there is a risk that planners will perceive such technologies as just a better type of artillery—an evolutionary approach. This would be a mistake on two levels. First, systems like FPV drones are not a panacea; 'old-school' artillery still has a place for all-weather, contested electronic environments, and mass strikes. Second, a 'better form of artillery' is but one level of adaptation that makes attrition more effective; it doesn't change the combined arms system. Thus, if we are not careful, our biases may well constrain us to *evolutionary* thinking and miss potentially *revolutionary* concepts.

A range of authors over recent years have already alluded to the shifting character of warfare, using terminology such as remote warfare, vicarious warfare or surrogate warfare. Indeed, we have already seen an evolution of such technologies in counterterrorism strategy under the term 'over-the-horizon targeting'. The language Admiral Paparo has used of a 'hellscape' of layered uncrewed systems is revolutionary on several fronts: it switches from favouring the offensive to the defensive, it is at a scale disproportionate to the personnel involved, it is vicarious (in terms of preserving manpower) and, communicated as such, it seeks to deter.[62]

Applying the efficacy of uncrewed systems in new systemic ways is perhaps best described as multidomain guerrilla warfare—a revolutionary paradigm. The systemic approach undertaken by the Houthis and Ukrainian special forces in generating littoral strike capabilities against SLOCs is fundamentally different from just a technological adaptation. Recent Israeli innovations similarly represent bold and novel capability. Conducting strike functions deep into an adversary's rear echelons has been a role central to special operations, and the evolving technologies of uncrewed systems are now allowing such raids to occur with an exponential increase in range and target effect. But the systemic approach reveals that ISR functions are needed over comparably larger areas if increases in range are to be realised. Support functions, inclusive of communications relays, are also needed. These effects will need to be drawn from local populations to realise the full potential of the evolving technologies. The assistance of local populations to contribute to conflict is termed 'resistance', and it is the idea of cultivating support to such resistance efforts that offers a step-change in ADF asymmetric capabilities.

The ADF, particularly its Special Operations component, has significant experience in the conduct of unconventional strike due to experimentation and adaptation conducted within Operation Okra. There is a solid base from which to further adapt, commensurate with the demonstrated exemplar missions UKRSOF has undertaken. By communicating that these lessons have been shared among allies—and that such allies stand willing to support regional partners with this developed capability—the desire of the NDS 2026 for means of asymmetric deterrence through partnered resistance concepts may well be achieved.

Wide-ranging systems or networks of ISR, support and strike functions across our region require a range of sovereign partners to realise. The greater the foundation of societal resilience such partners can develop, the greater the potential of such networks to aid unconventional strike effects. Working with partners in this regard may serve not only to deter would-be aggressors (deterrence by denial) but also to reassure partners who might otherwise tilt towards acquiescence to coercive pressure. Pre-prepared networks that elicit confidence in an ability to resist aggression might yield political will not to buckle to coercion. Indeed, Russia's efforts to coerce European states has proved a catalyst to the development of total defence strategies.

Enhanced resilience to external shocks, and confidence born from practised responses to shocks and buttressed by assured ADF support to resistance capabilities, might thus prove critical to containing conflict should deterrence fail. Australia has fought effectively alongside regional partners before, fighting unconventionally to impose costs and frustrate the aggressor's plans. Contemporary conflicts are demonstrating the potential of resistance yet again, albeit now empowered with digital-age technologies and operating across joint, space and cyber domains.

About the Author

Dr Andrew Maher is a Senior Lecturer at the University of New South Wales, Canberra. He has been a postgraduate lecturer on irregular warfare and special operations for over five years and has specialised on the analysis of proxy warfare. His forthcoming book Riding Tigers: The Strategic Logic of Proxy Warfare (2025) examines the use of warfare as a component of strategic competition. Dr Maher has also taught with Arizona State University, Joint Special Operations University and NATO Special Operations University, and through volunteer work at the Irregular Warfare Initiative. Dr Maher is a 20-year veteran of the Australian Defence Force, with extensive service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

ENDNOTES

1 Australian Government, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), p. 15, at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

2 Ibid., p. 17.

3 For example, Gjermund Forfang Rongved (ed.), *European Total Defence: Past, Present and Future* (London and New York: Routledge, 2025); Tim Sweijs, Saskia van Genugten and Frans Osinga (eds), *Defence Planning for Small and Middle Powers: Rethinking Force Development in an Age of Disruption* (London and New York: Routledge, 2025); and Joakim Berndtsson, Irina Goldenberg and Stéfanie von Hlatky (eds), *Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023).

4 Stephen J Flanagan, Jan Osburg, Anika Binnendijk, Marta Kepe and Andrew Radin, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance* (RAND, 2019), p. 2.

5 *Kaitseliit* [*Estonian Defence League*], at: www.kaitseliit.ee (accessed 4 June 2022).

6 *The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic* (Prague, 2012).

7 'Total Defence: What's Your Role Defending Sweden in the Event of a Military Attack?', *The Local*, 4 March 2022, at: www.thelocal.se/20220303/total-defence-whats-your-role-defending-sweden-in-the-event-of-a-military-attack; 'Objectives for Swedish Total Defence 2021–2025 Government Bill (Totalförsvaret 2021–2025), *Government Offices of Sweden* (website), 18 December 2020, at: https://www.government.se/government-policy/total-defence/

8 For an example, see Finnish Defence Forces, 'Taistelukenttä 2020 [Battlefield 2020]' (video), *YouTube*, 8 June 2020, at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTmWCbcYwb8.

9 Otto Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept* (Stockholm and Tampa: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2020), at: https://theresistancehub.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/ROC_final_cc.pdf. An alternative but similar definition is 'a form of contention or asymmetric conflict involving participants' limited or collective mobilisation of subversive and/or disruptive efforts against an authority or structure'. Jonathan B Cosgrove and Erin N Hahn (eds), *Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies: Conceptual Typology of Resistance* (Fort Bragg: United States Army Special Operations Command, 2021), at: www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D101-PURL-gpo107948/pdf/GOVPUB-D101-PURL-gpo107948.pdf.

10 This is an issue addressed by Andrew Maher and Matthew LM Jones, *Towards Total Defence: A Literature Review and Feasibility Assessment for Australia*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 39 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2026), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/towards-total-defence; and Matthew Jones, Sam Stevenson and Andrew Maher, *Towards Total Defence: Implementing National and Regional Resilience in the Australian Context* (Australian Army Research Centre, forthcoming).

11 'Total Defence', *MINDEF Singapore* (website), last updated 27 July 2025, at: www.mindef.gov.sg/defence-matters/defence-topics/total-defence.

12 A resistance strategy was advocated by Admiral Lee Hsi-min in particular. Lee Hsi-min and Eric Lee, 'Taiwan's Overall Defence Concept, Explained', *The Diplomat*, 3 November 2020, at: https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained.

13 Dio Suhenda, 'Indonesian Military Expansion Plan Raises Fear of Overreach', *Asia News Network*, 27 July 2026, at: https://asianews.network/indonesian-military-expansion-plan-raises-fear-of-overreach; and Muhammad Fauzan Maulfti, 'Indonesia's One Million Soldiers Questions', *War on the Rocks*, 23 January 2026, at: https://warontherocks.com/indonesias-one-million-soldiers-questions.

14 Peter Henning, D*oomed Battalion: The Australian 2/40th Battalion 1940–45—Mateship and Leadership in War and Captivity* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995).

15 'Fighting in Timor, 1942', *Australian War Memorial*, last updated 28 August 2020, at: www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/timor.

16 'Commonwealth Government to Lord Cranborne, U.K. Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (27 March 1941)', in WJ Hudson & HJW Stokes (eds), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937–49: Volume IV: July 1940–June 1941* (Canberra: Australian Government, 1980), p. 516.

17 *Ten Years of Japanese Burrowing in the Netherlands East Indies: Official Report of the Netherlands East Indies Government on Japanese Subversive Activities in the Archipelago During the Last Decade* (New York: Netherlands Information Bureau, 1942); Andrew Maher, 'Special Operations Developments in the Pacific: Back to the Future?', in Martijn Kitzen and James Kiras (eds), *Into the Void: Special Operations Beyond the Global War on Terror* (London: Hurst, 2024).

18 John Hanson, *The White Ghost: The Amazing Story of an Original Australian Commando* (Toni McRae and Martin Morris, 2014), at: https://doublereds.org.au/files/JackHanson-TheWhiteGhost.pdf.

19 A division usually ranges from approximately 10,000 to 12,000 troops. Hanson gives the much higher number of between 20,000 and 30,000 troops, which seems likely to be excessive but might account for locally raised Timorese fighters for the Japanese and local collaborators. Hanson, *The White Ghost*.

20 Gladwyn Jebb, 'Subversion', TNA HS8/334 (5 October 1940); 'Subversive Activities in Relation to Strategy', COS (40)27(0), PRO CAB-80-56 (25 November 1940); David Stafford, 'The Detonator Concept: British Strategy, SOE and European Resistance after the Fall of France', *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no. 2 (1975): 185–217.

21 Kyle Atwell and Olga Chiriac, 'Is Resistance Working in Ukraine?', *Irregular Warfare Podcast*, 14 November 2025, at: www.irregularwarfare.org/is-resistance-working-in-ukraine.

22 'From the War Office to CGS Canada, CGS South Africa, CGS Australia, CGS New Zealand', 75159, TNA WO 193/606 (29 June 1940), p. 1.

23 Major JML Gavin, 'Report on No. 101 Special Training School, Malaya (Scapula Mission)', December 1942, pp. 1–2.

24 Lionel Gage Wigmore, 'Appendix 1—Australians in Mission 204', in *Australia in the War 1939–1945*, Official History, Series 1—Army, Volume IV—*The Japanese Thrust* (1957), p. 643, at: www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1417309; War Office to C. in C. Far East, Desp. 88880, WO106/3555A (9 Sep 1941); C. in C. Far East, 41239, WO106/3555A (5 Sep 1941); Andrew Maher, 'When Australia Went to War in China', *Land Power Forum*, 25 July 2023, at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/when-australian-went-war-china.

25 Gavin, 'Report on No. 101 Special Training School', p. 1.

26 F Spencer Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutra*l (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949).

27 Gavin, 'Report on No. 101 Special Training School', p. 2.

28 RW Volckmann, *We Remained: Three Years Behind Enemy Lines in the Philippines* (New York: Norton & Company, 1954), p. 216; Elmer N Lear, 'Collaboration in Leyte: The Philippines, Under Japanese Occupation', *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1952).

29 John B Haseman, *The Thai Resistance Movement During the Second World War*, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, Special Report No. 17 (1978).

30 Ibid., p. 126; E Bruce Reynolds, *Thailand's Secret War: OSS, SOE, and the Free Thai Underground During World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

31 Thane Clare, *A Navy of Necessity: Ukraine's Unmanned Surface Vessels at War* (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2025), at: https://csbaonline.org/resource/a-navy-of-necessity-ukraines-unmanned-surface-vessels-at-war.

32 Andrew Maher, 'Regional SOF Capacity Building: An Asymmetric Australian Maritime Strategy', *Australian Army Journal* 12, no. 1 (2015), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/volume-12-number-1-winter/regional-special-operations-force-capacity-building-asymmetric-australian-maritime-strategy.

33 Robert D Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014).

34 Harold M Tanner, *War in Modern China: A Military History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2026), p. 293.

35 Ibid., p. 263.

36 Elbridge A Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 160.

37 David Kilcullen, 'Stand-in Manoeuvre in a Contested Littoral Environment', *Australian Army Journal* 19, no. 2 (2023): 245.

38 Similar ideas were argued by Chris Hall, *Development of an Infantry 'Disrupt Force' and Technological Experimentation in an Operational Unit*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 31 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2025), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/development-infantry-disrupt-force-and-technological-experimentation-operational-unit.

39 Richard H Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi: The Untold Story of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: First Perennial, 2000), p. 139.

40 George Friedman, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century* (New York: Doubleday Press, 2010).

41 *Plan B: A Service-Framed Examination of Economic Warfare*, Marine Corps Futures Monograph Series, Book 1 (Quantico: Marine Corps University Press, 2025), p. 26, at: www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/Books-by-topic/MCUP-Titles-A-Z/Plan-B.

42 A similar argument could be intimated by the Minister of Defence calling for 'impactful projection'; this argument also seems similar to that of Andrew Carr and Stephan Frühling, *Forward Presence for Deterrence: Implications for the Australian Army*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 15 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2023), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/15.

43 Sally Burt, Ian Langford, David Kilcullen and Andrew Maher, *Unconventional Deterrence in Australian Strategy* (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2025), at: www.aspi.org.au/report/unconventional-deterrence-in-australian-strategy.

44 Andrew Mack, 'Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict', *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 175–200.

45 Ibid., p. 185.

46 Jason Logue, 'Rethinking Information Dominance and Influence Battlespace Effects', *Australian Army Journal* 7, no. 3 (2010), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/volume-7-number-3-summer/rethinking-information-dominance-and-influence-battlespace-effects; and Jessica Craig, 'Mind over Manoeuvre', *Australian Government: Defence*, 30 October 2025, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2025-10-30/mind-over-manoeuvre.

47 Burt et al., *Unconventional Deterrence in Australian Strategy*.

48 This argument of relativity to an adversary is central to Matthew A Tattar, *Innovation and Adaptation in War* (Cambridge: Belfer Center Studies in International Security, 2025).

49 Zeyi Yang, 'Why China's Dominance in Commercial Drones Has Become a Global Security Matter', *MIT Technology Review*, 26 June 2024, at: www.technologyreview.com/2024/06/26/1094249/china-commercial-drone-dji-security.

50 Thomas A Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1996).

51 Dana JH Pittard and Wes J Bryant, *Hunting the Caliphate: America's War on ISIS and the Dawn of the Strike Cell* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2019).

52 US Army, *Mosul Study Group: What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force* (U.S. Training and Doctrine Command, 2017); Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare* (New York: Hachette, 2020).

53 Ben McKelvey, *Mosul: Australia's Secret War Inside the ISIS Caliphate* (Sydney: Hachette, 2020), p. 220.

54 Harry Davies and Manisha Ganguly, 'Up to 50 UK Special Forces Present in Ukraine This Year, US Leak Suggests', *The Guardian*, 12 April 2023, at: www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/11/up-to-50-uk-special-forces-present-in-ukraine-this-year-us-leak-suggests.

55 Brian S Petit, 'Can Ukrainian Resistance Foil a Russian Victory?', *War on the Rocks*, 18 February 2022, at: https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/can-ukrainian-resistance-foil-a-russian-victory.

56 Spencer Meredith, 'The Key to Ukrainian Victory Is Partnering (Not Ukrainifying)', *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 6 February 2024, at: https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/the-key-to-ukrainian-victory-is-partnering-not-ukrainifying.

57 Ibid.

58 Viktoriya Fedorchak, *The Russia–Ukraine War: Towards Resilient Fighting Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), p. 33.

59 Kirsti Brooksby, 'U.S. Special Operations Forces Bring Unique Capabilities to NATO Allies in the Baltic Sea Region', *Baltic Amber Magazine*, 1 August 2023, at: https://mncne.nato.int/baltic-amber-

magazine/us-special-operations-forces-bring-unique-capabilities-to-nato-allies-in-the-baltic-sea-region.

60 Shawn Davies, Therése Pettersson and Magnus Öberg, 'Organized Violence 1989–2025, and Violent Political Protests', *Journal of Peace Research* 63, no. 4 (2026): 705–723, at: https://doi.org/10.1093/jopres/xjag046; Uppsala Universitet, *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (website), at: https://ucdp.uu.se/encyclopedia.

61 David Kilcullen, 'Israel–Iran War Reveals Rising Age of Unconventional Conflict', *The Australian*, 21 June 2025, at: www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/israeliran-war-reveals-rising-age-of-unconventional-conflict/news-story/130f765ab1a5bb9ec665283daf196da3.

62 The 'hellscape' language is examined by Stacie Prettyjohn and Molly Campbell, *Hellscape for Taiwan: Rethinking Asymmetric Defence* (Centre for a New American Security, 2026).

REVITALISING THE LATENT STANDBY RESERVE WORKFORCE: LESSONS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

Vincent Connelly

Introduction

The 2025 UK Strategic Defence Review (SDR) highlighted the requirement for the British Armed Forces to accelerate their readiness to fight a state-on-state war[1] as part of the NATO alliance. The UK SDR, bolstered by the evidence from the war in Ukraine, emphasises the key role that reserve forces play in war. The 2026 Australian National Defence Strategy also seeks to strengthen the ADF Reserve to deliver the integrated, focused force required to protect and defend Australia.[2] The lessons from the Ukraine conflict demonstrate that on mobilisation, armies need to scale up their forces to be sustainable for state-on-state war. Armies that rely on volunteer enlistment will need to use reservists to reinforce their peacetime gaps and also replace individual battle casualties. However, armies also need reserve units to mobilise to deliver the additional collective capability to deal with the massive expansion of tasks and rapid wearing-out of units in war.[3] This is a dual pressure of filling peacetime gaps *and* supporting army expansion of reserve forces that many professional armies have not had to consider for decades.

The British Army's response to this challenge is to begin to refocus its part-time volunteer reserve, the Army Reserve (formerly the Territorial Army), on providing additional collective capability, while revitalising its pools of ex-regular reserves (the UK's equivalent of the 'Standby Reserve') to provide individual reinforcements and supplement home defence.[4] Many armed forces are now focusing attention on these previously trained workforce pools.[5] Australia's 2024 SRR, for example, recommends that the current SERCAT 2 category of previously trained ex-regulars, the 'Standby Reserve', be immediately expanded.[6] However, the 21st century has seen the workforce

pools of ex-regular reservists in the ADF,[7] as well as in the British Army, languish for many years with little engagement and no realistic planning or resourcing for their use.[8] This article reflects on the UK's recent history of regular reservists and considers why they are thought to be currently ineffective. The UK and Australia face similar challenges in maintaining a reliable pool of ex-regular personnel to be called upon in a crisis; in examining those challenges, this article proposes a common framework to enhance numbers, availability and readiness of the latent reserve workforce.

The Need for Reserve Forces

Most nations (especially democracies) cannot afford to have standing regular armies made up of the numbers of trained and equipped units needed to fight large-scale wars. As threats increase, regular armies that are limited in size by peacetime defence budgets must be ready to expand rapidly to cope with the heavier demands of war. Tasks will increase greatly, formations will suffer attrition, units will need replacement, and areas of operation will grow larger, greatly exacerbating workforce pressures. Therefore, smaller professional armies must be ready to generate more units on mobilisation for war, as well as plug inevitable gaps in establishments and source pools of battle casualty replacements. Reserve forces can provide both the additional units and the individuals to meet the challenges of wartime pressures without the economic demands of a large peacetime regular force, as has been demonstrated in Ukraine.[9]

The British Army for most of the 20th century had a simple and well-understood reserve system. The full-time regular forces provided the British Army standing forces at high readiness in peacetime; the part-time volunteer Army Reserve, at lower readiness, mobilised units and so expanded the army's collective capability in wartime; and the Regular Reserves provided a workforce pool of ex-regular individual reinforcements and a supplement to home defence. History demonstrated that this system worked well. Today, under the UK *Reserve Forces Act 1996*, there is still a part-time Volunteer Reserve, organised into units, which trains in peacetime and can be 'called out' for war, in crisis, or to supplement the Regular Forces. There is also the Regular Reserve, consisting of previously trained ex-regulars who can legally be called out for service under the same conditions as the Volunteer Reserve. Finally, there are those 'individuals liable for recall', who are also ex-regulars but have a different legal status and lower readiness. The UK Government is now referring to the Regular Reserve and 'individuals liable for recall' as the Strategic Reserve, and to the Volunteer Reserve as the 'Active Reserve', but these terms have no current legal basis and can be confusing. In this article, for simplicity, the Regular Reserve and those liable for recall will be referred to as the British Army's Regular Reserves.

The Utility of the Regular Reserves

One of the most successful periods for Regular Reserve utility for the British Army was the start of World War I. On mobilisation in 1914, 98 per cent of regular reservists reported for duty, with all battalions having enough regular reservists to bring them up to war establishment, and many forming complete reserve second line battalions.[10] The reason for such success was not random. Those leaving the Regular Army had a clear legal reserve liability but received a relatively generous retainer of half pay, and in return were expected to parade for a few days of training a year. Retainers were paid quarterly in arrears on condition of reservists turning up at their regimental depot with their uniform and equipment. A Regular Reserve liability was a well-known feature of army life; the regular reservist turned up for their training at their previous regular battalion or depot in the UK and was looked after by their previous regimental affiliation. This system continued and worked as well for mobilisation of the army in 1939[11] as it did in 1914, since the army continued to educate regular troops and communicate with regular reservists in the interwar period.[12]

The basics of the scheme did not change for most of the 20th century. Over time, defined sections of the Regular Reserve were developed with differing levels of readiness and commitment and with varying levels of retainer paid so that workforce pinch points, especially for specialist trades, could be adequately covered in an emergency. The largest call outs of the Regular Reserve after World War II were for the Korean War in 1950 and the Suez Crisis in 1956. The system had worked well for large-scale crises facing the nation (such as the world wars), but the call out for these smaller ‘wars of choice’ was not, unsurprisingly, popular with regular reservists—disciplinary issues, for example, were noted during the Suez Crisis.[13]

The British Army’s 1980s Individual Reinforcement Plan

Through the Cold War period (1945–1990), the British Army’s planning for war included extensive use of the Regular Reserves.[14] By the 1980s, this planning required regular reservists to be more rapidly available, so an effort was made to reinvigorate the entire system of planning and mobilisation. The individual reinforcement plan (IRP)[15] was developed between 1979 and 1981. This saw the matching of demand and supply for regular reservists, calculated by a simple algorithm, using a single computer against the army’s mobilisation order of battle for war. Each receiving unit’s current strength in peacetime was assessed in comparison with its peacetime gaps and increased war establishment. The algorithm then matched gapped posts with individual regular reservists of the required rank and trade group who were living nearest to the unit or mobilisation centre requiring reinforcement, selecting those who had most recently left the army first, and so on. Once selected, the individual reservist received details by post of their war role

and their reporting centre on call out, and this was added to the more general information about their liability for call out. Mobilisation reporting centres and all units had live lists of the named regular reservists they were to receive. The plan was estimated to be able to mobilise more than 100,000 reservists in 48 hours once activated.[16] Forecasting indicated that 50 per cent of regular reservists were expected to report within 24 hours, 40 per cent within 36 hours, and the remaining 10 per cent within 48 hours.[17] The plan included a surplus of reservists nominated to cover a percentage of 'no-shows', and even to account for enemy action while reservists were in transit to war locations.

As part of the IRP, regular soldiers leaving service were informed of their liability through briefings using specially produced films[18] and pamphlets, and the keeping of a home retention scale of uniform and equipment. Under the *Reserve Forces Act 1980*[19] each regular reservist had a 15-day training liability, but only one day of reporting a year was invoked. For this, reservists were required to attend an annual Army Reserve reporting centre exercise (ARRCEX). The aim of the day was to maintain regular contact with the reservist, verify personal details, determine a current state of health and welfare, check documentation and ensure that kit was complete. Reservists received written instructions about the ARRCEX well in advance and were given a choice of local reporting centres to attend. Reporting centres were typically Army Reserve unit or Regular Army unit locations with weekday, weekend or evening attendance options. The reservist was required to take their documentation, uniform and equipment to the centre to be paid for attendance. ARRCEX claimed an 85–90 per cent attendance rate with over 50,000 reservists attending each year during the 1980s.[20] Standardised and detailed instructions for reporting centre administrators were produced and their target was the processing of 30 reservists per hour.[21]

Regular reservists could also volunteer for additional training as part of the IRP. Project STAR (Scheme for Training Army Reservists) was a one-week voluntary refresher course available for regular reservists after they had been out of regular service for three years. Major exercises often involved testing mobilisation and reinforcement plans, so regular reservists were also invited to volunteer to take part. For example, Exercise Lionheart in 1984 saw 3,350 regular reservists rehearse mobilisation and move to Germany to fill war roles. By 1990, it was estimated that there were 180,000 British Army regular reservists potentially available, with about 120,000 of these allocated roles in the IRP. Of the rest, up to 40,000 were estimated as being unavailable due to occupying vital civilian occupations in war such as police, fire or ambulance services, or were living overseas, while a further 20,000 were deemed likely unusable due to medical issues or were untraceable.[22]

Regular reservists in the 1980s were typically allocated a war role identical or very similar to their previous roles in the army. Little account was taken of their civilian skills or experience developed since they had left regular service. In addition to reinforcing regular

and volunteer reserve units in the order of battle and providing formation-level battle casualty pools, some regular reservists were also tasked with forming rear area infantry defence companies for the deployed corps in Germany. In the UK, a large number of home defence General Service Units of infantry, engineering and transport would be formed from regular reservists. There were some doubts over the feasibility of this idea since no routine peacetime training was undertaken. However, the largest UK home defence exercise of the Cold War, 1985's Exercise Brave Defender, saw 2,500 regular reservists join the other 60,000 participants to practise forming General Service Unit infantry companies. These companies were allocated to guarding key points such as government and defence installations and infrastructure, ports, energy installations, food depots, and transport nodes across the UK. Home defence plans envisaged a role for over 40,000 regular reservists to protect the UK homeland's key points in these formed sub-units, as well as the provision for 15,000 individual reinforcements to backfill the regular and volunteer reserve units allocated to home defence.[23]

For those regular reservists who wished to have a more active part in home defence, the newly formed Home Service Force (HSF) welcomed ex-regulars leaving service who could commit up to 10 days a year training. The HSF provided formed infantry platoons for home defence, whose purpose was specifically to guard key points in their local areas. The HSF also recruited ex-volunteer reservists into their ranks. The result was an older but highly experienced cohort with a focused role that proved on numerous home defence exercises to be a valuable addition to the security of the nation in war. At its peak, the HSF had a strength of about 6,000 personnel. The HSF was disbanded along with all military home defence provisions in 1991 at the perceived end of the Cold War.

At the end of the 1980s, the British Army had a detailed and well-practised plan to use the Regular Reserve in war to reinforce both units and home defence. The IRP was never put into practice, so we can only speculate as to how well it would have worked.[24] For example, there was a baseline public assumption in the 1980s that any conventional war between NATO and the Soviet Union would be of very short duration and would be followed by a large-scale nuclear exchange.[25] There were also concerns raised in the Ministry of Defence that reservists might not be persuaded to part from families who could be under threat of nuclear attack. The archival files detail frustration in the Ministry of Defence with the Home Office—responsible for the UK civil police force—over the Home Office's refusal to order police officers to arrest regular reservists who failed to respond to an actual call out.[26] Finally, while the IRP infrastructure was funded, the available kit and equipment for regular reservists was more limited. After almost 10 years of the IRP, by 1990 the British Army still only had enough weapons and equipment for 80,000 of the 120,000 regular reservists allocated an IRP role. As others have indicated regarding UK Cold War preparations, the ideas were sound but sometimes fell through due to a lack of funding.[27]

The Regular Reserve After the Cold War

Members of the Regular Reserve, mainly medical reservists, were asked to volunteer for call out for the first Gulf War in 1990. Not surprisingly, many chose not to volunteer for a 'war of choice' and the call was not helped by ambiguity over job protection due to volunteering status.[28] The government therefore had to compulsorily call out small numbers under legislation. This was moderately successful but a number of reservists failed to report, prompting the Ministry of Defence to consider prosecution. However, the political appetite was not supportive, so prosecutions were not proceeded with. Paid retainers ceased later in 1991 as the peace dividend was taken, which reduced to a small grant to those who returned an annual reporting letter within the first five years post regular service. With the early 1990s centralisation of all personnel services in the Army Personnel Centre, no sign of a large-scale threat to the UK, and a new *Reserve Forces Act* in 1996 giving more flexibility to call out volunteer reservists, engagement and communication with the Regular Reserve was downgraded and funding for training, weapons and equipment began to wither away.[29]

Unit war establishment tables continued to reflect the planned use of the Regular Reserve for war until at least 2010, but any annual training requirements had long ceased. This did not prevent the army from compulsorily calling out regular reservists for Operation Telic 1—the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The call out of troops to an accepted-into-service ratio for regular reservists was low, with only approximately one in five accepted into service.[30] Compulsory call out orders were also issued for the part-time volunteer Army Reserve required for Operation Telic 1. They had a much better call out to accepted-into-service ratio of one in 1.25.[31] The Army Reserve therefore became the reserve of first choice for backfilling the British Army's continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2003 and 2014.[32]

This success meant that the part-time volunteer reserve, the Army Reserve—which had traditionally provided complete units on mobilisation—was now relied upon to provide individual backfill to the Regular Army on operations.[33] Over time, however, the collective capabilities and unit-level training of the Army Reserve drifted lower and lower in terms of Ministry of Defence priorities.[34] By the time of 2021's 'Future Soldier' review, the remaining 70 Army Reserve units were expected to primarily provide individual reservist backfill to Regular Army units and, at a stretch, were liable to provide some sub-unit level collective capability as well at 180 days' notice to move.[35] This contrasted with the end of the Cold War in 1990 when the Army Reserve could provide 107 major units, many organised in brigades, and 270 sub-units, all ready to expand the army at 72 hours' notice to move, backed up by 120,000 Regular Reserve individual reinforcements.[36]

By 2025, the British Army—through relying on the part-time Army Reserve for unit backfill and effectively ignoring the Regular Reserve—had lost its ability to rapidly expand its number of units in war. The dual system of the volunteer Army Reserve to provide additional units in war, and the Regular Reserve as a reliable source of individual reinforcements, had gone. This was despite the British Army's declining regular force structure and the many workforce gaps in regular units (including against several difficult-to-retain trades) introducing a hollowness in key skillsets that endangered the Regular Army's depth. In fact, the UK's National Audit Office reported that many of the specialist gaps in the Regular Army could not be filled by the part-time Army Reserve either.[37]

Barriers to Revitalising the Regular Reserve

Since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, western European nations acknowledge an increased threat of large-scale war returning to Europe. There is now an increased political focus on reserve forces and readiness for war, as there is in Australia.[38] However, the British Army has tried to reinvigorate the Regular Reserve several times since 2003.[39] What are the factors that are making this difficult to achieve?

A Failure to Communicate and Manage Expectations

The termination process for those leaving the Regular Army can be difficult for those transitioning,[40] so reminders about a legally liable enduring commitment may not be welcome. It has been reported from leavers' surveys that many Regular Army personnel consider that the obligation to be recalled is unfair, despite personally entering into a legally binding time commitment on entering regular service.[41] This may not be surprising in cases where there has been little mention of the reserve liability since the 1990s during their service, and where individuals thought it unlikely they would ever be called out for operations.[42] Leavers' surveys also indicate there is little, if any, mention of reserve liability when personnel go through the separation process from regular service.[43] Given evidence for the cultural marginalisation of reservists,[44] a lack of education about or contact with the Regular Reserve throughout a regular career, and the workplace culture of silence about Regular Reserve liability on leaving, it is not surprising that many regular leavers claim little knowledge of their ongoing liability.[45] Through this lapse, the British Army has failed to psychologically condition the regular workforce for reserve service.

A Perception of Reserve Deficiency Rather than Potential Utility

The workplace culture of the regular soldier demands that they maintain professional currency and demonstrate full-time commitment.[46] There is evidence that Regular Reserves are often perceived by serving regulars as deficient, and this risks an

emphasis on reservist 'skill fade', combined with the organisationally negative image of the unreliable, less committed civilian reservist.[47] Any focus on the perceived risk of reservists not meeting theatre entry standards has the corollary that the reservist is risk-inducing rather than gap-filling or capability-enhancing.[48] This detracts from an honest debate about the utility of individuals who have been previously trained. A number of studies have demonstrated that individuals, of course, do suffer from skill fade once out of the army, but previously well-trained individuals can be brought back to a useful standard more quickly than ab initio recruits.[49] A recent study in Estonia, for example, demonstrated that a high level of basic combat skills was maintained many years later, even in one-year trained conscripts.[50] Furthermore, discussions about Regular Reserves rarely consider how their potential post-discharge civilian skills could be leveraged in new roles. The armed forces can have difficulty recognising the value of knowledge, skills and experience from civil life[51] but, combined with previous military experience, reservist civil and specialist skills can potentially be enormously useful to the army.[52]

Perceived Unwillingness to Consider Returning to the Army

In the UK, there is also a belief held by many serving regulars that most regular reservists will not want anything to do with the army on leaving.[53] Data, however, demonstrates that there is a willingness across many regular reservists to engage more as time away from the army passes.[54] About a quarter of UK regular reservists return their annual reporting letter, and those in touch with the army are those more willing to consider training and other opportunities.[55] An important point is that a strong determinant when stating a preference to train was a local Regular Army or Army Reserve location. Maintaining such army locations among the community may well be a key element in retaining a Regular Reserve capacity. A 2021 study found that more than half of regular reservists would consider positively more engagement from the army, with many preferring modern communications (email or a webpage) over the standard postal letter they receive.[56] Previous surveys also suggest that between one-half and two-thirds of Regular Reserves state that they would respond to a short-notice call out for a large-scale national emergency.[57] They also believe a paid retainer would motivate them more to engage and train.[58]

The Challenges to Overcome for the UK Regular Reserve

The long decades of inadequate investment means that revitalising the Regular Reserve will not be easy. Given reports that many ex-regulars do not think an ongoing liability for call out or recall is fair,[59] many of those with a current legal liability may resent a change to the previous extremely low expectation of being recalled to the colours. The 2025 SDR recognises that the UK is in a very different position today in that the army has

increased workforce demands in wartime that it currently cannot meet from the Regular Army and Army Reserve workforce alone. The communication of this need and the justification for such a change in expectations will be a key factor in convincing those in the Regular Reserve to re-engage with their liability.

In summary, aspirations to reinvigorate the British Army Regular Reserve appear to have faltered for three interrelated reasons:[60]

- A workplace culture that does not value the potential contribution that the Regular Reserve could make and may not wish to engage with liability for recall after full-time service
- No specified demand held against the Regular Reserve workforce, despite gaps in critical pinch points and doubts over the British Army's ability to provide mass for warfighting[61]
- A lack of funding for effective workforce management and reintegration of the Regular Reserve into a Whole Force Approach.

The Regular Reserve represents a large sunk investment for UK Defence in knowledge, skills and experience that can provide a cost-effective return to the nation through its legal liability to call out and recall. Over the last three decades, this sunk investment has been allowed to waste away.

The ADF Standby Reserve, SERCAT 2

The 2024 ADF SRR, similarly to the UK 2025 SDR, committed all parts of the Reserve to be 'an integrated, focused force as part of National Defence and provide an expansion base for the ADF in times of crisis'.[62] Service Category 2 (SERCAT 2) is the standby reserve of the previously trained workforce that would be a key component of any future contingent reserve required to expand the ADF. This service obligation is mandatory for trained personnel who enlisted after 1 July 2003[63] and who do not transfer to the other reserve SERCAT categories. The SRR makes clear that SERCAT 2 is not in a healthy state. The numbers are low, about 9,400,[64] with little year-on-year growth compared to 125,500 UK regular reservists.[65] The review also references the complexity of activating SERCAT 2 individuals; many instead prefer to remain inactive on SERCAT 3, thus complicating the accounting of the operational and contingent reserve components. Of note, SERCAT 2 personnel were not called out in 2020, which has been the only contemporary government-enacted compulsory call out of the ADF Reserves. The current level of engagement and information held on those in SERCAT 2 was found to be wanting, which would be of greater concern should any mobilisation activities be contemplated. In line with the rest of the ADF reserve components, a clear role and purpose for SERCAT 2 is needed, aligned with an employee value proposition.

In recognising these challenges, the review recommended radical change to the current implementation of SERCAT 2 personnel based on the conclusion that 'reserve demand outweighs Defence's capacity to pay for, recruit and train such [a] reserve capacity'[66] solely from reservist volunteers from society. It endorsed a 'qualitative shift in management'[67] to modernise record keeping, regularly engage with the reservists on SERCAT 2 to assure individual available capability, and integrate civilian skills into record keeping. The review also recommended that SERCAT 2 supply be aligned with the workforce positions needed in a crisis. In addition, there was a recommendation to extend the allotted time in SERCAT 2 from five to 10 years (capping out at retirement age) to double numbers over five years. Out of the 14 recommendations made in the strategic review, this recommendation was the only one not initially agreed;[68] it was finally implemented in September 2026.[69] Even with this doubling of numbers, the total workforce available remains very small compared to the UK compulsory liability system where Regular Reserve numbers are three times that of volunteer reserves.

Setting the Conditions for Success

A change in requirements for modern reserve forces, as expressed in the UK 2025 SDR and the ADF SRR, sets out the reality that both armies have shortages in their workforces that previously trained personnel could provide in a crisis. The UK Ministry of Defence has, through the 2025 SDR, committed to reinvigorating the Regular Reserve and improving the ministry's ability to track, manage, mobilise, train and generate it. Presently, there is increased political will and recognition that the Regular Reserve needs to be brought back into the order of battle. From a weaker starting point in terms of numbers, the ADF has recognised similar issues and required solutions. The conditions for achieving both the UK's and the ADF's ambitions are tied to addressing six major challenges.

Modernised Legislation

The UK has the *Reserve Force Act 1996*, which provides on leaving regular service a compulsory legal liability for call out or recall for regular reservists. This allows a large pool of individuals to be legally brought back into service without going through a complicated rehiring process, and gives individuals the required legal protections. This provides the British Armed Forces with options when planning to use individuals to reinforce the workforce: asking for volunteers from that liability pool to come forward for mobilisation (as they have done since 2003), or compulsorily mobilising individuals at pace and scale.

The UK Ministry of Defence has also put forward legislative change to modernise the *Reserve Forces Act 1996,* introduced into parliament in early 2026.[70] The 1996 Act is

broadly fit for purpose, but some sections are being amended to expand the potential Regular Reserve workforce. Publicly available figures demonstrate that the pool of regular reservists has shrunk since 2020.[71] While almost all officers—Regular or Volunteer Reserve—have a recall liability for life, the proposed measures extend the age limit for recall from age 55 to age 65 for regular other ranks, bringing the UK in line with most other NATO allies. Another measure introduces a compulsory recall liability for the part-time volunteer Army Reserve other ranks, aligning with their Regular Army other-rank counterparts. The proposed measures also include widening the liability of individuals for recall from only 'if national danger is imminent or great emergency or an actual or apprehended attack on the United Kingdom' to include 'Warlike Operations'.[72] This introduces flexibility to recall so that individuals can be in place before an attack, thus strengthening national readiness.

There is clear evidence that opinions in the ADF about the value of reservists bear much similarity to those in the UK,[73] and these negative views may have influenced the decision to conservatively decide on only five years of compulsory liability after full-time service in SERCAT 2.[74] In fact, the only legislative change proposed by the SRR was to extend the current five-year liability for SERCAT 2 to 10 years. Now implemented, this will take five years to increase numbers by a few thousand. To provide similar numbers to the UK will take some time. There is no evidence that a lengthy compulsory reserve liability for the UK has impacted on Regular Forces recruitment at any point in time, but this may be down to lack of awareness and youthful optimism. While there will always be a portion of the UK Regular Reserve unwilling to contribute post-service, the evidence shows that many would be willing to return to service in the defence of the UK, and history has demonstrated that UK veterans beyond their legal liability will also look to volunteer in a crisis.[75] The ADF would likely see the same patriotic surge of veteran volunteers. However, given the small size of SERCAT 2, even with a 10-year liability, the ADF would be handicapped at bringing significant numbers of veteran talent back into the ADF as presumably, under extant regulations, they would need to be rehired individually.

A Clear Demand Signal

Like any reserve force, the Regular Reserve and the SERCAT 2 contingent reserve require a clear demand signal to provide a justification for resources. It has taken the British Army longer than many of its NATO allies to recognise that reserve forces are important for sustaining the army in a long-term conflict.[76] According to 2023's Defence Strategic Review, Australia also has its own issues with identifying a clear demand for its reserve components. Part of the reason the British Army IRP in the 1980s was a success was the clear and very detailed workforce demand signal. The post–Cold War change in organisational culture that believed the future British Army would only ever take part in

small conflicts led to the Regular Reserve literally dropping out of the army's workforce demand calculus. The 2025 SDR identified a lack of British Army workforce to deal with concurrent home threats while also fulfilling overseas commitments in support of NATO. This can provide the impetus for the British Army to define the Regular Reserve demand required. The ADF requires a similar demand signal for SERCAT 2.

Adequate Funding and Resources for Enhanced Readiness

Legislative changes require military and political leadership and a commitment to cultural change, but cost little while setting the conditions for future success. To ensure future success, a number of additional improvements need to be implemented, as set out below. All these improvements require funding and resources, without which nothing will succeed. To be credible, reservists will need to be provided adequate uniform, equipment and, where required, weapons. Neither the UK nor the ADF has adequately funded or resourced their pools of previously trained workforce for a very long time, and they both need a rapid injection of funds. The good news is that the funds required would be far short of the sunk investment costs inherent in these previously trained individuals and the huge cost of building such knowledge, skills and experience in wartime from ab initio recruits. Both the British Army and the ADF have pressures on their finances that lead to prioritisation of funding decisions. Reserve-focused measures are often overlooked in favour of other decisions that prioritise the force of today rather than the reserve needed for tomorrow. Overcoming the 'here and now' funding priorities will take both the political and the military leadership to lead a change in culture. Without funding, there will be no strategic/contingency reserve to speak of in either nation, despite the fact that the funding of the Regular Reserve is a relatively insignificant percentage of total workforce costs.

A reserve can only provide deterrence and utility if it is seen to be equipped, practised and exercised. A clear demand signal also needs well-practised mobilisation procedures where individual regular reservist supply can be assessed against establishment gaps and demand. Annual reporting and routine mobilisation exercises will be needed to test the system. The UK plans to test its reserve mobilisation processes as part of the NATO Exercise Steadfast Defender in 2027.[77] There is no public record of the ADF exercising SERCAT 2 mobilisation processes, but there has reportedly been a small-scale test of the process for mandatory call out of Reserves each year, since 2019, called Operation Civil Assist. Sometimes it is a tabletop activity, while at other times it requires small numbers of reservists to attend and go through the process of transition from SERCAT 2, 3 and 5 to Service Option C (SERVOP C).[78] For both armies, a larger-scale process much like that of the 1980s' IRP with its series of annual reporting ARRCEX events and the Project STAR refresher training periods—with opportunities to attend larger exercises if the reservist so wishes—would appear to be the ideal model to follow.

Commanders lead people, drive innovation and cultural change, and provide accountability for military capability. A relatively cheap, small-scale command and staff team could drive a program of engagement and persistent communication, deliver workforce management and force sensing when required, and work with units and commands to provide a flexible and dynamic set of mobilisation plans for a range of commitments from small to large scale. Ideally, this should be reservist based, as reservists understand other reservists best of all—as the recent success of the reserve-led formations in the UK (19 Brigade) and Australian armies (2nd Australian Division) demonstrate.

Effective Workforce Management, Accurate Data and Information Management Systems

The British Army has been criticised in the UK media for lacking the ability to track the home addresses of those in the Regular Reserve.[79] The current method of keeping track, through an annual postal letter,[80] is no longer fit for purpose, and is far below the expectations for a highly connected, technologically capable population. The home address is usually based on the one lodged at the point of discharge and thus is likely to be out of date; additionally, fewer people now use the postal system generally, so a postal-based system potentially undermines the credibility of using the Regular Reserve in an emergency. It is also slower than electronic means. A memorandum of understanding is now in place for the Ministry of Defence to facilitate access to national tax data for the sole purpose of seeking home addresses[81] and this has substantially improved access to contact address details.[82] The ADF process of engaging and tracking SERCAT 2 reserves is reportedly little better.[83] However, it will be an overall investment in the information management systems, resources and processes to accurately record, collate and easily access the military and civilian skills that could unlock the wider talent in the UK Regular Reserve and SERCAT 2 cadres.[84] Such a system would also vastly improve utility and speed up mobilisation. Legal permissions to access email and other electronic communications will be key to future developments.

Expectation Management and Education as a Regular

Early in-service education and a consistent narrative throughout regular full-time service of post-service liability are required; these cannot form part of resettlement and transition only. A through-life communications plan is needed; videos and social media posts are ideal for this purpose and could form part of annual refresher training. This would make Regular Reserve or SERCAT 2 part of the accepted lexicon and part of considerations of British Army and ADF service—akin to the ADF's 'One Defence' approach to acknowledging and including all forms of service. Use of the terms 'discharge' and 'service leaver' must be caveated, and it should be made clearer that most individuals

will have a post-service liability. The cultural change required to deliver and maintain this education is likely to be considerable in order to culturally reframe the value of the Regular/Standby Reserve and SERCAT 2 to national preparedness.[85] Consideration must also be given to the impact on families of a return to service in a crisis, and education provided for the service leaver and their family on the conditions for call out—including the welfare support that would be available.

A Regular Reserve Identity, an 'Offer' and a Local Location

Prior to the British Army Personnel Centre opening in 1996, its Regular Reserve in the UK was administered by devolved cap badge and arms and services headquarters, with similar for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Historically, a locally devolved organisation to foster long-term contact and engagement worked best for the UK regular reservist, either with a cap badge/regimental focus or with a local geographic unit. While this would still make sense for central administration processing, it would be productive for regular reservists / SERCAT 2 to develop links with actual units on the Order of Battle that they may well deploy with in the future. This option could achieve the ADF SRR recommendation to match contingent reserve supply with detailed demand.[86] However, as with the UK, the rationalisation of defence sites is making it increasingly harder for reservists to serve near where they live, introducing long travel times as a barrier to service.

A paid retainer was a key offer used to reward UK regular reservists for staying in touch and attending annual checks, and was a process that worked well. This was set at £150 in the 1980s, equating to approximately £400 today. Other communication, incentives and processes that encourage face-to-face or virtual engagement with the army, fostered by a transition process that discourages permanent separation, would promote a continued sense of belonging. Accessible online briefing opportunities and the opportunity to maintain skill levels at weekends or evenings—or even on larger-scale exercises with units—could be offered to those willing to volunteer, similar to UK efforts in the 1980s. This has the advantage of highlighting a post-service liability to those currently serving full time within each unit involved. The positioning of a liability for recall or call out also needs consideration in terms of a wider national narrative on increased defence preparations to justify the reliance on the call back of regular/standby reserves as a prudent defence measure.

The Regular Reserve and SERCAT 2 are also important segments of the veteran community, and more engagement with them would allow UK Defence and the ADF to positively message this part of their veteran community. With annual engagement, any members of the Regular Reserve / SERCAT 2 struggling with transition from full-time service may be identified and signposted to help more rapidly. A termination process from full-time service that mandates post-service reserve liability and encourages a

continued sense of belonging would potentially benefit both the regular reservist and, by default, the veteran community. Given the high level of political interest in the welfare of veterans in both countries, this could be very positive. This would need to be reinforced with reassurances that welfare provision would be available for the Regular Reserve / SERCAT 2 and their families in a crisis.

Conclusion

In summary, a transition from competition to conflict would place significant workforce pressures on the British and Australian armies to generate forces. In the past, this has been addressed by maintaining a 'Regular Reserve', which has suffered decay in recent years. Previously trained personnel represent a large sunk investment in individual training and experience that neither the British Armed Forces nor the ADF has chosen to draw upon for many years. The 'solution' proposed (equally applicable in the UK and Australia) is to better engage, resource and manage the latent workforce of former regular service personnel, which presents an opportunity for rapid force multiplication in a time of crisis at minimal cost (as a percentage of total workforce expenditure) and with minimal effort. To transition the Regular Reserve / SERCAT 2 from latent to a more active and usable regular reserve means first challenging internal culture to lead change.

The scale of this cultural challenge should not be underestimated. However, the history of the British Army Regular Reserve demonstrates that all of this has been successfully achieved in the past and represents a cost-effective way to achieve a return on the latent talent, knowledge, skills and experience of previously trained personnel. There is no reason that it cannot be achieved again with the right culture, modest investment, and leadership. A key challenge for the ADF is the cultural change needed to modernise legislation to more rapidly increase the numbers in SERCAT 2; the UK is undergoing this same change. Both nations need to go further to unlock the demand signal, provide adequate funding and resources for enhanced readiness, invest in effective workforce management and systems, ensure expectation management and through-life education in regular service, and work to achieve a Regular Reserve identity, with a clear 'offer', alongside a local location for the Regular Reserve / SERCAT 2 population to attend. Doing so will provide the greatest opportunity to draw on the widest pool of latent talent for service in national/homeland defence.

About the Author

Professor Vince Connelly is Professor of Psychology at the Oxford Brookes University Defence and Security Centre and Director of Teaching and Learning for the Psychology programmes at Oxford Brookes. His particular areas of research expertise include Reserve Forces, Military Families and Veterans. He has authored many peer-reviewed papers and articles on these topics and his 2023 co-edited book, Contemporary Military Reserves: Between the Civilian and Military Worlds, presents a comparative study of international military reserves.

Vince is a Fellow of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, the academic member of the UK Reserve Forces External Scrutiny Team, a trustee of the Berkshire Yeomanry Museum and a member of the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre Stakeholder Advisory Panel, among others. He has been a British Army Reservist for over 40 years.

ENDNOTES

1 Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review 2025—Making Britain Safer: Secure at Home, Strong Abroad* (Ministry of Defence, 2025), p. 31, at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-review-2025-making-britain-safer-secure-at-home-strong-abroad.

2 Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), p. 45, at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

3 Vincent Connelly, 'Delivering "Mass" for the British Army: Defence Reviews and Second Echelon Choices', *RUSI* (website), 7 March 2025, at: www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/delivering-mass-british-army-defence-reviews-and-second-echelon-choices.

4 Kitching, 'SDR', p. 11.

5 Stephen Trynosky, *Paper TigIRR: The Army's Diminished Strategic Personnel Reserve in an Era of Great Power Competition* (US Army War College, 2023), at: https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/html/trecms/AD1215164/index.html.

6 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*, p. 6.

7 Ibid., p. 61.

8 Ibid., p. 61.

9 Connelly, 'Delivering "Mass" for the British Army'.

10 David Langley, 'British Line Infantry Reserves for the Great War Part 1', *Stand To!* 100 (2014): 24.

11 'The Effectiveness of Reservists: A Historical Perspective. A Study for the Directorate of Battle Doctrine', 13 February 1985, DEFE 70/1343, p. 24.

12 Ibid., p. 23.

13 Vincent Connelly, *A History of the Army Reserve* (Ministry of Defence, 2018), p. 22.

14 CJ McInnes, 'BAOR in the 1980s: Changes in Doctrine and Organization', *Defense Analysis* 4, no. 4 (1988): 377–394, at: https://doi.org/10.1080/07430178808405366.

15 'Reinforcements: Individual Reinforcement Plan', 23 February 1982–11 June 1984, DEFE 70/1175, at: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16896288.

16 Vincent Connelly, 'The British Army Reserves: Responding to Challenges, Past, Present and Future', webinar, Reserve Officers Union for Armed Forces of Denmark, 6 February 2025.

17 Ibid.

18 'DRA 1416 Film: Reinforcement of the British Army for War' (video), *Imperial War Museum*, 1979.

19 'Reserve Forces Act 1980', *The National Archives of the UK (TNA)* (website), at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/9/contents.

20 Connelly, 'The British Army Reserves'.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Kenton White, 'Mearsheimer's Folly: NATO's Cold War Capability and Credibility', *Military Strategy Magazine* 6, no. 4 (2017), at: www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/mearsheimers-folly-natos-cold-war-capability-and-credibility.

25 Ibid.

26 'Reinforcements: Individual Reinforcement Plan'.

27 Connelly, 'The British Army Reserves'.

28 'Operation Granby (Gulf War): Manning and Battle Casualty Replacements', 1 October–11 December 1990, DEFE 70/1976, at: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16976592.

29 National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces* (National Audit Office, 2006), p. 20, at:

www.nao.org.uk/reports/ministry-of-defence-reserve-forces.

30 Connelly, *A History of the Army Reserve*, p. 29.

31 Ibid., p. 29.

32 National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, p. 20.

33 Ian Beckett, 'The Territorial Army: More than a Manpower Reserve?', *RUSI* (website), 24 June 2009, at: www.rusi.org/publication/territorial-army-more-manpower-reserve.

34 Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations, *The United Kingdom Reserve Forces: External Scrutiny Team Annual Statutory Report 2025* (CRFCA, 2025), at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69380a8de447374889cd8f5a/Council_of_Reserve_Forces__and_Cadets__Associations_Scrutiny_Team_annual_statutory_report_2025.pdf.

35 Connelly, 'Delivering "Mass" for the British Army'.

36 Connelly, 'The British Army Reserves'.

37 National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Ensuring Sufficient Skilled Military Personnel* (National Audit Office, 2018), at: www.nao.org.uk/report/ensuring-sufficient-skilled-military-personnel.

38 House of Commons Defence Committee, *Ready for War?: First Report of Session 2023–24* (UK Government, 2024), at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmdfence/26/summary.html.

39 Vincent Connelly, 'Bringing the Regular Reserve Back Into the Whole Force', *British Army Review* 181 (2021): 82–89, at: www.army.mod.uk/media/14374/bar_181-autumn-2021.pdf.

40 David I Walker, 'Anticipating Army Exit: Identity Constructions of Final Year UK Career Soldiers', *Armed Forces & Society* 39, no. 2 (2013): 284–304.

41 Connelly, 'Bringing the Regular Reserve Back Into the Whole Force'.

42 National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*.

43 Ibid.

44 Vincent Connelly, 'Understanding and Explaining the Marginalization of Part-Time British Army Reservists', *Armed Forces & Society* 47, no. 4 (2020), at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20948591.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ministry of Defence, 'Supplementary Written Evidence Submitted by the Ministry of Defence', Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the Army inquiry (Commons Select Committee: Defence Committee, 2016), Q3, at: http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/sdsr-2015-and-the-army/written/40139.html.

50 Marten Vares, 'Measuring Skill Decay in Reserve Soldiers', presentation, NATO Science and Technology Organisation Meeting Proceedings—Reserve Forces: Challenges and Relevance to NATO and National Security, 2025, at: https://publications.sto.nato.int/publications/STO%20Meeting%20Proceedings/STO-MP-HFM-390/MP-HFM-390-23P.pdf.

51 Anthony King, *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: From the Rhine to Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

52 Directorate of Land Warfare, *Operation Herrick Campaign Study* (Ministry of Defence, 2016), at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f4833e5274a2e8ab4b3ab/20160107115638.pdf.

53 The individual references reinforcing these arguments in the following sections have not all been reproduced here but are located in my 2021 paper: Connelly, 'Bringing the Regular Reserve Back Into the Whole Force'. Readers interested in the wide variety of data, reports and sources that underpinned those arguments should consult that paper, with all sources used provided with grateful permission of the British Army and Ministry of Defence.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, 'Warfighting at Scale: Regenerating and Reconstituting Mass', *Ares & Athena* 6 (2016).

62 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves,* p. 55.

63 Australian National Audit Office, *Performance Audit Assistance Provided to Personnel Leaving the ADF*, General Audit Report No. 9 (ANAO, 2005), p. 22.

64 Ibid., p. 35; Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2024–25* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025), p. 127.

65 Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations, *The United Kingdom Reserve Forces: External Scrutiny Team Annual Statutory Report 2026* (CRFCA, 2026), p. 32.

66 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*.

67 Ibid., p. 61.

68 Ibid., p. 74.

69 'Bolstering the ADF's Contingent Workforce', *Department of Defence* (website), 21 September 2026, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2026-09-21/bolstering-adfs-contingent-workforce (accessed 30 September 2026); Tom Lowrey, 'ADF Doubles Post-Service Commitment for New Recruits to 10 Years', *ABC News*, 22 September 2026, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2026-09-22/adf-doubles-post-service-committment-to-ten-years/107181834 (accessed 30 September 2026).

70 Ministry of Defence, 'Armed Forces Bill 2026', *UK Government*, updated 13 July 2026, at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-bill-2026.

71 Ministry of Defence, 'Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics: 1 January 2026', *UK Government*, updated 23 September 2026, at: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2026/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-1-january-2026.

72 Ministry of Defence, 'Armed Forces Bill 2026'.

73 Jodie Lording, 'Paid Volunteers: Experiencing Reserve Service and Resignation', *Australian Army Journal* 12, no. 1 (2015): 90–110.

74 Mark Armstrong, 'Historical Legacy to National Asset: The Australian Army Reserve in the 21st Century', PhD thesis, Deakin University, 2024.

75 Connelly, 'Bringing the Regular Reserve Back Into the Whole Force'.

76 Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations, *The United Kingdom Reserve Forces: External Scrutiny Team Annual Statutory Report 2025*.

77 Ministry of Defence, 'Letter from Louise Sandher-Jones MP, Minister For Veterans And People, to Lord Peach', 11 December 2025, at: https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2025-0849/External_Scrutiny_Team_Report_-MinVP_to_Lord_Peach.pdf.

78 Anonymous reviewer comment to an earlier draft of this paper.

79 Daniel Boffey, 'MoD Has Lost Track of Veterans on Recall List, Says Defence Adviser', *The Guardian*, 19 April 2026, at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2026/apr/19/mod-has-lost-track-of-veterans-on-recall-list-defence-adviser.

80 Ministry of Defence, 'Service Leavers' Guide', *UK Government*, updated 18 September 2024, at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-leavers-pack/service-leavers-guide#your-reserve-liability-responsibilities-and-opportunities.

81 'Reserve Forces Act 1996', *The National Archives (TNS)* (website), Part XII Miscellaneous Section 125A, at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/14/section/125A.

82 Council of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations, *The United Kingdom Reserve Forces: External*

Scrutiny Team Annual Statutory Report 2026.

83 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*.

84 Richard Anon, 'The Strategic Reserve: What it Is, and Why It Could Be You', *Wavell Room*, 27 November 2024, at: https://wavellroom.com/2024/11/27/the-strategic-reserve-what-it-is-and-why-it-could-be-you.

85 Connelly, 'Bringing the Regular Reserve Back Into the Whole Force'.

86 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*.

FROM MOBILISATION TO EFFECT: A FRAMEWORK FOR RESERVE FORCE DESIGN IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

John Coyne

Introduction: The Reserve Question Australia Can No Longer Avoid

Australia faces a hard reserve question. What should Army Reserves do, and how quickly must they do it? Every other issue follows from that question. Recruitment, training, employer support, force structure, domestic support tasks, specialist capability programs and mobilisation law all matter, but none of them can compensate for strategic ambiguity about purpose.

Australia has entered an era in which military effectiveness depends not only on advanced platforms but on the nation's ability to generate, sustain and rapidly expand combat power under conditions of compressed strategic warning. The 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS)[1] adopted deterrence by denial as the organising logic for Australian force design, placing the defence of Australia's northern approaches at the centre of national strategy. The 2026 NDS reinforced this strategic direction by reaffirming northern Australia's central role in Australia's defence.

Contemporary strategic scholarship reflects this shift by treating force posture, mobilisation, contested logistics and national resilience as integral components of military capability rather than its enabling functions.[2] Military effectiveness is increasingly understood to depend not only on the quality of platforms but also on the capacity to generate, move, sustain and integrate forces at the speed required by modern conflict. This represents a broader transition from platform-centric conceptions of military power towards readiness, adaptability and force generation.[3]

This intellectual shift is reflected in the Army's evolving approach to mobilisation. Recent work on the role of the 2nd Division increasingly conceptualises mobilisation not as the delayed expansion of the force after conflict begins but as the continuous generation of operational capability able to respond to compressed strategic warning.[4] Likewise, contemporary Australian Army literature recognises that mobilisation serves different purposes depending on the strategic problem being addressed and cautions against treating mobilisation as a single or uniform concept.[5]

This article builds on that emerging literature but also addresses a related and distinct question. It does not seek to define mobilisation, develop a mobilisation model or prescribe specific call-out arrangements. Instead, it examines how reserve capability is translated into operational effect across a range of contingencies. The central question is not whether individuals, units or the institution are mobilised, but how quickly reserve capability can generate operational outcomes once required.

To address this question, the article develops a mobilisation-to-effect framework that shifts attention from force structure and preparedness metrics alone towards the practical challenge of converting reserve capacity into timely operational capability. The framework treats readiness, workforce availability, geographic alignment, strategic movement, sustainment, command integration and mobilisation arrangements as interdependent determinants of operational effect rather than discrete workforce or preparedness issues.

Methodology

This article employs an exploratory qualitative research design combining documentary analysis, comparative case study analysis and applied policy analysis to examine the relationship between reserve force design, mobilisation and operational effect. Rather than testing a formal hypothesis, the article develops a conceptual framework for analysing how reserve capability contributes to operational outcomes under Australia's contemporary strategic circumstances. The objective is explanatory rather than predictive: to identify the principal factors that influence the generation of operational capability and to assess their implications for reserve force design.

The analysis draws on Australian Government policy documents, Defence publications, parliamentary and audit reports, Army doctrine, professional military literature, peer-reviewed academic research, international studies of reserve forces, and publicly available workforce and demographic data. These sources are used to examine reserve capability across strategic, institutional and operational levels rather than to evaluate the

implementation of individual Defence programs. The analysis is situated in Australia's contemporary strategic environment, particularly the shift towards deterrence by denial, compressed strategic warning and the increasing strategic importance of northern Australia.

The research proceeds in seven stages. First, it synthesises contemporary Australian defence strategy, mobilisation literature and reserve policy to identify the principal challenges affecting reserve force design and mobilisation. Second, it develops a mobilisation-to-effect framework that integrates readiness, workforce availability, strategic movement, sustainment and command integration into a single analytical construct focused on the generation of operational effect. Third, it examines four structural, organisational and societal factors influencing mobilisation-to-effect: demographic geography, workforce availability and readiness, employer integration, and competing domestic operational demands. Fourth, it traces the evolution of Australian reserve force design, from the Ready Reserve through the Total Workforce System to contemporary reforms, including the transformation of the 2nd (Australian) Division and the Reserve Force Level Framework. Fifth, it undertakes a structured comparative analysis of reserve systems in Singapore, Finland, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States to identify transferable design principles rather than advocate institutional replication. Sixth, it applies these findings to northern Australia as the decisive test of whether reserve capability can generate timely operational effect under demanding geographic and strategic conditions. Finally, it considers the implications for Australian reserve force design, identifying how the mobilisation-to-effect framework can complement existing reforms by strengthening the alignment between readiness, force generation and operational requirements.

These international cases were selected because they represent democratic states employing reserve forces under differing combinations of territorial defence, expeditionary operations, conscription, national service and volunteer service. Their value lies not in providing models for institutional replication but in illustrating alternative approaches to mobilisation, readiness, force generation and civil–military integration that illuminate the Australian case.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework constitutes the principal analytical contribution of the article. Rather than proposing an alternative reform agenda, the framework provides a means of evaluating whether existing and future reserve reforms, including differentiated readiness, workforce integration and mobilisation arrangements, collectively generate operational capability within the timeframes demanded by Australia's contemporary defence strategy.

The Mobilisation-to-Effect Framework

Defence acknowledges the reserve workforce challenges it faces in delivering the force required to implement the national strategy endorsed by the government and is calculating ways to slice the workforce pie to deliver the mission.

It is exactly here where Army could consider a mobilisation-to-effect framework. The framework asks one practical question: How long does it take to convert a named reserve capability into operational effect at a specified location, under specified conditions and with specified sustainment?

For the purposes of this article, mobilisation refers to the process by which Defence converts reserve personnel and capability from peacetime availability into operationally effective military capability. Mobilisation exists on a spectrum ranging from routine force-generation activities and voluntary reserve service through to formal call-out arrangements under Part IV of the *Defence Act 1903*. The focus of this article is not the legal mechanism used to activate reserve service but the time required to generate operational effect once a decision has been made to employ reserve capability.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework applies across partial, defence and national mobilisation scenarios. While mobilisation type influences authority, scale and resource allocation, the framework focuses on the common force-generation challenge of converting available capability into operational effect within required timelines.

The framework presented here does not replace established concepts such as readiness, preparedness, mobilisation or force generation. Rather, it integrates them through a common temporal lens focused on operational effect. Readiness describes the capability immediately available to Army. Mobilisation describes the process of preparing and activating that capability. Force generation describes the assembly and preparation of forces for operational employment. The mobilisation-to-effect framework asks a complementary question: How long does it take to translate available reserve capability into operational effect at a specified location under specified conditions?

Figure 1 illustrates this process as three sequential and interdependent stages. Although presented linearly for analytical clarity, the stages are mutually reinforcing, and delay or failure at any stage extends the overall time required to generate operational effect.

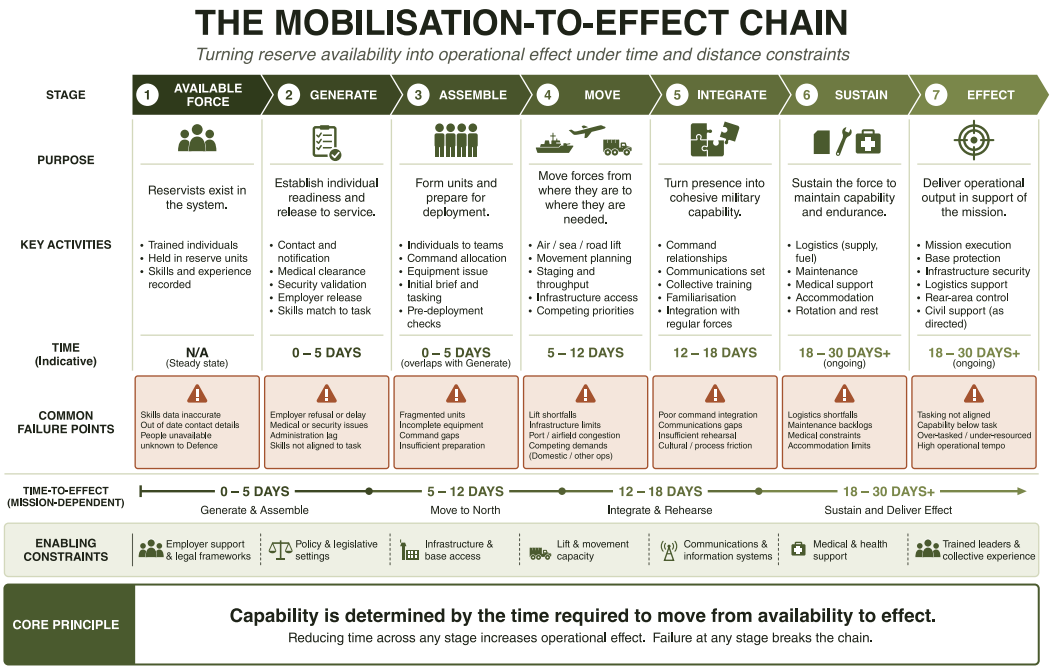


Figure 1. The mobilisation-to-effect framework

The first stage is generation. Reservists must be contactable, medically current, administratively ready, legally deployable and released from civilian obligations. Individual competence must align with task requirements, including qualifications, trade currency, security clearances and physical readiness. The second stage is movement, in which personnel and equipment are transported from population centres to operational locations through often constrained air, road, rail and maritime networks. The final stage is effect. Reserve elements must arrive as functioning teams, equipped, sustained and integrated into command structures with sufficient collective training to perform their assigned tasks immediately. Arrival alone does not constitute operational effect; without integration, sustainment and command relationships, it represents presence rather than capability. Northern Australia amplifies each stage of mobilisation. Distance turns force generation into a logistics problem. Sparse population limits local reserve mass. Movement depends on constrained lift and vulnerable transport corridors, utilising national highways that are subject to northern Australia's spectacularly destructive climate. Sustainment relies on infrastructure, fuel, maintenance and communications systems that define what a force can do after arrival. Defence has committed significant investment to northern infrastructure, but infrastructure alone does not produce trained, integrated capability at speed. The constraint lies in the interaction between workforce, movement and sustainment.

Building on existing preparedness frameworks, a mobilisation-to-effect model would allow Army to classify reserve capability not only by readiness level but also by the time required to generate operational effect at a specified location and for a specified task. Immediate tasks would rely on local presence and access, including liaison, surveillance, infrastructure support and civil–military coordination. Short-notice tasks would include rear-area security, logistics augmentation and base support. Medium-notice tasks would involve formed sub-units for protection, sustainment and follow-on roles. Long-notice tasks would provide depth of expansion and replacement capacity following deliberate collective training. The value of each capability depends not simply on whether personnel exist or can be legally activated but on how quickly they can be assembled, equipped, moved, integrated and sustained to generate operational effect.

The framework also forces explicit trade-offs. A reservist available within 48 hours requires different preparation, employer arrangements and sustainment planning than one available after 30 days. Specialist capabilities, including medical, engineering or technical roles, require different readiness pathways from combat elements. Geographic alignment matters. A locally based reserve element differs from one requiring interstate movement, as it knows the physical and human terrain and can plug into networks and connections already established by its personnel.

Defence already uses service categories in the Total Workforce System (TWS) to describe service types; however, those categories do not address the operational question of time-to-effect. Mobilisation-to-effect should become a planning and reporting metric. Army needs to be able to know, by region and capability, how many reservists can generate effect within defined timeframes (and under what legal frameworks), including 24 hours, 72 hours, seven days, 14 days, 30 days and 90 days. The metric should incorporate movement and sustainment, not just availability. It should distinguish between individual augmentation, specialist teams and formed elements. It should also account for employer risk. Reservists embedded in essential civilian sectors may face competing national demands during a crisis. Mobilisation planners already account for these constraints, but that understanding must be codified and communicated across policy, industry and supporting agencies before mobilisation, not rediscovered under operational pressure.

Factors Influencing Mobilisation-to-Effect

Reserve capability is determined by more than authorised strength or workforce numbers. The mobilisation-to-effect framework developed in this article demonstrates that operational capability emerges from the interaction of multiple constraints that

collectively determine how rapidly reserve personnel can be converted into military effect. These constraints are structural, organisational and societal. They influence not only the availability of individual reservists but also the ability to generate, move, integrate and sustain formed capability under operational conditions. Four factors are particularly significant: demographic geography, workforce availability, employer integration and competing domestic operational demands. Examining these factors together provides a more accurate assessment of reserve effectiveness than workforce statistics alone because each directly affects the time required to generate operational capability.

Demographic and Geographic Constraints

Australia's strategic geography creates the first and least malleable constraint on mobilisation-to-effect. The NDS places northern Australia at the centre of Australia's defence posture, yet the distribution of reserve capability continues to reflect national population patterns rather than operational geography. Consequently, the principal challenge confronting Army is not the willingness of Australians to serve, but the geographic separation between where reserve capability is generated and where strategy increasingly requires military effect.[6]

This distinction reframes a longstanding policy debate. Northern and remote communities consistently demonstrate strong participation in reserve service relative to their population size, suggesting that commitment to service is not the limiting variable.[7] Rather, the constraint is demographic scale. Northern Australia simply does not possess, nor is it projected to possess, the population necessary to generate the reserve mass required for sustained operations independently of southern Australia. Even substantial increases in regional recruitment would produce only marginal improvements in operational capacity.

The implication is that Defence faces a mobilisation challenge rather than a recruitment challenge. Strategic success depends less on increasing reserve numbers than on designing a mobilisation system capable of rapidly translating reserve capability concentrated in Australia's southern population centres into operational effect in the north. The question is not whether sufficient reservists exist nationally, but whether they can be generated, transported, integrated and sustained within the timelines demanded by Australia's contemporary defence strategy.

Recent workforce trends reinforce this conclusion. Although reserve numbers have increased over the past decade, growth has occurred largely in the major population centres where Australians already live rather than in those northern regions now assuming greater strategic importance.[8] Headline workforce growth provides only limited insight into operational capability. A reserve establishment concentrated in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane contributes differently to Australia's defence posture than capability already positioned in Darwin, Townsville or other northern locations. Geography changes the

operational value of identical workforce numbers because distance directly influences mobilisation timelines, lift requirements, sustainment demands and command integration.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework shifts attention from establishment strength towards geographic responsiveness. Capability should not be measured solely by the number of reservists available in the force structure, but by the time required to generate operational effect at specified locations under defined operational conditions. In this context, northern Australia functions as the decisive design test. It magnifies every component of mobilisation by combining long distances, limited infrastructure redundancy, constrained strategic movement and sparse population into a single operational problem. Reserve force design must acknowledge demographic reality and build systems that compensate for it rather than assume it can be overcome through recruitment alone.

Workforce Availability and Readiness

The second determinant of mobilisation-to-effect is workforce availability. Unlike a standing force, a volunteer reserve cannot be assumed to exist in a constant state of readiness. The mobilisation of reserve capability depends on the interaction of individual availability, collective preparedness and institutional readiness. These factors are related but distinct. Individual reservists may satisfy administrative and training requirements yet still be unavailable because of civilian employment, family commitments or competing professional obligations. Equally, units composed of individually qualified personnel may lack the collective proficiency required to generate operational effect within the timeframe demanded by a contingency. The critical question is not simply how many reservists are available but how rapidly they can be assembled, integrated and employed as functioning military capability.

This distinction highlights an enduring limitation of establishment-based measures of reserve capability. Workforce statistics describe the size of the reserve but provide only a partial indication of operational capacity. Capability is ultimately generated through trained individuals operating in cohesive teams, supported by established command relationships, communications, logistics and collective training. Readiness is an emergent characteristic of the force rather than the aggregate of individual qualifications. Measuring reserve effectiveness through authorised strength alone risks overstating the capability immediately available to government during periods of compressed strategic warning.[9]

Australia's traditional reserve training model reflects the historical expectation that mobilisation would occur over extended periods. Weekly parade nights, periodic weekend exercises and annual continuous training remain effective mechanisms for maintaining military identity, core competencies and community connection. They are less well suited, however, to developing the collective proficiency required for complex combined-arms operations or for generating formed capability at short notice.[10] Contemporary operations require reserve elements capable of integrating rapidly with regular Army formations,

operating sophisticated equipment and sustaining operations across extended distances. These demands place increasing emphasis on collective readiness rather than on individual competence alone.

The challenge is compounded by the changing character of Australia's reserve workforce. Many reservists possess highly specialised civilian skills that are increasingly valuable to Defence, particularly in cybersecurity, engineering, health, logistics and information technology. Yet these same individuals often occupy critical civilian positions during national crises, creating competing demands for their expertise. A mobilisation system that assumes unrestricted access to specialist personnel risks overlooking the interdependence between Defence capability and broader national resilience. Workforce planning should account not only for military availability but also for the strategic value of reservists in Australia's essential civilian systems.[11]

Recent reforms acknowledge these realities. The Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves recognises that reserve capability exists across a spectrum of readiness and proposes the Reserve Force Level Framework (RFLF) to align training commitments, availability and preparedness with operational purpose.[12] The significance of this approach lies in recognising that readiness is not a uniform condition but a deliberate design choice. Different operational tasks require different levels of preparation, notice to move and employer support. Attempting to maximise readiness across the entire Reserve would be prohibitively expensive and unnecessary; conversely, assuming all reserve capability can be generated within similar timeframes understates the diversity of operational requirements.

Viewed through the mobilisation-to-effect framework, readiness becomes a temporal concept rather than a purely administrative one. The relevant question is not whether reservists satisfy prescribed readiness standards, but whether those standards enable individuals, teams and formed units to generate operational effect within the decision window created by the strategic circumstance. High-readiness reserve elements require more than additional training days. They require predictable availability, current qualifications, established command relationships, collective training, assured access to equipment and mobilisation arrangements that enable rapid integration with the broader force. Lower-readiness elements remain equally valuable but contribute differently by providing specialist capability, reinforcement, replacement personnel and expansion depth over longer mobilisation periods.

Accordingly, workforce availability should be understood as a continuum rather than a binary condition. Individual willingness to serve, while fundamental, represents only one component of operational readiness. Mobilisation effectiveness depends equally on the collective preparedness of units, the institutional mechanisms that support rapid

activation and the capacity of Defence to align differentiated readiness with clearly defined operational tasks. Reserve capability is generated not through workforce numbers alone but through the interaction of people, preparedness and time.

Employer Support and Civil–Military Workforce Integration

The effectiveness of a volunteer reserve ultimately depends on relationships that extend beyond Defence. Unlike a standing force, reserve capability is generated through a partnership between the individual, Defence and civilian employers. Employer support is more than a workforce management issue; it is a critical determinant of mobilisation-to-effect. The willingness and ability of employers to release personnel influences not only the availability of individual reservists but also the speed with which Defence can generate collective capability under conditions of strategic warning.

Australia's legislative framework provides an important foundation for this relationship. The *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001* protects reservists from discrimination arising from their military service and provides mechanisms to safeguard civilian employment during periods of Defence duty.[13] Complementary initiatives, including the Employer Support Payment Scheme and the work of the Defence Reserves Support Council, have sought to reduce the financial and organisational burden placed upon employers while encouraging recognition of the broader benefits reserve service can provide through leadership, resilience and technical expertise.[14] These arrangements have contributed to generally positive employer attitudes towards reserve service during routine training and limited operational commitments.

However, contemporary strategic circumstances expose the limitations of viewing employer support primarily through a peacetime workforce lens. Research demonstrates that employer support is neither uniform nor unconditional. While most employers express broad support for reserve service, that support becomes increasingly contingent as the duration, frequency and operational consequences of employee absence increase.[15] Small and medium-sized enterprises, regional businesses and organisations employing highly specialised personnel often experience disproportionate operational and financial impacts when key employees are mobilised. These pressures are likely to intensify during a national crisis, when the same civilian sectors supporting Defence, including transport, logistics, health, engineering, communications, energy and critical infrastructure, are simultaneously required to sustain essential national functions.

This creates a fundamental mobilisation dilemma. Many of the reservists whose civilian skills are most valuable to Defence are also indispensable to the resilience of Australia's economy and critical infrastructure. Mobilisation requires balancing competing national

priorities rather than simply maximising Defence workforce availability. A cyber specialist employed by a major telecommunications provider, a logistics manager supporting national freight networks or an engineer responsible for critical energy infrastructure may contribute as much to national resilience through their civilian employment as through military service. Mobilisation planning must consider the broader national consequences of transferring specialised personnel from civilian industry into Defence.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework suggests that employer integration should be understood as a component of national preparedness rather than merely an administrative support function. Higher-readiness reserve capability requires predictable arrangements that extend beyond legal protection to encompass sustained engagement between Defence, industry and government. Formal employer partnerships, sector-specific mobilisation planning and workforce continuity arrangements are likely to become increasingly important as Defence seeks to generate capability within compressed strategic warning periods. These arrangements should not seek to eliminate the tension between civilian and military demand, which is inherent in any volunteer reserve system; rather, they should manage it transparently through deliberate planning before a crisis emerges.

Viewed in this way, employer support becomes an operational variable rather than a peripheral personnel issue. The speed with which Defence can generate reserve capability is directly influenced by the strength of its relationships with civilian employers and by the degree to which mobilisation planning accounts for the interdependence between military capability and broader national resilience. Employer integration should be regarded as a strategic enabler of mobilisation-to-effect, linking Defence workforce policy to Australia's wider system of national preparedness.

Domestic Operations and Readiness Trade-Offs

Domestic operations represent the fourth major influence on mobilisation-to-effect because they compete directly with the readiness, availability and force-generation requirements necessary for high-intensity operations. Reserve forces have become an increasingly important component of Australia's response to bushfires, floods, cyclones, pandemics and other emergencies through Defence Assistance to the Civil Community. These operations demonstrate the flexibility of the Reserve and reinforce its contribution to national resilience, strengthening relationships with emergency services, governments and local communities while providing reservists with valuable operational experience.[16]

However, domestic operations also create opportunity costs. Reserve capability is finite, and time committed to one task is unavailable for another. Extended domestic commitments consume training time, equipment availability, command capacity, employer goodwill and individual availability. Although many domestic operations develop

leadership, logistics and command skills that are transferable to military operations, they do not necessarily generate the collective warfighting proficiency required for operations under contested conditions. The issue is not whether domestic operations have value—they clearly do—but how their demands are balanced against the readiness required to support Australia's contemporary defence strategy.

This tension has become increasingly apparent as Australia's strategic environment has deteriorated. The Defence Strategic Review reaffirmed that the ADF should remain the force of last resort for domestic disaster response, recognising that routine domestic tasking can reduce preparedness for the ADF's primary function of defending Australia and contributing to deterrence.[17] The NDS reinforces this shift by placing greater emphasis on force generation, sustained operations and the defence of Australia's northern approaches under conditions of compressed strategic warning. Reserve force design must account for the possibility that future domestic emergencies and strategic crises may occur concurrently rather than sequentially.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework provides a means of understanding these competing demands. Domestic operations affect each stage of mobilisation. Personnel committed to disaster response may be unavailable for immediate military deployment. Equipment employed in civil support tasks may require maintenance or redistribution before operational employment. Command elements engaged in domestic operations may require reconstitution before undertaking military tasks. Consequently, the operational cost of domestic commitments cannot be measured solely by the duration of the deployment itself but by their effect on the time required to generate military capability for subsequent contingencies.

These trade-offs do not suggest that reserve forces should withdraw from domestic operations. Rather, they reinforce the importance of differentiated readiness and clearly defined operational roles. Reserve elements primarily assigned to domestic resilience require different readiness standards, equipment scales and training priorities from units intended to provide rapid reinforcement, rear-area security or operational sustainment. Attempting to optimise every reserve element simultaneously for both domestic support and high-readiness warfighting would dilute capability across both missions. Conversely, explicitly differentiating readiness allows Defence to preserve valuable contributions to national resilience while ensuring that designated high-readiness reserve elements remain capable of generating operational effect within the timeframes demanded by Australia's defence strategy.

Viewed collectively, the factors examined in this section demonstrate that mobilisation effectiveness is determined by the interaction of demographic realities, workforce availability, employer integration and competing operational demands rather than by

establishment strength alone. Each influences the time required to generate operational capability, and each contributes directly to mobilisation-to-effect. Reserve reform should consequently focus less on increasing workforce numbers than on reducing the practical constraints that delay the conversion of reserve potential into operational capability. This provides the analytical foundation for the comparative analysis that follows.

Evolution of Australian Reserve Force Design

Australia's approach to reserve force design has evolved significantly over the past three decades in response to changing strategic circumstances, operational experience and workforce realities. While the specific policy settings have varied, successive reforms have sought to balance the competing demands of readiness, affordability, workforce sustainability and operational utility. Rather than representing disconnected initiatives, these reforms demonstrate an ongoing effort to determine how reserve capability can best contribute to national defence. Examined through the mobilisation-to-effect framework, they reveal a gradual shift from viewing the Reserve primarily as a source of augmentation towards recognising its role in force generation, mobilisation and operational preparedness.

The Ready Reserve and High-Readiness Mobilisation

The Ready Reserve scheme, introduced in 1991, represented Australia's most ambitious attempt to create a high-readiness reserve force capable of rapid mobilisation. Established under the *Defence Legislation Amendment Act 1991* (Cth), the scheme required recruits to complete 12 months of continuous full-time military training before transitioning to a four-year period of part-time reserve service, followed by a period in the Standby Reserve.[18] Unlike the traditional reserve model, which relied primarily on periodic evening and weekend training, the Ready Reserve sought to generate a force capable of immediate operational employment by investing heavily in initial collective preparation.

The underlying philosophy reflected a recognition that operational readiness cannot be generated instantaneously. Concentrated full-time training provided reservists with greater individual proficiency, unit cohesion and familiarity with Army procedures than could be achieved through dispersed part-time training. The scheme represented an early acknowledgement that the speed with which reserve capability could be generated depended on sustained investment before mobilisation rather than on accelerated preparation after a crisis emerged. In contemporary terms, it sought to reduce mobilisation-to-effect by increasing the proportion of capability already prepared for operational employment.

Although the Ready Reserve demonstrated considerable success in producing highly capable reservists, it also exposed enduring policy trade-offs. The model required substantial financial investment, imposed significant opportunity costs on participants through prolonged separation from civilian employment or education, and demanded a continuous training pipeline capable of sustaining annual intakes.[19] These requirements proved difficult to reconcile with the fiscal constraints and strategic assumptions of the post Cold War period. Following the election of the Howard government, the scheme was discontinued in 1996 as Defence shifted towards a more flexible reserve model based on individual augmentation and part-time service rather than maintaining a dedicated high-readiness reserve component.[20]

Its abolition should not be interpreted as a rejection of the readiness principle that underpinned the scheme. Rather, it reflected the competing workforce, financial and strategic priorities confronting Defence at the time. Subsequent operational experience, including Timor-Leste, Iraq, Afghanistan and increasingly frequent domestic support operations, continued to demonstrate the value of reservists while simultaneously highlighting the challenges associated with generating formed capability at short notice.[21] As Armstrong argues, Australian reserve policy since the 1990s has largely sought to reconcile this enduring tension between maintaining affordable part-time capability and generating operational readiness when required.[22]

Viewed through the mobilisation-to-effect framework, the Ready Reserve remains significant because it demonstrated that readiness can be deliberately created through concentrated investment in training and preparedness before mobilisation. Equally, it demonstrated that such readiness carries significant financial, workforce and institutional costs. The central policy challenge has never been whether readiness matters, but how Defence should balance readiness, affordability and sustainability in a predominantly volunteer reserve system. That challenge continues to shape contemporary reforms, including the TWS, the transformation of the 2nd (Australian) Division, and the RFLF.

From Augmentation to Total Workforce

The abolition of the Ready Reserve did not signal the abandonment of reserve reform. Rather, it marked the beginning of a prolonged period in which Defence sought to integrate reserve capability more closely with the regular Army while balancing operational effectiveness against workforce sustainability. Successive reforms increasingly shifted the Reserve away from its traditional role as a strategic mobilisation base towards a more flexible workforce capable of supporting domestic operations, specialist capability, individual augmentation and expeditionary deployments. This evolution reflected the operational demands of the post Cold War period and Australia's sustained commitments in Timor-Leste, Iraq, Afghanistan and domestic disaster response.[23]

During this period, the distinction between the regular Army and the Reserve became progressively less rigid. Operational deployments demonstrated that reservists could make valuable contributions across a broad spectrum of activities, particularly as individual specialists and augmentees embedded in regular units. At the same time, Defence increasingly recognised that maintaining separate workforce systems constrained flexibility and limited its ability to respond to changing operational and personnel requirements. Reserve reform shifted from creating a distinct high-readiness component towards developing a more integrated total workforce capable of moving personnel between different forms of service as operational demand changed.[24]

This transition culminated in the introduction of the TWS, which fundamentally reframed the relationship between full-time and part-time military service. Rather than treating reserve service as a discrete workforce category, the TWS established a continuum of service through which members could transition between permanent, part-time and inactive service according to Defence requirements and individual circumstances.[25] The reform recognised that contemporary military capability depends increasingly on workforce agility rather than on rigid personnel structures. By reducing institutional barriers between service categories, the TWS sought to improve retention, increase workforce flexibility and provide Defence with greater access to specialist skills distributed across Australian society.

The TWS represented a significant institutional advance because it acknowledged that military capability extends beyond the permanent force. However, its principal focus remained workforce management rather than mobilisation. The system provides Defence with greater flexibility to manage personnel across service categories but it does not, by itself, determine how rapidly those personnel can be generated, organised, moved and integrated into operational formations during a strategic crisis. Workforce flexibility and mobilisation effectiveness are related concepts but they are not synonymous.

Operational experience during this period further reinforced the need to distinguish between individual contribution and formed capability. Reservists consistently demonstrated their value across overseas operations and domestic support tasks, yet these contributions were predominantly delivered through individual augmentation or specialist employment rather than through the routine deployment of formed Reserve combat units.[26] This distinction is important because the mobilisation challenge confronting Australia today extends beyond generating individual personnel. Under the NDS, Defence must increasingly consider how reserve formations can contribute to force generation, protection, sustainment and rear-area security within compressed strategic warning periods.

Viewed through the mobilisation-to-effect framework, the TWS should be understood as an enabling reform rather than a complete solution. It provides the workforce flexibility necessary to support modern force generation, but mobilisation effectiveness ultimately

depends on how that workforce is translated into operational capability. Questions of readiness, geographic alignment, strategic movement, command integration and sustainment remain critical determinants of the time required to generate military effect. These issues have become the focus of more recent reforms, particularly the transformation of the 2nd (Australian) Division and the development of the RFLF.

Contemporary Reform: The 2nd Division and the Reserve Force Level Framework

Australia's contemporary reserve reforms reflect a significant shift in strategic thinking. Rather than viewing the Reserve principally as a workforce available for augmentation after conflict begins, recent reforms increasingly position reserve capability as an integral component of mobilisation, force generation and national preparedness. This evolution has been shaped by a deteriorating strategic environment, reduced warning time and the NDS's emphasis on deterrence by denial, integrated force design and the defence of Australia's northern approaches.[27] Together, these developments have redirected attention from the size of the Reserve towards its ability to generate operational capability within compressed decision and mobilisation timelines.

The transformation of the 2nd (Australian) Division illustrates this evolution. Recent professional military literature argues that the division should no longer be understood primarily as an administrative headquarters responsible for managing reserve units, but as Army's principal mobilisation formation responsible for generating and integrating capability during periods of strategic warning.[28] Under this approach, mobilisation is conceived as a continuous force-generation activity rather than the delayed expansion of the Army following the commencement of conflict. The emphasis shifts from maintaining a latent reserve force to preparing an organisation capable of generating operational effect across multiple contingencies.

This conceptual shift is reinforced by the Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves (2024), which concluded that reserve capability should be differentiated according to operational purpose rather than managed through a single, uniform readiness model.[29] The review's proposed RFLF recognises that reserve forces contribute across a spectrum of operational tasks requiring different levels of readiness, availability, training commitment, equipment, notice to move and employer support. Rather than seeking to maximise every reserve unit across every dimension, the framework explicitly aligns preparedness with operational requirement, acknowledging that strategic effectiveness depends on matching readiness to task.

The significance of the RFLF extends beyond workforce management. It represents an important conceptual recognition that reserve capability cannot be evaluated through establishment strength alone. Different reserve elements are expected to deliver different

operational outcomes within different mobilisation timelines. High-readiness elements require sustained investment in collective training, equipment, employer engagement and mobilisation planning if they are to generate rapid operational effect. Conversely, lower-readiness elements provide strategic depth, specialist expertise, replacement personnel and expansion capacity over longer mobilisation periods. Differentiated readiness reflects a deliberate allocation of resources against operational priorities rather than unequal treatment of reserve capability.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework developed in this article complements, rather than challenges, this direction of reform. Whereas the RFLF differentiates workforce readiness according to operational purpose, mobilisation-to-effect provides an analytical lens for assessing whether those differentiated readiness levels generate operational capability within the timeframes demanded by Australia's contemporary strategy. It shifts the focus from the readiness of individual reserve categories to the interaction of readiness, mobilisation, strategic movement, sustainment and command integration in producing operational outcomes.

Viewed together, the RFLF and the transformation of the 2nd Division represent the most significant evolution in Australian reserve policy since the introduction of the TWS. They demonstrate that Army has already recognised many of the challenges examined in this article. The remaining task is not to develop an entirely new reform agenda, but to ensure that existing reforms are evaluated against the operational problem they are intended to solve. The mobilisation-to-effect framework provides one means of doing so by assessing reserve capability according to its capacity to generate timely military effect under the strategic conditions envisaged by the NDS.

Lessons for Mobilisation-to-Effect

Australia's reserve reforms over the past three decades reveal a consistent pattern of institutional adaptation rather than episodic policy change. While individual reforms differed in emphasis, each sought to reconcile the same enduring challenge: how to generate operationally relevant military capability from a predominantly part-time force within the financial, workforce and political constraints of a liberal democracy. The evolution from the Ready Reserve, through the TWS, to the transformation of the 2nd (Australian) Division and the development of the RFLF reflects a progressive shift in thinking from reserve administration towards mobilisation and force generation. This trajectory mirrors broader developments in Australian defence policy, where mobilisation has increasingly been recognised as a central component of national defence rather than a contingency undertaken only after conflict begins.[30]

Four lessons emerge from this evolution. First, readiness cannot be generated solely after strategic warning is received. The Ready Reserve demonstrated that operational readiness is created through sustained investment in people, collective training and preparedness before mobilisation, even if maintaining such capability carries significant financial and workforce costs. Subsequent reforms have sought to preserve this principle while adopting more sustainable workforce models that better accommodate part-time service and civilian employment.[31]

Second, reserve capability has become increasingly differentiated rather than uniform. Operational experience and contemporary workforce policy have demonstrated that a single readiness model cannot efficiently satisfy the diverse roles expected of the Reserve. Individual augmentation, specialist capability, domestic resilience, rear-area security and formed operational units each require different levels of readiness, training, notice to move and employer support. The RFLF formalises this reality by recognising that preparedness should be aligned with operational purpose rather than distributed uniformly across the force.[32]

Third, mobilisation should be understood as a whole-of-system function rather than simply the activation of reserve personnel. Contemporary Australian mobilisation literature increasingly emphasises that military capability depends on the interaction of workforce availability, strategic movement, sustainment, command integration and national resilience. The transformation of the 2nd Division similarly reflects an institutional recognition that mobilisation is a continuous process of force generation rather than the delayed expansion of the Army following the outbreak of conflict.

Finally, Australia's contemporary strategic environment alters the standard against which reserve capability should be assessed. Under the NDS, compressed warning times and the demands of deterrence by denial reduce the relevance of establishment strength as the principal measure of reserve effectiveness. The more important question is whether reserve capability can be generated, deployed and integrated quickly enough to influence operational outcomes before strategic opportunities are lost. This shifts analytical attention from workforce numbers towards the temporal relationship between readiness, mobilisation and operational effect.

The mobilisation-to-effect framework developed in this article builds on these lessons rather than proposing an alternative reform agenda. It complements existing reforms by providing a common analytical lens through which readiness, workforce design, strategic movement, sustainment and command integration can be assessed against a single criterion: the time required to generate operational effect. In doing so, the framework extends current thinking beyond workforce management and force structure to consider

whether Australia's evolving reserve system is capable of delivering the operational outcomes envisaged by the NDS. The following section broadens this analysis through a comparative examination of selected international reserve systems, identifying design principles that may further inform Australia's continuing reserve transformation.

International Models: Lessons Without Imitation

International reserve models offer useful lessons, but they operate under different strategic conditions. Geography, demography, threat perception, legal frameworks and political culture shape reserve design. Australia should not copy foreign models. It should extract principles that improve mobilisation-to-effect under Australian conditions.

Singapore provides the clearest example of a reserve system built on continuity of service.[33] Operationally Ready National Service places former full-time personnel into a structured training cycle following initial service. Singapore's national service framework typically involves a defined period of recurrent training over approximately 10 years. The model relies on conscription, legal obligation and social acceptance of national service, which are politico-social conditions Australia does not share. The transferable lesson lies in continuity. Reserve readiness improves when part-time service operates as a structured continuation of full-time service rather than as a discretionary add-on.

Finland demonstrates the scale and clarity of a mobilisation-focused reserve. The Finnish Defence Forces report a reserve of approximately 900,000 personnel and a wartime strength of around 280,000.[34] That system reflects conscription, territorial defence doctrine and intergenerational cultural conditioning predicated on a direct existential land threat. Australia cannot replicate the Finnish scale or compulsory service model. However, it can adopt the underlying principle: reserve design should align clearly with national defence tasks, and mobilisation systems should enable the timely generation, integration and employment of trained capability. Finland's strength lies not simply in the size of its reserve but in the fact that personnel, units, readiness arrangements and mobilisation processes are designed as part of a coherent wartime system.

Sweden illustrates the integration of military reserve design within a broader total defence system. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency emphasises societal preparedness, including the roles of households, businesses and local authorities in crisis and conflict.[35] The military reserve depends on that system. Infrastructure protection, mobilisation and sustainment require civilian cooperation.

Norway offers a practical territorial model. The Norwegian Home Guard comprises approximately 40,500 personnel distributed across the country with responsibilities for

territorial security and infrastructure protection.[36] The force provides rapid mobilisation capability through local presence and defined responsibilities. Norway's geography differs from Australia's, but the principle applies: distributed reserve elements with clear territorial tasks can protect key nodes and support mobilisation.

The United States illustrates both scale and complexity. The National Guard operates under a dual state and federal mission, supporting domestic emergencies while contributing to the national defence.[37] The model embeds military capability in communities and links domestic response to military readiness. It also creates tension, as domestic demands *can* compete with warfighting preparation.

The United Kingdom provides a contemporary reform case. The Reserve Forces Review 2030 found that UK reserves had improved under a whole-force approach but required clearer demand signals, stronger integration and deeper relationships with employers and government.[38] UK experience also highlights the risk of treating former personnel as a passive pool rather than an actively managed capability. Effective reserve systems require visibility of skills, availability and roles before mobilisation.

Across these models, consistent principles emerge despite significant differences in strategic circumstance. Finland, Sweden and Norway organise their reserve forces primarily around territorial defence and homeland mobilisation, whereas Australia has historically maintained an expeditionary force designed to deploy beyond its borders. The relevance of these examples lies not in their force structures but in the principles they demonstrate. Reserve effectiveness depends on a clear purpose aligned with national strategy, continuity between full-time and part-time service, integration with civilian systems, defined responsibilities where geography demands, and realistic management of domestic and operational roles.

Northern Australia as the Decisive Design Test

The comparative analysis suggests that no single reserve model is directly transferable to Australia. Nevertheless, common principles emerge across successful systems: reserve purpose must align with national strategy; readiness should be differentiated according to operational task; mobilisation depends on integration with civilian institutions; and capability must be assessed by its ability to generate operational effect rather than establishment strength alone. Northern Australia provides the most demanding test of these principles. It is here that Australia's strategic priorities, demographic realities and mobilisation challenges converge.

The NDS positions northern Australia at the centre of Australia's defence posture. The region hosts critical bases, training areas and logistics infrastructure, supports international force posture initiatives, and anchors Australia's northern approaches. At the same time, it presents significant operational constraints. Vast distances, sparse population, limited transport redundancy, extreme climatic conditions and dispersed infrastructure collectively compress the time available to generate and sustain military capability. Consequently, northern Australia provides the most rigorous environment in which to assess whether reserve force design can translate mobilisation into operational effect.

Viewed through the mobilisation-to-effect framework, northern Australia highlights that reserve capability is fundamentally a temporal problem. The operational question is not whether reserve forces exist but whether they can generate the required effects within the decision window created by a particular contingency. This challenge extends beyond workforce numbers to encompass strategic movement, sustainment, command integration and geographic alignment. A reserve force concentrated in Australia's southern population centres may provide substantial latent capability, but its operational value ultimately depends on the speed with which that capability can be generated, moved and integrated into operations in the north.

The analysis suggests that northern Australia requires reserve capability across multiple mobilisation timelines rather than a single uniform readiness model. Immediate capability is required to provide local situational awareness, civil–military liaison and support to the reception of follow-on forces. Short-notice capability is required to protect bases, ports, logistics nodes and critical infrastructure while supporting movement control, sustainment and rear-area security. Longer-notice capability provides reinforcement, specialist expertise and expansion capacity as operations become sustained. These functions differ in readiness, training and workforce requirements, but together they illustrate how differentiated readiness can support a coherent mobilisation system.

This interpretation aligns with the RFLF by linking differentiated readiness to operational purpose rather than to workforce administration alone. High-readiness reserve elements require assured access to strategic lift, equipment, command relationships and sustainment if they are to generate timely operational effect. Conversely, lower-readiness elements contribute through specialist capability, replacement personnel and expansion depth over extended mobilisation periods. The analytical value of the mobilisation-to-effect framework lies in evaluating whether these differentiated capabilities collectively reduce the time required to generate operational outcomes rather than simply increasing the number of available reservists.

The northern Australian case also reinforces an important implication arising from the international comparison. Effective mobilisation cannot be assessed through personnel readiness alone. It depends on the performance of the wider mobilisation

system, including employer participation, transport networks, infrastructure, logistics, communications and coordination with civilian agencies. Consequently, mobilisation exercises should be evaluated not simply as tests of military preparedness but as assessments of system performance. Their purpose is to determine whether reserve capability can be generated, moved, sustained and integrated under the degraded conditions likely to characterise contemporary conflict. Such an approach shifts the emphasis from validating individual components of mobilisation towards evaluating whether the mobilisation system as a whole can deliver operational effect within the timeframes demanded by Australia's contemporary defence strategy.

Implications for Reserve Force Design

The mobilisation-to-effect framework developed in this article provides an analytical lens for assessing reserve capability against Australia's contemporary strategic requirements. Rather than proposing a separate reform agenda, the framework complements current Army initiatives by focusing attention on the relationship between workforce design, readiness, force generation and operational effect. The preceding analysis suggests several implications for the continuing evolution of reserve force design.

First, the analysis indicates that reserve capability should be evaluated through operational outcomes rather than workforce measures alone. Establishment strength, recruitment targets and participation rates remain important indicators of workforce health but they provide only a partial assessment of military capability. The more relevant measure is the extent to which reserve personnel, teams and formations can generate operational effect within the timeframes required by specific contingencies. Readiness should increasingly be understood as a temporal characteristic of force generation rather than solely an administrative measure of preparedness.

Second, the framework suggests that differentiated readiness should become the organising principle for reserve capability development. The RFLF recognises that different operational tasks require different levels of availability, training, notice to move and employer support. The analysis presented here reinforces that proposition by demonstrating that a uniform readiness model cannot efficiently support the diverse demands of deterrence, domestic resilience, specialist capability, reinforcement and sustained mobilisation. Aligning readiness with clearly defined operational roles provides a more effective basis for force design than seeking to maximise preparedness uniformly across the Reserve.

Third, the analysis indicates that mobilisation should be considered as a whole-of-system capability rather than simply a workforce function. The time required to generate operational effect is influenced not only by the readiness of reservists but also by strategic

movement, sustainment, command integration, employer participation and supporting national infrastructure. Reserve capability is generated through the interaction of multiple systems rather than through personnel availability alone. Assessing mobilisation through this broader lens encourages greater integration between workforce planning, logistics, infrastructure, industry engagement and operational planning.

Fourth, the framework suggests that Australia's strategic geography should become a more explicit consideration in reserve force design. The concentration of population and reserve capability in the south, combined with the increasing strategic importance of northern Australia, means that geographic distribution will continue to influence mobilisation timelines. This demographic reality cannot be resolved through recruitment policy alone. Instead, force design should increasingly consider how reserve capability can be generated, moved and sustained across Australia's vast distances within compressed strategic warning periods.

Finally, the analysis indicates that reserve reform should continue to build on, rather than replace, the substantial reforms already underway in Army. The transformation of the 2nd (Australian) Division, implementation of the TWS and development of the RFLF collectively represent a significant evolution in Australian mobilisation thinking. The mobilisation-to-effect framework complements these initiatives by providing a common analytical basis for assessing whether they reduce the time required to generate operational capability. In this sense, the framework is intended not as an alternative model of reserve reform, but as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of existing reforms against the operational demands of Australia's contemporary defence strategy.

Taken together, these implications suggest that the effectiveness of reserve reform should ultimately be judged not by the size of the Reserve, the number of reforms implemented or the complexity of workforce arrangements, but by the ability of the Reserve to generate timely and sustainable military effect under operational conditions. This shifts the focus of analysis from organisational inputs towards operational outcomes and provides a coherent basis for evaluating future force design decisions as Australia's strategic environment continues to evolve.

Conclusion

Australia's strategic circumstances have fundamentally altered the question confronting the Army Reserve. The central issue is no longer simply the size of the Reserve or the number of personnel available for mobilisation, but how rapidly reserve capability can be translated into operational effect under conditions of compressed strategic warning. As the NDS places increasing emphasis on deterrence by denial, force generation and the

defence of Australia's northern approaches, the effectiveness of the Reserve will depend less on workforce statistics than on its contribution to operational outcomes.

This article has argued that mobilisation should be understood not as a discrete event but as a continuous process through which reserve capability is generated, moved, integrated and sustained to produce military effect. Building on contemporary Australian mobilisation literature, the evolution of the 2nd (Australian) Division, the TWS and the RFLF, it has developed a mobilisation-to-effect framework that integrates readiness, workforce availability, strategic movement, sustainment and command integration through a common temporal lens. The framework does not replace existing concepts of readiness, preparedness or force generation. Rather, it provides a means of understanding how these concepts interact to determine the time required to generate operational capability.

The analysis demonstrates that reserve effectiveness is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors. Australia's demographic geography constrains where reserve capability can be generated. Workforce availability and differentiated readiness influence the speed with which personnel and formed units can be prepared for operations. Employer participation affects mobilisation flexibility, while competing domestic operational demands shape the availability of reserve capability during periods of national crisis. These constraints are interdependent. Improving any single element in isolation is unlikely to produce a proportionate increase in operational capability unless the broader mobilisation system is similarly strengthened.

The historical evolution of Australian reserve policy further demonstrates that many of these challenges are already recognised in Army. From the Ready Reserve through to the contemporary transformation of the 2nd Division and the development of RFLF, successive reforms have progressively strengthened the Reserve's contribution to force generation and mobilisation. Rather than proposing an alternative reform agenda, this article has argued that these initiatives can be better understood and evaluated through a mobilisation-to-effect framework that focuses on operational outcomes rather than organisational inputs.

The principal contribution of this article is conceptual rather than prescriptive. It proposes a common analytical framework for assessing reserve capability against the operational demands of Australia's contemporary strategic environment. By shifting attention from establishment strength to the time required to generate operational effect, the framework provides a basis for evaluating existing reforms, informing future force design and assessing reserve capability against the strategic objectives established in the NDS.

Ultimately, the question facing the Australian Army is not whether the Reserve can contribute to national defence, but whether it can generate the right capability in the right place and at the right time to influence operational outcomes. Answering that question

requires more than measuring workforce numbers or readiness categories. It requires understanding mobilisation as a system whose success is determined by its ability to translate reserve potential into timely military effect. The mobilisation-to-effect framework offers one means of undertaking that assessment and, in doing so, contributes to the continuing evolution of Australian reserve force design in an increasingly contested strategic environment.

About the Author

Dr John Coyne is the Director of National Security Programs at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), where he leads research on national security, defence, strategic policy and economic security. He has more than 30 years of experience across the Australian Defence Force, Australian Federal Police, intelligence community and public service, including operational deployments. John holds a PhD, two master's degrees and is a Churchill and Vincent Fairfax Fellow, with extensive experience advising governments on complex national security challenges.

ENDNOTES

1 Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

2 James J Wirtz and Jeffrey A Larsen, 'Wanted: A Strategy to Integrate Deterrence', *Defense & Security Analysis* 40, no. 3 (2024): 361–378, at: https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2024.2352943.

3 David Thomae, 'The Evolving Role of the 2nd Division Within Australia's Defence Mobilisation Strategic Framework', *United Service* 72, no. 4 (2021): 5–9, at: https//www.rusinsw.org.au/Papers/20210831.pdf.

4 Ibid.

5 David Thomae, 'Focusing the 2nd Division', speech, Defence Reserve Association conference, 12 August 2023; Wirtz and Larsen, 'Wanted', pp. 361–378.

6 Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy*; Department of Defence, *2024 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), at: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2024-national-defence-strategy-2024-integrated-investment-program.

7 Iris Reinhold and Raelene Lockhorst, 'Australia's Reserves Are Growing—But Not Where the Strategy Needs Them', *The Strategist*, 17 April 2026, at: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-reserves-are-growing-but-not-where-the-strategy-needs-them.

8 Department of Defence, *Annual Report 2024–25* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025); Reinhold and Lockhorst, 'Australia's Reserves Are Growing'.

9 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), at: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/strategic-review-of-the-adf-reserves; Mark Armstrong, 'Historical Legacy to National Asset: The Australian Army Reserve in the 21st Century', PhD thesis, Deakin University, 2024.

10 Mark Armstrong, 'The Australian Army Reserve'; David Thomae, 'Focusing the 2nd Division'.

11 Department of Defence, *2024 National Defence Strategy*; Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy*.

12 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*; Thomae, 'The Evolving Role of the 2nd Division'.

13 *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001*.

14 Department of Defence, *Defence Reserves Support* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia); Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Employer Support Payment Scheme* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia).

15 Brad West and Joshua Healy, *Drawing on Reserves: Assessing Civilian Employer/Manager Support for Employees' Part-Time Military Service*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 28 (Canberra: Australian Army Research Centre, 2025), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/drawing-reserves.

16 Department of Defence, *Defence Assistance to the Civil Community Manual* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024); Australian National Audit Office, *Defence's Assistance to the Civil Community*, Auditor-General Report no. 30 of 2020–21 (Canberra: Australian National Audit Office, 2021).

17 Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023), pp. 54–56; Department of Defence, *2024 National Defence Strategy*.

18 *Defence Legislation Amendment Act 1991*; Australian National Audit Office, *Army Ready Reserve Scheme*, Audit Report no. 18 (Canberra: Australian National Audit Office, 1994).

19 Australian National Audit Office, *Army Ready Reserve Scheme*; Department of Defence, *Army Ready Reserve Scheme: Implementation Papers* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1991).

20 Department of Defence, *Australia's Strategic Policy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997).

21 Department of Defence, *The Australian Army Contribution to INTERFET* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000); David Horner, *The Australian Army: From Whitlam to Howard* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001).

22 Armstrong, 'The Australian Army Reserve'.

23 Horner, *The Australian Army*; Armstrong, 'The Australian Army Reserve'.

24 Armstrong, 'The Australian Army Reserve'; Department of Defence, *Adaptive Army: Public Information Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).

25 Department of Defence, *Total Workforce System: Overview* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016); Department of Defence, *Defence People Strategy 2018–2028* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2018).

26 Department of Defence, *The Australian Army Contribution to INTERFET;* Armstrong, 'The Australian Army Reserve'.

27 Department of Defence, *2024 National Defence Strategy*; Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy*.

28 Thomae, 'The Evolving Role of the 2nd Division'; Thomae, 'Focusing the 2nd Division'.

29 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*.

30 Stephan Frühling, Richard Brabin-Smith and Graeme Dunk, 'The Concept of Mobilisation and Australian Defence Policy Since Vietnam: Lessons and Cautions for Army in the Post-DSR World', *Australian Army Journal* 20, no. 3 (2024): 215–244, at: https://doi.org/10.61451/2675158.

31 Mark Armstrong, 'Historical Legacy to National Asset: The Australian Army Reserve in the 21st Century', PhD thesis, Deakin University, 2024.

32 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves*.

33 Matthew LM Jones and Andrew Maher, *Towards Total Defence: A Literature Review and Feasibility Assessment for Australia*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 39 (Canberra: Australian Army Research Centre, 2026), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/towards-total-defence.

34 'In the Reserve', *Finnish Defence Forces* (website), at: https://intti.fi/en/in-the-reserve (accessed 5 May 2026).

35 Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, *In Case of Crisis or War* (Stockholm: Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2024).

36 'The Norwegian Home Guard', *Norwegian Army* (website), updated 19 September 2024, at: www.forsvaret.no/en/organisation/home-guard.

37 United States National Guard Bureau, *National Guard Fact Sheet* (Arlington: National Guard Bureau, 2006), at: https://www.nationalguard.mil/About-the-Guard/Army-National-Guard/Resources/News/ARNG-Media/FileId/137011 (accessed 5 May 2026).

38 United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, *Reserve Forces Review 2030* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2021), at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reserve-forces-review-2030.

SUSTAINING DETERRENCE: STRENGTHENING THE SYSTEMS THAT UNDERPIN AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN BASE NETWORK

Julian McMahon

Introduction

Before the bombing of Darwin in 1942, Prime Minister John Curtin warned that 'the protection of this country is no longer that of a contribution to a world at war, but is a resistance to an enemy threatening to invade our own shores'.[1] His warning was soon borne out when Japanese aircraft conducted two major raids against Darwin, causing extensive damage to military facilities, shipping and civilian infrastructure. The attacks transformed a looming strategic concern into an immediate national crisis, galvanising Curtin's resolve and reinforcing his call for total national mobilisation. Arguing that the war had reached Australian soil, he demanded unity, urgency and the full commitment of national resources. Curtin advocated a transition from a peacetime to a wartime footing, aligning industry, manpower and society toward the nation's defence. Central to this vision was the need for a resilient logistics system capable of sustaining the demands of war, underpinned by the recognition that Australia's security would ultimately rest on its preparedness and determination to confront an expanding regional threat.[2]

Nearly eighty-five years after the bombing of Darwin, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the release of the 2026 National Defence Strategy (NDS 2026).[3] He observed that Australia faces an increasingly unstable and contested strategic environment, with intensifying great-power competition reshaping the nation's security outlook. Ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including tensions involving Iran, had contributed to global energy volatility, affecting domestic fuel prices. Drawing comparisons to the uncertainty of the Second World War era, Albanese highlighted the need for national resilience and preparedness.[4] The NDS 2026 was presented as a response to these challenges, prioritising deterrence, resilience and Australia's ability to operate in a more

dangerous and unpredictable strategic environment.[5] Fundamental to this approach is Australia's northern base network, which is a critical enabler of force projection and sustained operations. In alignment with earlier strategies, it highlights Northern Australia as the primary geographic platform for operations, enabling dispersal, resilience and proximity to key Indo-Pacific approaches.[6] Australia's northern base network, comprising established airfields, bare bases, and austere operating locations, remains critical to sustaining military operations in an era of heightened strategic competition.[7]

Deterrence by denial depends on an adversary believing Australia can generate, sustain and regenerate combat power over time. Sustainment systems underpin operational endurance, resilience and responsiveness. Therefore, weaknesses in sustainment undermine the credibility of deterrence. This article argues that, if the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is to sustain deterrence, the systems underpinning Australia's northern base network must be strengthened, with fuel resilience the most critical requirement for sustaining operational reach, persistence and combat power to achieve that deterrence effect.

The article first examines the strategic importance of Northern Australia in sustaining deterrence through both the defence of the continent and the projection of military power into the Indo-Pacific. It then analyses the challenges associated with operating in the north and the critical role of sustainment systems in overcoming them, with particular emphasis on fuel as a foundational enabler of operational reach, endurance and resilience. While sustainment depends upon a range of commodities and enabling systems, fuel warrants particular attention because it is consumed continuously across all domains and directly influences the ability to generate and sustain military effects; the sustainment of credible military capabilities is central to deterring adversaries. Finally, the article argues that the vulnerabilities inherent in operating in Northern Australia should be viewed not merely as constraints, but as opportunities to test, evaluate and refine the sustainment concepts, technologies and infrastructure measures required to improve resilience across the integrated force.

The Strategically Valuable North

Australia's northern base network derives its strategic value from two complementary functions: defending the Australian mainland and enabling military operations throughout the Indo-Pacific. Debate persists regarding the network's primary purpose. Some analysts argue northern bases should focus on the defence of Australia, acting as a shield against potential threats to the continent. Others contend the network functions as a sword, enabling offensive operations by coalition forces deep into the Indo-Pacific.[8] NDS 2026 implicitly reconciles these perspectives by treating the 'shield' and the 'sword' as

complementary functions of an integrated force. The government's priorities are reflected in the approximately $425 billion investment over the decade to deliver an integrated, focused force.[9] While the importance of logistics, including fuel, infrastructure, and sustainment systems is well recognised, workforce capacity and distribution capabilities have not advanced at the same pace. In particular, shortages in deployable logistics units and ground distribution capabilities pose challenges to sustaining dispersed operations at scale.

Northern Australia spans a vast, sparsely populated and operationally complex region, yet one of considerable strategic importance. Australia's northern base network enables force projection. Positioned across Northern Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia, these bases provide the geographic reach necessary to project air power into the Indo-Pacific, generating operational tempo, responsiveness and strategic influence.[10] Their significance both includes and extends beyond continental defence; they underpin Australia's ability to operate forward, support coalition partners and contribute meaningfully to regional stability. Its northern air bases provide critical support to allied operations and advanced military aircraft. In October 2024, for example, access to and overflight of Northern Australia enabled a long-range US Air Force B-2 Spirit strike mission against hardened Houthi weapons storage facilities in Yemen.[11] This highlighted the region's role in supporting global power projection. In a future Indo-Pacific contingency, Australia could once again serve as a major staging and sustainment base for allied airpower, much as it did during the Second World War when Australian bases enabled American air operations across the Southwest Pacific.[12]

Australia's northern region also serves as a critical platform for projecting ground forces deeper into the Indo-Pacific. The redeployment of Army units to the north outside of their traditional bases in Eastern and South-Eastern Australia has placed key forces closer to potential operating areas, reducing transit times and extending the effective reach of both maritime and air assets. This is an important consideration for a defence policy and strategy based on deterrence by denial, where an adversary's assessments of our responsiveness, preparedness, resilience and operational tempo become key factors. The acquisition of long-range strike capabilities such as the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) extends the ADF's capacity to hold key maritime approaches in the Indian Ocean and the Arafura and Coral Seas at risk, contributing directly to deterrence by denial. This is to say little of developing technologies, such as drones or autonomous surveillance, transport and attack aircraft.[13] Although these capabilities are already available, they have yet to be widely integrated into Northern Australia, where they could play a critical role in supporting future operations at scale. Force projection and long-range strike capabilities, however, are only as effective as the sustainment systems that support them. Northern Australia is a cornerstone of Australia's ability to project power and sustain operations across the Indo-Pacific.

However, strategic value does not automatically translate into strategic utility. The ability to project force from the north depends upon the capacity to sustain personnel, fuel, munitions and equipment across vast distances. Consequently, the central question is not whether Northern Australia is strategically important, but whether the systems supporting operations in the region are sufficiently resilient to sustain deterrence over time.

In his 20 May 2026 address, 'The Future of the Australian Army Profession', Lieutenant General Simon Stuart affirmed that the Australian Army is the nation's expert in combat 'from, on, and onto the land'.[14] Central to this role is the ability to enable and sustain joint operations. This expertise extends beyond manoeuvre to include the critical logistics functions required to support operations across Australia's vast and challenging geography. While air and maritime forces generate much of Australia's deterrent effect, their effectiveness depends on the Army's ability to establish, sustain and protect the logistics networks that underpin northern operations.

The Army's role in supporting the logistics network is clear. *Concept Lantana*, the ADF Land Domain Concept, emphasises the Army's role in enabling joint force projection through control of key terrain, sustainment networks and persistent land-based capabilities.[15] Northern bases represent critical nodes within this system, requiring sustained logistics capacity to remain operational and resilient. The Army's ability to establish, sustain and protect these networks enables air and maritime forces to operate effectively across extended distances. In this way, the Army's warfighting expertise and logistics capabilities are mutually reinforcing, underpinning both land operations and the broader effectiveness of the joint force. Absent substantial improvements to base infrastructure and the supporting air, road, rail and digital networks, northern basing will remain an uneven and weather-dependent proposition. In such circumstances, climatic conditions, rather than operational requirements, will dictate the tempo and feasibility of military operations. This is neither desirable nor acceptable when the nation's defence and capacity to hold adversaries at distance is at stake.

Defence of Australia's north requires sustaining operations across a vast and remote region. The archipelagic approaches to the continent encompass hundreds of islands, including the strategically significant offshore territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. These locations offer valuable strategic depth, surveillance opportunities and options for forward positioning. However, their limited infrastructure, harsh environmental conditions and distance from major population centres present significant sustainment and resupply challenges. The demands of this region require robust, flexible and highly distributed sustainment systems.[16]

Northern Australia's combination of vast distances, sparse infrastructure and harsh environmental conditions places significant strain on transport and sustainment

networks. Seasonal extremes of the wet and dry seasons profoundly affect mobility and sustainment. During the wet season, heavy rainfall and flooding frequently render roads impassable, isolating communities and degrading critical supply routes. River crossings and low-lying infrastructure are especially vulnerable. For example, flooding in North Queensland has repeatedly cut the Flinders Highway, isolating inland centres, and has been identified as an issue requiring direct federal and state government investment to alleviate.[17] In Cape York, river crossings such as the Archer River are routinely impassable during the wet season, effectively severing access for weeks. In Western Australia, the bridge at Fitzroy Crossing was severely damaged in 2023, cutting road access across the Kimberley.[18] Conversely, the dry season introduces dust, heat, and road degradation, increasing vehicle wear and reducing endurance. These environmental pressures complicate sustainment planning and place additional strain on already fragile infrastructure. Movement of vital goods and services by road cannot be guaranteed in Northern Australia's climate and terrain.

Compounding these challenges is Australia's underdeveloped northern rail network. It remains sparse, primarily north-south in orientation, and lacks the lateral connectivity required to support distributed operations across the continent. This constrains the efficient movement of bulk commodities, particularly fuel, leaving Defence and industry heavily reliant on road transport. Together, these factors create a fragile and constrained logistics network across Northern Australia. The concerns over Australia's underdeveloped rail system have been long held. As the Australian General Staff observed in 1920:

> By reason of the great expanse of Australia, the long distance between vital points and the unavoidable necessity for mobilization of the units of the Field Army at widely separated places, the question of efficient and judiciously located railway communications is of very great importance. The recent war has demonstrated that the power to manoeuvre depends upon inviolate railway facilities.[19]

More than a century later, the fundamental relationship between mobility, logistics and military effectiveness remains unchanged. While modern sustainment networks now incorporate road, rail, air, maritime and digital infrastructure, Australia's ability to generate and sustain combat power still depends on resilient and redundant lines of communication spanning vast distances.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted systemic weaknesses in Australia's northern base network, offering a useful analogue for how the north might function under wartime strain. During the pandemic, supply chain disruptions, limited infrastructure redundancy, and workforce fragility exposed the region's dependence on civilian and interagency support.[20] Northern bases lack sufficient organic sustainment capacity, relying heavily

on external stakeholders to maintain operational continuity.[21] The lesson is that northern basing cannot rely upon just-in-time logistics or narrow supply chains; resilience requires redundancy, local capacity and pre-positioned resources.

Sustaining Australia's northern base network is a challenge too large for any single service to solve alone. The scale, distance and complexity of operations across Northern Australia demands a genuinely joint approach that integrates the capabilities of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Army, and Royal Australian Navy (RAN), alongside international partners who can provide additional logistics capacity and resilience. The United States' Marine Rotational Force–Darwin (MRF–D) represents a key allied presence that both contributes to and depends upon this shared sustainment system. Its presence provides additional logistics support, engineering, and force protection depth, enhancing resilience and interoperability.

Beyond the military domain, there is significant value in leveraging interagency and civilian organisations already operating in remote environments. Australia Post, the State Emergency Service (SES), Australian Border Force (ABF) and Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) offer enduring access, distribution networks and crisis response capabilities that could meaningfully complement Defence logistics in a crisis or conflict.[22] Australia Post underpins essential mail distribution and supply movement across dispersed and remote communities, ensuring continuity of communications and goods. The SES contributes surge manpower and disaster response capabilities, critical for base support during crises, while the ABF maintains regulatory control, biosecurity enforcement, and port/airfield access—functions vital in both competition and conflict scenarios. Meanwhile, the RFDS ensures aeromedical evacuation and primary healthcare access across vast distances, compensating for limited medical reach in austere environments. These organisations and their unique capabilities and experience must be integrated into a whole-of-nation approach to defence.[23]

Northern Australian bases continue to face workforce challenges associated with remote locations and limited local populations. The success of fly in fly out (FIFO) workforce models in the resources sector provides one example of how specialist labour can be sustained across dispersed northern locations. Historically, the ADF mitigated distance challenges through dedicated air mobility platforms such as the Government Aircraft Factories (GAF) Nomad and de Havilland Canada DHC-4 Caribou, which provided flexible and responsive troop and light cargo transport between remote bases. However, their replacement, the C-27J Spartan, has not delivered the expected level of utility. Persistent reliability and maintenance issues have constrained its availability, reducing its operational use and limiting its effectiveness as a routine intra-theatre transport solution. As a result, the ADF has struggled to replicate the agility once provided by its predecessors, creating capability gaps in personnel movement and sustainment.

This shortfall reinforces the need for an alternative approach, such as a structured FIFO model supported by reliable airlift or contracted services. Without this, northern basing will continue to face workforce and logistics inefficiencies, undermining operational readiness and resilience in a region of growing strategic importance.

Fuel: The Critical Commodity

While sustainment encompasses personnel, munitions, spare parts, medical support and information systems, fuel occupies a unique position because nearly every component of the integrated force depends upon it. Aircraft cannot fly, ships cannot sail, vehicles cannot manoeuvre and generators cannot power military networks without access to fuel. Consequently, fuel represents the most critical and universally demanded commodity within the northern sustainment system. Unlike munitions, which are consumed primarily during combat, or spare parts, which are required intermittently, fuel is consumed continuously across all domains regardless of operational tempo. Its absence immediately constrains movement, power generation and combat operations. While all sustainment commodities are important, fuel's universal demand and direct relationship to operational reach make it uniquely significant within northern basing and force projection. For this reason, the effectiveness of Australia's northern base network is likely to be constrained less by the availability of combat platforms than by the resilience of the fuel systems that support them.

In announcing the outbreak of war with Japan, Prime Minister Curtin warned that 'the thread of peace has snapped—only the valour of our fighting forces, backed by the very uttermost of which we are capable in factory and workshop, can knit that thread again into security'.[24] Curtin's observation highlighted the inseparable relationship between combat capability and national industrial capacity. Among the many outputs of that industrial base, fuel was paramount. Aircraft, ships, vehicles and logistics networks could only operate to the extent that adequate petroleum products could be refined, stored and distributed to where they were needed. Recent conflicts have reaffirmed this reality. In Eastern Europe, both Russian and Ukrainian forces have expended enormous resources protecting, attacking and sustaining fuel infrastructure, recognising that operational reach and combat endurance depend upon reliable access to energy. The conflict has demonstrated that even technologically advanced militaries remain constrained by the availability, movement and storage of fuel, making logistics and industrial resilience critical determinants of battlefield success.[25] While the character of warfare continues to change, the enduring relationship between military capability and industrial capacity remains relevant to Australia's northern approaches. The ADF's ability to sustain forces across vast distances through resilient fuel infrastructure and supply chains will be as important as the combat systems themselves.

Sustainment in Northern Australia will ultimately hinge on fuel. The ability to generate, store, distribute and protect liquid fuels will be decisive in both peace and conflict, underpinning the effectiveness of air, maritime and land operations. These functions depend upon resilient logistics networks, secure infrastructure and the capacity to distribute fuel across vast distances and into austere environments. In this context, Army plays a critical role in enabling the integrated force through the establishment, protection and operation of sustainment networks. Investment in fuel infrastructure, distribution systems and resilient supply chains should therefore be regarded not as a supporting activity, but as a prerequisite for credible deterrence, force projection and operational endurance.

As Major General Martin White has observed, liquid fossil fuels remain fundamental to ADF military capability despite ongoing efforts to incorporate alternative energy sources across the force.[26] Like the US military, the ADF remains heavily dependent on liquid fuels, particularly for aviation, maritime and logistics operations. Tanker aircraft illustrate both this dependence and the opportunities it creates. Operating from Northern Australia, they can extend the range of combat aircraft, support a persistent air presence and sustain coalition operations across vast distances. However, recent global instability, has highlighted the vulnerability of fuel supply chains and Australia's continued dependence on imported refined fuel. More than 80 per cent of Australia's refined fuels are sourced from overseas, including key regional hubs such as Singapore, South Korea and China.[27] Fuel security is therefore not merely a logistics challenge; it is a strategic imperative underpinning Australia's northern defence posture.

Australia's dependence on internationally refined oil is compounded by the steady decline in domestic refining capacity over recent decades, leaving only a small number of refineries in operation. A quarter of a century ago, Australia operated eight domestic oil refineries, while today, only two remain open—one in Brisbane and the other in Geelong.[28] Incidents such as Viva Energy's Geelong facility fire, which took more than 13 hours to extinguish, illustrate both the fragility of existing infrastructure and the potential for sudden degradation of national supply.[29] At the same time, post-COVID-19 analysis has highlighted the considerable financial and industrial challenges associated with rebuilding large-scale domestic refining capacity, which largely fall beyond Defence's remit and budget. [30] In these circumstances, Australia must pursue a dual approach: strengthening international partnerships that underpin fuel security, particularly with key regional hubs such as Singapore, while investing in resilient fuel infrastructure across Northern Australia. This includes the development of hardened fuel storage facilities and secure distribution networks capable of supporting both national resilience and military operations. Such infrastructure would not only enhance Australia's ability to sustain combat power during crises but also provide shared access opportunities for regional partners with limited training areas, strengthening interoperability and collective capacity.

A consistent fuel supply to key nodes across Australia is a well-established requirement, but the growing demand for expeditionary fuel support is increasingly evident. The RAAF's decision to adopt agile basing concepts, combined with the Army's transition to platforms such as the Apache attack helicopter and the continued reliance on Chinook heavy-lift aircraft, places greater emphasis on dispersed, responsive fuel networks. These capabilities are only effective if supported by forward fuel nodes that enable sustained operations across vast distances.

While options such as hot-wing refueling remain vital for rapid turnaround, they are resource-intensive and underscore the need for reliable bulk fuel resupply—particularly from maritime sources. Petroleum Over the Shore (POTS) operations during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2023 demonstrate how sea-based fuel delivery can support expeditionary operations.[31] Army's continued participation in Exercise Balikatan in the Philippines and Operation Southern Discovery in Antarctica further reinforces its commitment to practicing and validating fuel distribution in austere environments.

The RAAF's investment in agile air basing emphasises dispersal, resilience, and the ability to operate from a network of main and bare bases.[32] Agile basing ensures these northern locations can support sustained operations even under threat, transforming them into flexible projection nodes rather than static infrastructure. Within this model, fuel emerges as the critical commodity. Air operations drive immense fuel demand, and dispersal dictates the need for multiple sites. As such, fuel logistics becomes the defining constraint on operational output. Addressing this challenge requires prioritising bulk storage, distribution systems and sustainment capacity. In this context, the Australian Army is uniquely positioned to support the integrated force, providing the bulk fuel storage, ground distribution and sustainment capabilities necessary to enable continuous and scalable operations from northern bases.[33]

Emerging solutions include the renewed use of dracone barges—flexible fuel bladders proven in the Falklands War—and the need for an Inland Pipeline Distribution System (IPDS) to support Northern Australia's geography.[34] The IPDS serves as a temporary pipeline that allows fuel to be pumped over long distances across land to sustain military operations. Ultimately, operational reach and endurance across Northern Australia will depend on resilient support nodes capable of sustaining dispersed forces at distance. This reinforces a recurring lesson from modern conflict that fuel remains central to military operations, while the supply chains that sustain it remain inherently vulnerable.

Typically, the RAAF is the largest consumer of fuel on a day-to-day basis in expeditionary operations. Air platforms—particularly fast jets, surveillance aircraft, and air mobility fleets—require significant volumes of aviation fuel to generate sustained airpower, making fuel a critical enabler of reach and persistence. Despite this demand, there exists a

well-established global fuel and basing infrastructure that supports air operations from fixed land bases, enabling rapid projection of airpower across regions. This reliance on fuel-intensive air operations places a premium on the protection of critical storage and distribution nodes such as airbases, fuel storage sites and logistics hubs. Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) systems must therefore be prioritised to ensure the survivability and continuity of these key enablers.[35] Without adequate protection, fuel infrastructure remains a critical vulnerability that can constrain operational effectiveness. The protection of the northern base network is as important as the strategic capabilities it enables.

The challenges associated with fuel security are well understood, and addressing them will require a coordinated effort between Defence, government and industry. Encouragingly, significant investments are already underway. The continued development of RAAF Base Tindal reflects a growing recognition of the importance of fuel resilience to Australia's defence posture, while analysts have repeatedly called for the diversification of fuel supply chains and the hardening of critical transport infrastructure to reduce strategic vulnerability.[36] Similarly, proposals for major jet fuel storage facilities at Tindal, Curtin and Learmonth demonstrate an increasing commitment to strengthening the endurance, dispersal and resilience of the northern base network.[37] Beyond Defence-led initiatives, the Gascoyne Gateway Marine Complex (GGMC), a privately funded and Australian-owned deep-water port, has the potential to further enhance resilience in North-West Australia by providing an additional logistics hub capable of supporting force projection, sustainment, fuel distribution and allied operations.[38] Collectively, these developments represent important steps towards strengthening the logistics foundations upon which Australia's deterrence and operational effectiveness increasingly depend.

Effective force projection is not the product of any single service, but of an integrated force capable of generating and sustaining combat power across vast distances. While the RAAF delivers much of Australia's operational reach and is among the largest consumers of fuel in expeditionary operations, its effectiveness depends upon the Army's ability to establish, protect and sustain forward operating bases, fuel nodes and logistics networks.[39] The Navy, in turn, provides the maritime lifeline that connects industry to the battlespace through strategic sealift, replenishment capabilities and access to critical ports and infrastructure. Together, the services create the sustainment architecture that underpins operational endurance, ensuring airpower and joint force capabilities can be generated, maintained and protected in both contested and austere environments.

The challenge is not simply acquiring additional fuel infrastructure. The ADF must also determine how fuel can be distributed, protected and sustained under realistic operational conditions. Questions surrounding dispersed fuel storage, autonomous resupply, inland pipeline systems, integrated air and missile defence, and coalition sustainment cannot be answered through planning alone. They require persistent experimentation under

operationally relevant conditions. Northern Australia therefore offers more than a location from which to project force; it provides an environment in which the integrated force can continuously test, evaluate and refine the sustainment systems upon which deterrence ultimately depends.

From Constraint to Opportunity: Developing a Multinational Test and Evaluation Ecosystem

The preceding analysis has identified a series of unresolved challenges: fuel security, infrastructure resilience, workforce constraints, autonomous resupply, logistics protection, and coalition interoperability. Addressing these challenges requires more than additional investment; it requires a mechanism through which concepts, technologies and partnerships can be continuously tested and refined. Northern Australia is uniquely suited to perform this function. Critically, the purpose of such testing is to improve the resilience of the sustainment systems identified throughout this paper, rather than to establish a separate strategic objective.

Australia's northern bases should be positioned as a national test and evaluation ecosystem, tightly integrated with international engagement. Success will depend on attracting sustained foreign investment; Australia is unlikely to resource a credible northern test enterprise on its own. Done properly, a foreign investment partnership model can help address the long-standing challenges of logistics and sustainment in Northern Australia. While the constraints are well understood by experts, many proposed solutions remain unfunded or impractical. A viable path forward is to design infrastructure with clear dual-use outcomes in both peacetime and contingency operations. In particular, the centralisation of key logistics resupply—enabled by air mobility—demands a coordinated, multi-departmental approach, underpinned by contributions from allies and partners.

While exercises such as Talisman Sabre and Pitch Black are invaluable for validating concepts and interoperability, their episodic nature limits opportunities for continuous experimentation and refinement.[40] The northern base network must be evolved into a persistent, year-round test and evaluation ecosystem, enabling continuous refinement of sustainment and dispersal in under multiple types of simulations. This includes leveraging both wet and dry seasons to test system resilience, particularly electromagnetic spectrum capabilities under varied environmental conditions. In the context of competing priorities such as nuclear-powered submarines, prioritising joint logistics investment is critical to sustaining and maturing the network.

The north's geography and climate are strategic advantages that should be deliberately leveraged for testing, training and evaluation activities. Existing multinational exercises

with the United States, Japan, India, and Singapore demonstrate the value of this approach. Similarly, industry support to NASA and the European Space Agency in Australia highlights the type of partnership model required. By aligning defence needs with commercial and international interests, the north can become a sustainable, high-value ecosystem for test and evaluation.

Technological advances are transforming the character of war and, in doing so, increasing the importance of sustainment. Long-range fires, autonomous systems, electronic warfare, and space-enabled capabilities provide unprecedented operational reach, precision, and persistence. Yet these advantages come with growing demands for fuel, maintenance, specialist personnel, data infrastructure, and resilient supply networks. Consequently, the logistic development of Northern Australia cannot be limited to the construction of bases alone. Equal attention must be given to building a robust ecosystem for testing, evaluation, logistics and sustainment capable of supporting both current and emerging capabilities. Viewed through this lens, Northern Australia is more than a collection of forward operating locations; it is a strategic platform from which future military capability can be developed, sustained and projected across the Indo-Pacific.

Recent conflicts, including the Russia–Ukraine war and actions by Iran, its proxies, and North Korea, demonstrate how the character of war has evolved through the widespread use of lethal one-way Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS). First-person-view (FPV) drones, in particular, have proven highly effective, delivering precise and low-cost strikes that have caused significant battlefield casualties. A notable trend has been the deliberate targeting of logistics networks, including resupply assets, fuel points, and critical infrastructure, highlighting the vulnerability of sustainment systems in modern conflict. The increasing range and accessibility of these systems mean that Australia's northern bases and lines of communication are no longer insulated by distance.[41] This exposes key logistical hubs, which are essential for force projection, to emerging threats from both state and non-state actors. The ADF has recognised this challenge for several years and has accelerated investment in counter-UAS capabilities to address the growing threat.[42]

However, as potential adversaries acquire increasingly capable long-range strike systems, sustaining operations in Northern Australia will require more than simply expanding logistics capacity. It will also demand the protection of critical fuel infrastructure, munitions stockpiles, airfields, and resupply routes.[43] This includes enhancing protection of northern resupply routes and developing resilient logistics systems. Equally important is identifying suitable platforms capable of rapidly transporting large volumes of guided weapons to remote locations, ensuring sustainment and operational effectiveness in contested environments. Recent conflicts highlight the urgency of this challenge.

The widespread employment of relatively inexpensive one-way attack drones, such as the Iranian-designed Shahed series, has demonstrated their ability to threaten critical infrastructure and impose disproportionate costs on defenders.[44] These challenges are not new. A decade of efforts to counter Iranian drone systems has demonstrated that traditional air defence solutions alone are unlikely to provide a complete answer, particularly against massed attacks.[45] Contemporary battlefield experience in Ukraine demonstrates that the contest between drones and counter-drone systems is evolving rapidly, with both attackers and defenders continuously adapting.[46] Protecting sustainment infrastructure may ultimately prove just as important as expanding it, as fuel supplies, logistics hubs and distribution networks are likely to become priority targets in any future conflict.

An enduring challenge for the Australian Army is preparing for the threat of long-range fires across the full spectrum of competition—cooperation, competition, crisis, and conflict. Central to this challenge is justifying the investment in remote logistics bases during periods short of war, where the immediacy of threat may not be apparent, but preparedness remains essential. A potential solution lies in reframing the inherent challenges of Northern Australia as strategic advantages. The significance of these developments lies not only in their ability to destroy combat forces, but in their capacity to disrupt sustainment. Fuel farms, pipelines, logistics nodes and transport networks have emerged as priority targets in modern warfare, demonstrating that sustainment infrastructure is increasingly part of the battlefield.

The region's sparse population and vast distances between major centres create an ideal environment for the testing and evaluation of capabilities such as long-range fires. These conditions enable realistic experimentation at scale, unconstrained by the density and limitations of more populated areas. Importantly, this concept is not unprecedented. Over the past decade, Northern Australia has seen significant growth in dual-use infrastructure, including commercial space launch facilities and Defence capabilities such as the Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN). Building on this foundation, the development of sustainable, dual-use logistics and testing hubs would provide enduring capability in peacetime while retaining the capacity to surge and support operations during crisis or conflict. Such an approach would enhance military preparedness while generating broader economic and technological benefits for the region. However, any expansion of these activities must be approached with sensitivity, acknowledging Northern Australia's historical association with atomic testing during the mid-twentieth century.

The RAAF's Jericho Disruptive Innovation Cell has been actively exploring the 'Camel Train' concept—an autonomous aircraft program designed to extend logistics reach across Australia's vast northern regions.[47] This initiative reflects a broader shift toward

leveraging emerging technologies to address the enduring challenges of distance, access, and sustainment in remote environments. By integrating autonomous systems into the logistics network, the RAAF aims to reduce reliance on traditional, resource-intensive supply chains while increasing responsiveness and resilience. This effort aligns with advancements in the United States, where collaboration with industry partners has demonstrated the viability of autonomous and semi-autonomous flight systems.[48] Although still nascent, the Camel Train concept has the potential to fundamentally reshape how Northern Australia is resupplied. Autonomous aircraft could deliver fuel, munitions, and critical supplies to dispersed and austere locations with reduced risk to personnel and greater operational tempo. If successfully developed and integrated, this capability would significantly enhance Australia's ability to sustain forces and project power across the Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion

In 1942, John Curtin recognised that military power could not be separated from the national capacity to sustain it. The challenges confronting Australia today are different in form but not in substance. Geography, distance, infrastructure and logistics continue to define the effectiveness of Australia's defence posture in the north. This paper has contended that Australia's northern base network derives its strategic value not from its physical infrastructure alone, but from the force projection and sustainment it enables in support of operations across the Indo-Pacific. Northern Australia provides the geographic foundation for deterrence by denial, agile basing, long-range strike and coalition operations across the Indo-Pacific. Yet these capabilities will remain constrained unless supported by resilient logistics systems capable of sustaining combat power across vast distances and under contested conditions.

Northern Australia provides the geographic reach necessary to support deterrence, agile basing, long-range strike and coalition operations. Geography alone does not confer military advantage. The decisive challenge is sustaining combat power across vast distances in a region characterised by limited infrastructure, harsh environmental conditions, workforce constraints and vulnerable supply chains. Logistics, particularly the storage, distribution and protection of fuel, underpins operational reach, endurance and resilience. Realising the full potential of northern basing will therefore require more than investment in physical infrastructure alone. Australia must strengthen joint and interagency logistics networks, improve fuel security and resilience, and embrace emerging technologies such as autonomous resupply. Equally important is the development of Northern Australia as a persistent test and evaluation ecosystem capable of refining sustainment concepts, validating emerging capabilities and supporting operations in an increasingly contested strategic environment.

Among these requirements, priority should be given to fuel storage, distribution and protection systems, as they underpin the operational reach and endurance upon which all other capabilities depend. The ability to manage this critical commodity will determine the operational reach and endurance of the integrated force. Equally important are the transport networks, workforce capacity, industry partnerships and emerging technologies that collectively underpin sustainment. Achieving this will require a genuinely joint and national approach, drawing upon Army, Navy, Air Force, allies, industry, and civilian agencies to create a resilient northern support network.

The enduring lesson is that force projection without sustainment is merely aspiration. As Australia adapts to a more contested strategic environment, investment in northern logistics, fuel resilience, and sustainment capacity will be as important as investment in ships, aircraft, missiles or autonomous systems. Ultimately, the defence of Australia and the projection of Australian power into the Indo-Pacific will depend not on how far the force can reach, but on how long it can endure.

About the Author

Lieutenant Colonel Julian McMahon entered the Australian Army in 2004 and commissioned into the Corps of Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME) in 2007. Over the course of his career, he has served in a broad range of command, staff and operational appointments across Army and the Joint force. He has deployed on operations to Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq. In recognition of his service, he has been awarded Australian Army Silver and Australian Defence Force Gold Commendations. LTCOL McMahon holds a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical), a Master of Special Operations and Irregular Warfare, a Master of Defence Studies, and a Master of Systems Engineering. He is a Chartered Engineer with Engineers Australia and is currently completing a Master of Project Management.

ENDNOTES

1 Brendan Nelson, '70th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War in the Pacific', Australian War Memorial, August 15, 2015, https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/speeches/70th-anniversary-vp-day.

2 John Curtin, Address to the Nation Following the Bombing of Darwin, 16 February 1942, National Archives of Australia.

3 Australian Government, Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), accessed via '2026 National Defence Strategy and Integrated Investment Program', *Defence Ministers*, 16 April 2026, https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2026-04-16/2026-national-defence-strategy-integrated-investment-program.

4 Anthony Albanese, 'Australia-New Zealand Leaders' Meeting 2026', *Prime Minister of Australia*, 2026, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-new-zealand-leaders-meeting-2026.

5 National Defence Strategy 2026.

6 Australian Government, National Defence Strategy 2024 (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2024).

7 Australian Government, Defence Strategic Review 2023 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

8 Andrew Carr, 'Australia's Archipelagic Deterrence', *Survival*, 65, no. 4 (2023): 79–100.

9 Australian Government, Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy and 2026 Integrated Investment Program* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2026), https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

10 Australian Government, National Defence Strategy 2024 (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2024).

11 Andrew Galloway, 'Australian airbase used in US strike on Houthi stores in Yemen', *ABC News*, 18 October 2024, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-18/australian-airbase-used-in-us-strike-on-houthi-stores-yemen/104490578 (accessed 16 June 2026)

12 See *The Fifth Air Force in the War Against Japan* (Military Analysis Division, 1947).

13 John A. Tirpak, 'Autonomous Cargo Aircraft Could Transform Logistics', *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, March 2024, https://www.airandspaceforces.com.

14 Australian Army, 'Chief of Army Address: The Future of the Australian Army Profession', 20 May 2026, https://www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2026-05-20/chief-army-address-future-australian-army-profession.

15 Australian Defence Force, Concept Lantana: Australian Defence Force Land Domain Concept (Canberra: Department of Defence), (accessed 2 June 2026).

16 Australian Government, Defence Strategic Review 2023 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

17 Kristy McBain and Ann Leahy, 'Upgrades to fix Flinders Highway flood hot spots', 3 June 2026, media release, https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/KristyMcBain/Pages/upgrades-to-fix-flinders-highway-flood-hot-spots.aspx (accessed 16 June 2026)

18 Vanessa Mills, 'Demolition of Fitzroy Crossing bridge under way after Kimberley floods', *ABC News* (Online), 18 May 2023, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-18/fitzroy-bridge-demolition-begins-after-kimberley-floods/102362890 (accessed 16 June 2026).

19 Australian Military Forces, *Report on the Military Defence of Australia by a Conference of Senior Officers of the Australian Military Forces, Volume 2* (Melbourne: Department of Defence, 1920), 8, National Archives of Australia, B273703, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=273703.

20 Isobel Bredhauer, 'Coronavirus Panic-Buying Threatens Food Security in Remote NT Community', *ABC News*, 21 March 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-21/coronavirus-panic-buying-threatens-food-shortage-in-nt-community/12071414.

21 Deloitte Access Economics, *Regional Risk and Resilience: COVID-19 Impacts on Northern Australia* (Canberra: Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia, 2021)

22 Marcus Hellyer and Andrew Nicholls, 'Sustaining Australia's Northern Bases', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2022.

23 National Defence Strategy 2024.

24 Department of Veterans' Affairs, 'Shifting Tides: Australia and the Pacific in the Second World War', *Anzac Portal*, https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/shifting-tides-australia-and-pacific-second-world-war. (accessed 27 July 2026)

25 Elmas Hasanovikj, 'Lessons for the West from Ukraine on Operations and Supply Chains', *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 9:8 (2026), 249-257.

26 See Martin White, *Piqued Oil Interest: Overstating the Priority for United Stated Military Fuel Sustainability in Australia* (Australian Army Research Centre, 2021) https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/piqued-oil-interest; Khalil Gholami, Ali Azizivahed, Li Li & Dylan Lu, *Energy Independence and Microgrid Deployment: Examining the Implications for Defence Operations and Supply Chain Resilience* (Australian Army Research Centre, 2026) https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/energy-independence-and-microgrid-deployment

27 Powering Australia, 'Securing Australia's Fuel Future', https://poweringaustralia.com.au/securing-australias-fuel-future/. (accessed 27 July 2026)

28 David Crowe, 'Why Australia can't just drill its way out of a global crisis?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April 2026, https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/beyond-the-petrol-pump-can-home-grown-steps-solve-the-nation-s-fuel-crisis-20260406-p5zll0.html.

29 Brianna Morris-Grant and Alex Lim, 'What we know about the 'unprecedented' Geelong refinery fire', *ABC News*, 17 April 2026, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-17/geelong-refinery-fire-visual-explainer/106571216.

30 Australian Government, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, *Fuel Security Regulation Impact Statement: Securing Australia's Domestic Fuel Stocks and Refining Capability* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, May 2021).

31 Dori Salcido, 'U.S. Forces Validate Ship-to-Shore Logistics Capability at Talisman Sabre 23', *U.S. Department of Defense News*, 20 July 2023, https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3468121/us-forces-validate-ship-to-shore-logistics-capability-at-talisman-sabre-23/.

32 Australian Government, Defence Strategic Review 2023 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

33 Alan Dupont, 'Transformation or Stagnation? Rethinking Australia's Defence', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 57, no. 1 (2003): 55–76.

34 Kenneth L. Privratsky, *Logistics in the Falklands War: A Case Study in Expeditionary Warfare* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2014).

35 Daniel Mueller, 'Authority Is Not Enough: Implementing Australia's Domestic Counter-UAS Mission', *Land Power Forum*, Australian Army Research Centre, 16 April 2026, https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/authority-not-enough.

36 Raelene Lockhorst, 'House of Cards: Northern Australia's Liquid Fuel Resilience', *The Strategist* (Australian Strategic Policy Institute), 3 March 2025, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/house-of-cards-northern-australias-liquid-fuel-resilience/.

37 Tom Lowrey, 'US Military Investigates Converting Remote Australian Airstrips to Major Fuel Depots', ABC News, 19 August 2026, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-08-19/could-united-states-use-bare-northern-based-for-defence-assets/107017430.

38 Gascoyne Gateway Ltd., 'Project', *Gascoyne Gateway Marine Complex*, https://gascoynegateway.com.au/project/. (accessed 27 July 2026).

39 Robert Powell, 'Protecting Deployed RAAF Facilities: A Role for the 2nd (Australian) Division', *The Cove*, Australian Army, 25 February 2026, https://cove.army.gov.au/article/protecting-deployed-raaf-facilities-role-2nd-australian-division.

40 Sophie Maxwell, 'Keeping Pitch Black Moving', *Defence*, 28 July 2026, https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2026-07-28/keeping-pitch-black-moving.

41 Marthe van der Wolf and Reuters, 'How Ukraine's Deepest Attack in Russia, on Arctic Gas, Signals New Reach', *Al Jazeera*, 10 September 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/9/10/how-ukraines-deepest-attack-in-russia-on-arctic-gas-signals-new-reach.

42 Land Forces, 'Project Land 156 Fast-Tracks Advanced Counter-Drone Systems for the ADF', *Land Forces International Land Defence Exposition*, January 2026, https://landforces.com.au/news-media/latest-news/news-updates/project-land-156-fast-tracks-advanced-counter-drone-systems-for-the-adf/.

43 Paul Iddon, 'Iran War Sparks Surge in Demand for Cost-Effective Anti-Drone Rockets', *Forbes*, 3 May 2026, https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2026/05/03/iran-war-created-surge-in-demand-for-cost-effective-anti-drone-rockets/.

44 Peter Layton, 'Australia, Too, Is in the Shadow of the Shahed', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 26 March 2026. https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-too-is-in-the-shadow-of-the-shahed/.

45 Robert Tollast, 'A Decade-Long Struggle to Thwart Iran's Drones Carries Warnings for the UK', *RUSI Commentary*, Royal United Services Institute, 25 March 2026, https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/decade-long-struggle-thwart-irans-drones-carries-warnings-uk.

46 Josh Rogin, 'Ukraine's way of fighting war can't match what's coming', *Washington Post*, 9 September 2026, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2026/09/09/how-russia-is-erasing-ukraines-battlefield-advantage/.

47 Department of Defence, 'Autonomous Aircraft Boost Logistics Reach', *Defence*, 4 May 2026, https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2026-05-04/autonomous-aircraft-boost-logistics-reach.

48 Nina Borgeson, 'Project Convergence-Capstone 6: FCC's Role in Army Experimentation', *U.S. Army*, 24 July 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/294098/project_convergence_capstone_6_fccs_role_in_army_experimentation.

DEFENDING WHAT MATTERS: COUNTERING DRONES AND THE CHALLENGE OF PRIORITISATION IN AUSTRALIA

Carl Rhodes

Introduction

Few challenges to national security have emerged as rapidly and consequentially as the threat posed by small uncrewed aerial systems (UAS), commonly referred to as drones. The dual-use nature of this technology, combined with its low cost, has enabled widespread proliferation among nation states, non-state actors and individuals.[1] UAS can be employed across a range of missions, including surveillance, kinetic and non-kinetic attack, and the movement of contraband. While these systems have played a transformative role on battlefields in Europe and the Middle East over the past decade, they have also increasingly been used domestically to undermine security and disrupt activities across several nations.[2]

Compared with battlefield operations, where hostile UAS are generally encountered within an established military context, the domestic environment presents a broader range of potential targets, missions and actors. Importantly, intent may be considerably more difficult to determine as UAS are employed by hobbyists, photographers, security forces and other users for legitimate purposes. The relatively low barrier to entry means that individuals, non-state groups and nation states can employ UAS for a wide range of purposes. The result is a large and diverse set of potential threats and targets that must be considered in any comprehensive approach to counter-UAS defence. This breadth of vulnerability, combined with Australia's limited and still-developing counter-UAS capacity suited to domestic use, will require difficult decisions about prioritisation, capability allocation and capability generation.

The release of the Defence Amendment (Counter-UXS Measures) Regulations 2025 has made these questions more immediate.[3] The regulations provide a legal framework

for authorised personnel to take measures to counter uncrewed devices threatening protected defence areas or defence assets, including areas or assets declared by the Minister in the interests of defence or national security. However, the legal authority does not determine what assets, areas or activities should receive protection, how limited capabilities should be allocated or how much and what types of capability Australia should maintain for domestic national security purposes, recognising that systems suitable for domestic use may differ substantially from those required for overseas contingencies. As this new framework is implemented, questions of prioritisation, allocation and capability generation require attention.

Much discussion of counter-UAS focuses on the acquisition of technology. This article argues that Australia's domestic counter-UAS challenge must also be understood as a problem of prioritisation, capability allocation and capability generation. It first briefly examines the characteristics of the domestic threat and the contribution of intelligence, passive measures and active defences as a layered approach to reducing risk. A framework is then proposed for prioritising protection and allocating scarce capabilities, before considering the implications of these requirements for future capability generation. Finally, the article examines the role the Australian Army, and particularly the 2nd (AS) Division, could play as part of a broader national counter-UAS architecture involving Defence, law enforcement, other government agencies and private operators.

Domestic Threat from Uncrewed Aerial Systems

Commercially available small UAS already possess capabilities that make them useful for a wide range of hostile activities. Current systems combine increasingly capable sensors with substantial speed, endurance and operating range, while remaining inexpensive and widely available.[4] These capabilities are also improving rapidly. Analysis of DJI systems produced between 2013 and 2024, for example, found continuing increases in speed, transmission distance and flight duration.[5] Such trends mean that assessments of the threat, and defensive systems to counter that threat, can become outdated quickly.

The range of missions that UAS can perform further complicates domestic defence. Small UAS can conduct surveillance and reconnaissance using the electro-optical cameras with which they are typically equipped, or additional sensors such as infrared or radiofrequency systems. Suspicious UAS activity has been reported around sensitive military and nuclear facilities in the United States, France and the United Kingdom.[6] In 2024, Thomas Matthew Crooks used a commercially available DJI drone to survey the site of a campaign rally before attempting to assassinate Donald Trump.[7] Such incidents illustrate a particular challenge in the domestic environment: the same aircraft

and sensors used routinely for recreational, commercial and other legitimate purposes can also collect information to support hostile activity.

Small UAS can also conduct kinetic attacks or deliver other harmful payloads. Commercial and hobbyist aircraft require relatively minor modifications to carry explosives.[8] Ukraine's 2025 Operation Spiderweb demonstrated the potential consequences when small UAS are positioned covertly close to valuable targets: 117 UAS were launched from concealed locations near Russian airfields in attacks that reportedly damaged or destroyed multiple strategic bombers.[9] Criminal organisations have also employed UAS kinetically, including gangs in Rio de Janeiro that used drones to drop grenades on police during a 2025 operation.[10] These examples are particularly relevant to domestic defence because an attacker able to position systems close to a target can greatly reduce the warning time available to defenders.

Other applications broaden the threat further. UAS can transport contraband into restricted areas and across borders, including cross-border drug shipments and prohibited items delivered into prisons.[11] Such activity has already occurred in Australia. Small UAS may also provide platforms for electronic attack by operating close enough to a target to reduce the power required for jamming or other interference.[12] Agricultural spraying technologies demonstrate the technical potential to disperse chemical or biological material, although developing and effectively delivering such payloads presents significant challenges. A 2024 United Nations review identified no successful UAS-enabled chemical or biological attacks.[13] Other applications might include emplacing sensors, acting as communications relays or collecting environmental samples near sensitive facilities.

The significance of this diversity is that there is no single domestic UAS threat against which Australia can optimise its defences. The characteristics that matter to an attacker vary according to the mission: payload capacity may be critical for delivering explosives, sensing capability and standoff distance for surveillance, and proximity to the target for electronic attack. The consequences also vary substantially depending on what is targeted and what the attacker is trying to achieve. UAS conducting surveillance near a defence facility, delivering contraband into a prison or carrying an explosive towards a public event may employ similar underlying airframe and control technologies while presenting very different risks and requiring different responses.

Australia's geography provides little protection against UAS threats that originate within the country or are positioned covertly near their intended targets. Combined with the large number of potentially vulnerable sites, this creates a defensive problem that cannot be solved by attempting to provide equivalent protection everywhere. The diversity of actors, missions and system characteristics reinforces the need for a layered approach that can reduce risk and allow limited defensive capabilities to be concentrated where they are likely to have the greatest effect.

Legal Framework for Domestic Counter-UAS Operations

Prior to December 2025, legal and policy constraints limited Defence's ability to engage UAS within Australia. This changed with the making of the Defence Amendment (Counter-UXS Measures) Regulations 2025, which established a legal framework enabling authorised personnel to take measures to counter uncrewed devices threatening protected defence areas or defence assets, including areas or assets declared by the Minister in the interests of defence or national security.[14] The resulting provisions are now contained in Part 11B of the Defence Regulation 2016.[15]

Under this framework, appropriately trained 'authorised persons', including Australian Defence Force (ADF) members, certain Australian Public Service employees, contractors and specified law enforcement personnel, may employ a range of counter-UXS measures when they reasonably believe a device poses a safety or security risk. These measures include identification, tracking, interference, diversion, seizure and destruction, provided that they are reasonable and safe, the authorised person has regard to relevant ministerial guidelines or directions, and applicable international air and maritime navigation obligations are observed.[16]

The regulations also clarify the scope of key concepts such as 'protected defence areas', which may include defence premises, declared maritime or aviation zones and other locations designated by the Minister where national security interests are at stake. They further provide authority to exploit captured systems for intelligence and investigative purposes, including the collection and sharing of relevant information with law enforcement and intelligence agencies.[17]

The regulations provide authority to act but do not determine how that authority should be implemented across competing requirements. They do not establish which assets, sites or activities should receive priority, where limited counter-UAS capabilities should be deployed, or what capabilities should be generated to meet future requirements. Those questions are particularly important given the number of organisations potentially involved and the limited counter-UAS capacity currently available. The following sections therefore consider how intelligence, passive and active measures can reduce risk, before examining the problems of prioritisation, capability allocation and capability generation.

A Layered Approach to Risk Reduction

Australia's response to the domestic UAS threat should be layered rather than centred on active counter-UAS systems alone. Intelligence, passive measures and active defences reduce risk in different ways, are suited to different circumstances and place different

demands on resources. Intelligence may allow threats to be disrupted before a UAS is launched or enable capabilities to be deployed based on warning. Passive measures may reduce vulnerability without requiring continuous deployment of specialised counter-UAS systems that can be expensive to acquire, operate and continuously modernise. Active defences typically provide more direct protection but are comparatively scarce and may be significantly constrained by their operating environment and potential effects on surrounding systems and populations. Taken as a whole, these layers can reduce overall risk while allowing the most limited resources to be concentrated on the highest-priority requirements.

Intelligence

Actionable intelligence plays a critical role in informing, and in some cases pre-empting, the need for other layers of counter-UAS operations. In the best case, intelligence disrupts attacks during the planning phase, well before a UAS is launched or a payload is integrated. Achieving this requires gathering information across multiple domains, including understanding how nation states, terrorists or extremists might employ UAS, monitoring supply chains and smuggling activities, identifying suspicious behaviours and assessing which targets may be most attractive to hostile actors. Such intelligence can enable the prevention of attacks before they occur.

A second intelligence need focuses on the technical characteristics of UAS and the tactics used to employ them. Intelligence mission data derived from observation, capture and analysis of systems can improve detection, classification and electronic countermeasures.[18] Rapid proliferation of technologies and tactics makes intelligence sharing with allies and partners, as well as across government, particularly important, both to maintain awareness of emerging threats and to improve defensive systems and operational concepts.

Intelligence will not neutralise all UAS threats. Indicators may be missed, false positives may occur and legal or policy constraints may limit domestic collection. Nevertheless, high-quality intelligence can reduce demand on defensive systems by disrupting threats before they materialise and by identifying when and where risk has increased sufficiently to justify the deployment of counter-UAS capabilities. For threats that are not identified through intelligence activities or that emerge without warning, passive and active measures will remain necessary.

Passive Defences

Passive defences in the counter-UAS mission include measures that reduce the likelihood that assets or activities will be detected or targeted, and mitigate the effects of attack. While sensitive sites and infrastructure have traditionally been designed to control access

by individuals, the threat posed by UAS requires new approaches. Passive measures may be less expensive than the sustained deployment of active systems and, in some cases, can be implemented more quickly than new active defence systems can be procured and fielded. By reducing vulnerability to surveillance, disruption and attack, passive defences can also reduce the number of situations in which scarce active counter-UAS capabilities are required.

Passive measures may include design features that shield or disguise areas vulnerable to observation or attack. Guidance from the United Kingdom's National Protective Security Authority and the US Joint Interagency Task Force 401 emphasises measures such as hardening, obscuration and management of the area surrounding a site.[19] At existing sites, these might include physical barriers or netting to protect critical assets from kinetic attack, blinds or obscuring films to limit observation, and traditional security measures such as cameras and lighting to help detect suspicious activity or identify UAS operators near the site perimeter.

Passive measures also include procedural actions that reduce vulnerability. These may involve varying routines to avoid predictable patterns, dispersing valuable assets where feasible, limiting the outdoor exposure of sensitive equipment and reducing the visibility of critical activities from the air. Such measures can deny hostile actors useful intelligence and complicate the planning and execution of attacks.

Reporting and response procedures are also important. Sites without dedicated UAS detection systems may still have personnel capable of observing suspicious aerial activity if clear reporting channels exist. A suspicious drone reported by a resident near a shipyard in Virginia, for example, contributed to the identification and conviction of a Chinese national for unlawfully photographing sensitive US Navy facilities.[20] Once a potential threat is identified, organisations should have rehearsed procedures for warning personnel, protecting assets, preserving evidence and escalating the incident to police, Defence or other relevant authorities.

These lessons should inform Australian approaches to protecting defence sites, defence assets and other critical infrastructure. Passive defences should form a baseline layer of protection across important locations because many can be implemented broadly, sustained over time and adapted as threats evolve. They will not eliminate the threat, but they can reduce vulnerability and allow active counter-UAS capabilities to be concentrated on risks that cannot be adequately mitigated through other means.

Active Defences

Active defences are most useful where intelligence and passive measures cannot reduce risk sufficiently, particularly for high-consequence or symbolically important sites or

during periods of elevated threat. Actionable intelligence may also drive the temporary deployment of active systems to particular locations.

Active counter-UAS operations typically involve three phases: sense, decide and effect.[21] Detecting small UAS can be difficult, particularly in cluttered environments such as urban areas. Sensor options include radar, radiofrequency, electro-optical, infrared and acoustic systems, often used in combination. Each has limitations, and factors such as buildings, vegetation, weather and a congested electromagnetic environment can affect performance. Detection opportunities may also extend beyond the aircraft itself, as control links or the presence of nearby operators can provide additional indicators of UAS activity.[22]

The decide function links detection to an appropriate response. This is particularly important in domestic environments, where potential threats must often be distinguished from legitimate UAS activity and where the consequences of an incorrect engagement decision may be significant. Counter-UAS command and control systems therefore need to integrate sensor information, support rapid threat identification and enable the selection and tasking of appropriate effectors.[23]

Effectors may use kinetic, electronic or directed-energy techniques to disrupt, disable or destroy a UAS. The objective is not necessarily to destroy the aircraft, but to prevent it from completing its mission while minimising collateral effects. In domestic settings, this creates difficult trade-offs. Kinetic systems and interceptors can pose risks from missed shots or falling debris, while electronic systems may interfere with nearby communications or navigation services and can be less effective against autonomous platforms or systems using uncharacterised control links and protocols. Directed-energy systems offer additional options, but also face environmental, safety or performance constraints.[24]

These limitations mean that no single active counter-UAS system is suitable for all locations or threats. Systems intended for domestic use should be assessed in operationally representative environments that account for buildings, vegetation, civilian air traffic, radiofrequency congestion, weather and surrounding populations. A capability that performs effectively on an open military range, for example, may have substantially degraded performance near airports, ports, or in urban areas.[25]

Active defences should therefore not be treated as universal solutions that can simply be distributed across vulnerable locations. Their effectiveness depends on the threat, operating environment and legal and operational constraints, while their acquisition and operation consume limited personnel and financial resources. Active capabilities should consequently be concentrated where the consequences of a successful attack are greatest, other layers cannot adequately reduce risk and the available system is likely to provide meaningful protection.

Prioritising Counter-UAS Protection

The combination of limited counter-UAS capability, constrained budgets and the broad range of potential sites that hostile actors might target means that it will be neither possible nor sensible to defend all locations equally. Resources in the form of funding, systems and personnel will therefore need to be prioritised according to where they can provide the greatest reduction in risk for the nation. Such decisions should consider a range of factors, including the consequences of successful hostile UAS employment, the likelihood of a threat being directed against a particular site or activity, the vulnerability of the target, the extent to which intelligence, passive measures or active defences can reduce that vulnerability, the resources required to achieve that reduction in risk and the associated opportunity costs, and the duration for which protection may be required.

Existing investment and deployment decisions necessarily involve some prioritisation of counter-UAS requirements within Defence and across government. This article does not attempt to describe or assess existing processes, many aspects of which may not be publicly available. Instead, the following discussion develops a framework from first principles for how prioritisation could be structured, identifying the factors that should inform decisions about where limited counter-UAS resources can provide the greatest reduction in risk.

Understanding the consequences of successful hostile UAS employment will require imagination, given the range of missions such systems can undertake, as well as detailed analysis and modelling of the potential effects of kinetic attack, intelligence collection, electronic or cyber operations and other missions. There is no single measure that allows fundamentally different consequences to national security to be compared. For example, the casualties resulting from an explosive attack cannot simply be equated with the collection of sensitive defence information that might reduce the future combat effectiveness of the ADF and its allies. Assessments should therefore consider consequences not only in terms of lives and financial loss but also in terms of their immediate and longer-term effects on military capability, essential services and national security.

Estimating the likelihood of hostile UAS employment against any site or activity will also prove quite challenging. Actionable intelligence will prove most valuable in these assessments, along with the value and symbolic importance of the target, the accessibility of the site to operators of shorter-range UAS and the feasibility of conducting the mission. Observable counter-UAS measures at a site may also provide some deterrent effect by reducing an attacker's perceived likelihood of success. Likelihood assessments will need to be updated regularly as new intelligence is gathered, UAS capabilities and payloads improve, and the operating environment changes.

The inherent vulnerability of a target should also influence prioritisation, along with the extent to which different measures can reduce that vulnerability. Highly vulnerable sites may be more attractive to hostile actors, but vulnerability alone should not determine priority. Where intelligence, passive measures or active defences can substantially reduce risk, investment may produce a greater benefit than at sites where available measures are unlikely to be effective. For active defences, assessing likely effectiveness may require consideration of terrain, typical air traffic, the electromagnetic environment and the potential for collateral damage. Similar assessments would also be useful when determining the potential effectiveness of additional intelligence resources or passive defensive measures.

The resources required to achieve a particular reduction in risk should also influence prioritisation. A measure that provides only modest additional protection at significant financial or personnel cost may be a lower priority than one that produces greater risk reduction with the same resources. For scarce deployable capabilities, the opportunity cost must also be considered: assigning a system or personnel to one requirement may make them unavailable to protect another.

A final factor that should shape investment decisions is the expected duration of the protection requirement. Enduring requirements, such as those associated with critical Defence locations, may justify fundamentally different investments from temporary requirements associated with major sporting events or other short-duration activities. Enduring requirements may support fixed or permanently installed improvements in passive and active defences, potentially reducing long-term operating costs. Temporary requirements may instead be better served by deployable teams and mobile active defences that can be redeployed once the need has ended. Temporary passive measures, such as netting, or surged intelligence support may also be appropriate.

Effective decision-making for allocating and deploying resources requires structured decision-support packages. These packages should include current threat intelligence, assessments of the potential consequences of hostile UAS activity and site vulnerability, the expected coverage and effectiveness of potential active and passive measures, the anticipated duration of the protection requirement, and the personnel and financial costs of mitigation options. A framework incorporating likelihood, consequence, vulnerability, expected risk reduction, resource requirements, opportunity cost, and duration would support consistent prioritisation. Standardising such packages across Defence, police and other organisations involved in domestic counter-UAS operations would improve the allocation of scarce resources, particularly during crises or periods of heightened threat. It would also help ensure that decisions are transparent, evidence based and capable of withstanding subsequent scrutiny.

Capability Allocation and Governance

Establishing priorities is only the first step in managing scarce counter-UAS resources. Effective capability allocation will also require coordination across government and clearly defined roles, responsibilities and decision authorities. Even highly capable counter-UAS systems may provide little value if responsibilities are unclear, approvals are slow or available capabilities cannot be reallocated rapidly in response to changing requirements.

The goal of an effective capability allocation system should be to translate established priorities into decisions about assigning available capabilities to reduce risk in the current threat environment. Some capabilities may be permanently assigned to sites or assets that continue to be high priorities for counter-UAS protection. Others, particularly mobile active defences and deployable personnel, may need to be allocated temporarily to meet requirements that persist for only days or weeks. Rapid reallocation may also be required as intelligence and the threat environment evolve.

Defence, intelligence organisations and police forces may all identify requirements for counter-UAS capabilities based on the threats and assets relevant to their responsibilities. Effective allocation therefore requires clear processes for consolidating requirements, comparing competing demands and determining which organisation will provide the required capability. Responsibilities will also need to be defined for authorising deployments, exercising operational control over deployed systems and reallocating capabilities as priorities change. The precise institutional arrangements for making these decisions are beyond the scope of this article, but responsibilities and decision authorities should be established and tested before a crisis occurs.

This challenge is further complicated by the fact that many assets requiring protection, particularly critical infrastructure, are owned or operated by private entities. Effective counter-UAS protection may therefore require coordination between government and industry, including clear guidance on their respective responsibilities for protective measures, access to sites and the integration of government capabilities with measures already provided by site operators.

A cautionary example of poor coordination occurred in the airspace above Fort Hancock, Texas. There, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) halted air traffic after a drone operated by U.S. Customs and Border Protection was engaged by a high-energy laser operated by the US military. The military believed it was targeting a drone used by a Mexican cartel, while the FAA was unaware of the system's deployment and its potential impact on civilian aviation. The incident prompted debate about how the Pentagon should coordinate with other agencies prior to deploying laser-based counter-UAS systems.[26] Australia would benefit from establishing and exercising such coordination mechanisms before a crisis, particularly for counter-UAS measures that may affect civilian aviation, communications, navigation services or critical infrastructure.

The allocation of responsibilities should also reflect the nature and sophistication of the threat. Routine criminal misuse of UAS, such as contraband delivery, harassment or other relatively unsophisticated activity, would generally be best addressed by police, site security and other civilian authorities using capabilities appropriate to normal security requirements. More sophisticated threats, particularly those involving advanced UAS, state-sponsored intelligence collection or kinetic attacks against significant targets, could require capabilities, intelligence and operational expertise more commonly resident within Defence. Terrorist threats may involve both sets of organisations, with police and intelligence agencies retaining their established responsibilities while Defence provides specialised capabilities as required. A national counter-UAS architecture would enable capabilities to be drawn from different organisations according to the character and severity of the threat rather than seeking to replicate the full spectrum of capability in every agency.

In this context, effective governance requires more than identifying which organisation has formal responsibility for a particular capability. It requires established processes for sharing information, making allocation decisions, resolving competing demands and rapidly reallocating resources as circumstances change. These arrangements should be tested through regular exercises involving relevant government organisations and private-sector operators of assets that may be threatened by UAS. Patterns of persistent unmet demand identified through this process should also inform decisions about what additional counter-UAS capability Australia needs to generate.

Implications for Capability Generation

Prioritisation and allocation address how Australia should employ the counter-UAS capabilities currently available, but they do not answer the separate question of what capabilities should be developed and maintained over time. This article does not attempt to determine the number, mix or readiness of counter-UAS capabilities that Australia should maintain; doing so would require a detailed force-sizing study incorporating threat assessments, anticipated demand, existing and planned capabilities, workforce constraints, costs and competing Defence priorities. Instead, this section identifies implications that the preceding analysis has for future capability generation.

It is important to recognise that capabilities generated for domestic counter-UAS operations may differ substantially from those designed primarily for battlefield or expeditionary use. Domestic systems may need to operate in congested airspace and electromagnetic environments, distinguish hostile UAS from legitimate activity and minimise effects on surrounding populations, communications and infrastructure.[27]

These constraints could limit the suitability of some systems that perform effectively in combat environments or on open military ranges. Capability-generation decisions should therefore consider domestic operating requirements explicitly rather than assuming systems acquired for overseas contingencies will be suitable for use within Australia.

The pattern and duration of expected demand should also shape investments in counter-UAS capability. Requirements at enduring high-priority locations may justify permanently installed active defences or long-term improvements to passive defences. By contrast, temporary requirements associated with major events, exercises or periods of elevated threat may be better served by mobile systems and deployable teams that can be reassigned as priorities change. A national capability model will likely require a combination of fixed capacity and surge capability rather than relying predominantly on either approach.

Surge requirements also have implications for readiness and workforce design. Deployable counter-UAS capability must be available quickly to respond to changes in threat. However, maintaining large numbers of personnel and systems at high readiness may be costly and inefficient when demand is intermittent. This creates a need to balance standing capacity with scalable personnel, including reserve or contractor support, and equipment that can be moved between locations as needed.

Counter-UAS capability generation must also account for the rapid evolution of UAS technologies and tactics.[28] Systems, intelligence mission data, operating procedures and training require regular updates as threats evolve. Investment decisions should consider not only procurement costs but also the resources required to sustain, modernise and adapt capabilities over time.

Army's Role in Domestic Counter-UAS Operations

The requirement for deployable surge capacity identified above provides a potential role for the Australian Army in domestic counter-UAS operations. Army should focus on those requirements where its capabilities provide a comparative advantage, while ensuring that domestic counter-UAS taskings do not detract from its broader operational responsibilities. It is neither practical nor desirable for Army to provide routine protection across numerous domestic sites. Its strengths lie in its ability to generate and deploy task-organised forces, surge personnel during crises and apply expertise in force protection, planning, command and control, and sustainment. Army's comparative advantage is likely to be greatest at the higher end of the threat spectrum, where sophisticated systems, nationally significant targets or rapidly escalating threats require specialised capabilities and deployable force-protection expertise.

Within Army, the 2nd (AS) Division is particularly well placed to develop this contribution. Its responsibilities for domestic security and response operations, together with its reserve force structure, provide an institutional basis for maintaining expertise and preparing task-organised counter-UAS force packages for domestic requirements.[29] These packages could supply or augment protection at prioritised sites during periods of elevated threat, provide planning and technical support, and integrate Army capabilities with police, other Defence elements and commercial providers. Regular training with these organisations would be needed to ensure that such force packages can be integrated rapidly.

Army's contribution should be both scalable and complementary to civilian and other government capabilities rather than becoming a mechanism for permanent nationwide coverage. Determining the precise level of personnel, equipment and readiness that Army should maintain for this role requires the broader force-sizing analysis identified earlier and is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, maintaining institutional knowledge of evolving UAS technologies, tactics and countermeasures, together with the ability to generate deployable capability when required, would provide an important contribution to any national counter-UAS architecture.

Conclusions

The domestic UAS threat presents Australia with a problem that cannot be solved purely through the acquisition of technology. The number and diversity of potential targets, rapid evolution of UAS capabilities and limited availability of counter-UAS resources mean that equivalent protection cannot be provided everywhere. Effective defence will require a layered approach that combines intelligence, passive measures and active defences, with each investment and capability deployed where it can provide the greatest reduction in risk.

This article has argued that three related but distinct problems require attention. Prioritisation determines which sites, assets and activities warrant protection based on factors including consequence, likelihood, vulnerability, expected risk reduction and duration of the requirement. Capability allocation translates those priorities into decisions about where available systems, personnel and other resources should be employed, supported by clear governance arrangements across government and with private-sector operators. Capability generation concerns the question of what capacity Australia should develop and maintain over time. Domestic requirements may differ substantially from expeditionary ones, and a national approach will require a combination of enduring site protection and deployable surge capability.

These distinctions matter because scarcity will persist even as Australia expands its counter-UAS capacity. Structured decision-support processes will help ensure that limited resources are concentrated where they are most likely to reduce national security risk, while also identifying persistent shortfalls that inform future investment. Just as importantly, responsibilities, authorities and coordination mechanisms must be established and exercised before a crisis rather than improvised once a threat emerges.

The Australian Army can contribute to this broader architecture, but its domestic counter-UAS taskings should not grow to the point at which they displace resources needed for its broader mission. In particular, the 2nd (AS) Division can provide institutional expertise and task-organised surge capacity able to reinforce civilian and other government capabilities during periods of elevated threat. Ultimately, Australia's ability to counter hostile UAS will depend not on any single technology, but on whether it can build a coherent system for deciding what must be protected, where scarce capability should be employed and what additional capability must be generated as the threat evolves.

About the Author

Dr Carl Rhodes is the founder of Robust Policy and a senior fellow with the National Institute for Deterrence Studies. He previously spent 25 years at the RAND Corporation and hosts the *Deterrence Down Under* podcast. Carl earned his PhD in chemical engineering from the California Institute of Technology and his BS in chemical engineering from Stanford University.

ENDNOTES

1 Don Rassler and Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, 'On the Horizon: The Ukraine War and the Evolving Threat of Drone Terrorism', *CTC Sentinel* 18, no. 3 (2025): 1–24; Dan Gettinger, *The Drone Databook Update: March 2020* (The Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College, 2020).

2 Steve Feldstein and Dara Massicot, 'What We Know About Drone Use in the Iran War', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (website), at: https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2026/03/iran-drones-shahed-us-lessons; Oleksandra Molloy, *Drones in Modern Warfare: Lessons from the War in Ukraine*, Occasional Paper No. 29 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2024).

3 The amendment defines a UXS device as an autonomous or remotely operated uncrewed device capable of moving on the ground, on water, underwater or in the air.

4 Bradley Wilson et al., *Small Unmanned Aerial System Adversary Capabilities* (RAND Corporation, 2020); DJI, 'DJI Mavic 4 Pro—Specs', *DJI* (website), at: www.dji.com/au/mavic-4-pro/specs.

5 Jake Dulligan et al., 'The Rising Threat of Non-State Actor Commercial Drone Use: Emerging Capabilities and Threats', *CTC Sentinel* 18, no. 3 (2025): 39–44.

6 Joseph Trevithick and Tyler Rogoway, 'Mysterious Drones Swarmed Langley AFB for Weeks', *The War Zone* (website), at: www.twz.com/air/mysterious-drones-swarmed-langley-afb-for-weeks; Rudy Ruitenberg, 'Drones Fly Over French Strategic Nuclear Submarine Base, Media Report', *Defense News*, 6 December 2025; Josh Layton, 'Up to Six Drones Spotted over UK Nuclear Plant in Possible "Malicious" Event', *Metro*, 31 October 2022.

7 Michael Kosnar and Ken Dilanian, 'Trump Shooter Flew Drone Over Venue Hours before Attempted Assassination, Source Says', *NBC News*, 20 July 2024.

8 James Rogers, 'Written Evidence DTD0014—UK Parliament Domestic Threat of Drones Inquiry', 15 August 2019, at: https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/103872/html.

9 James Marson, Jane Lytvynenko and Serhii Bosak, 'Inside Ukraine's Daring "Operation Spiderweb" Attack on Russia', *Wall Street Journal*, 10 December 2025.

10 Cody Weddle and Iona Cleave, 'Gangs Bomb Police with Drones in Retaliation for Rio de Janeiro Raid', *The Telegraph*, 28 October 2025.

11 Hannah Haight, 'High Crimes in Low Airspace: The Rise of Drones in Cross-Border Drug Trafficking', *Journal of Air Law and Commerce* 90, no. 3 (2025): 327–372; Jasper Lindell, 'Drone Drop-Offs to Canberra's Jail Would Be Banned Under Liberal Bill', *The Canberra Times*, 24 November 2021.

12 Charlie Shoup et al., *Autonomous Airborne Electronic Warfare System* (University of Utah, 2017).

13 Ben Belton and Leo Baldiga, 'Agricultural Drones Are Taking Off Globally, Saving Farmers Time and Money', *The Conversation*, 29 October 2025; United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Global Counter-Terrorism Program on Autonomous and Remotely Operated Systems (AROS Program), *Global Report on the Acquisition, Weaponization and Deployment of Unmanned Aircraft Systems by Non-State Armed Groups for Terrorism-Related Purposes* (New York: United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2024).

14 *Defence Amendment (Counter-UXS Measures) Regulations 2025*.

15 *Defence Regulation 2016*, Part 11B.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Carl Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats: Preparing Army to Counter Small Uncrewed Aerial Systems*, Occasional Paper No. 24 (Canberra: Australian Army Research Centre, 2024).

19 National Protective Security Authority, 'Counter Uncrewed Aerial Systems (C-UAS)', *National Protective Security Authority* (website), at: www.npsa.gov.uk/specialised-guidance/uncrewed-aerial-systems/counter-uncrewed-aerial-systems-c-uas; Joint Interagency Task Force 401, *Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructure: Reframing Critical Infrastructure Security for the Drone Threat* (Joint Interagency Task Force 401, 2026).

20 Jordan Pearson, 'Drone Photographer Pleads Guilty to Espionage Act Charges', *The Verge*, 13 July 2024.

21 Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats*; Shaan Shaikh, Tom Karako and Michelle McLoughlin, *Countering Small Uncrewed Aerial Systems: Air Defense by and for the Joint Force* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023).

22 Georgia Lykou, Dimitrios Moustakas and Dimitris Gritzalis, 'Defending Airports from UAS: A Survey on Cyber-Attacks and Counter-Drone Sensing Technologies', *Sensors* 20, no. 12 (2020): 3537; Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats*.

23 Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats*; Shaikh, Karako and McLoughlin, *Countering Small Uncrewed Aerial Systems*.

24 Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats*; Aaron Angell, 'The High-Energy Laser: Tomorrow's Weapon to Improve Force Protection', *Joint Forces Quarterly* 64 (2012): 115–121; Lykou, Moustakas and Gritzalis, 'Defending Airports from UAS'.

25 Geert De Cubber et al., 'Standardized Evaluation of Counter-Drone Systems: Methods, Technologies, and Performance Metrics', *Drones* 9, no. 5 (2025): 354.

26 Karoun Demirjian et al., 'A Laser, a Shutdown of Airspace and Signs of Government Agencies at Odds', *The New York Times*, 26 February 2026.

27 Lykou, Moustakas and Gritzalis, 'Defending Airports from UAS'; Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats*.

28 Molloy, *Drones in Modern Warfare*; Rhodes, *Small Aircraft, Sizeable Threats*.

29 Australian Army, *The Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024* (Australian Army, 2024).

Australian Army Journal
2026, Volume XXII No 3

SOCIAL COHESION AND ARMY'S SOCIAL LEGITIMACY

Phillip Hoglin

Social Cohesion and Army's Social Legitimacy

Embedded within Army's document detailing its contribution to the National Defence Strategy (NDS) is a succinct description of one of its five 'land power' characteristics: presence. This description articulates that 'the Australian Army provides a human presence among populations, building trust, and protecting and projecting Australia's influence. Our positive networks reassure communities, enhancing security and reducing instability'.[1] In the context of domestic tasks and operations, this characteristic presupposes Army's enduring social legitimacy and the cohesion of society, implying that Army will consistently retain its social legitimacy and that Australia will remain a broadly cohesive society in the foreseeable future. However, an assumption of continued social legitimacy and cohesion is not guaranteed.

Army's purpose, whether it is deployed overseas or domestically, tacitly requires the support and cooperation of Australia's population[2]—or, at the very least, an implied positive sentiment towards its activities. During domestic operations, this requirement for support extends to local populations and communities among which Army will conduct operations; without it, mission success will become more complex, difficult to achieve and challenging to maintain in an enduring manner.[3] The sociology of mission success for Army, therefore, requires two interrelated but separate preconditions: a cohesive society that shows general support[4] and a socially legitimate Army that has not had its purpose undermined.[5]

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) does not formally consider social legitimacy as a direct or indirect input to its capabilities in its policy or doctrine,[6] although a recent Chief of Army did briefly reference social license (legitimacy) in the context of Army's 'jurisdiction',[7] a symposium was held to discuss Army in society,[8] and the land power characteristic of 'presence' had its singular mention in Army's NDS companion document. The significance of Army as a participant in society and the reciprocal impact of society on Army are still not well articulated; perhaps they are assumed to be self-evident or beyond the Army's capacity to influence.[9] Overall, there appears to be an implicit assumption that legitimacy and cohesion are immutable, stable and established

constructs that Army cannot influence; therefore, their inclusion as an input to capability is mute. If this assumption is true, it would hint that Army takes for granted its position in society and its level of public support, along with the cohesiveness of the national population, and presumes that these settings are enduring. However, there are risks to Army's social legitimacy that are not recognised or fully appreciated, and if they are not addressed, there may be consequences for Army's capability.

This article explores the concepts of social cohesion and social legitimacy as they relate to the Australian Army. First, the concepts of social cohesion and social legitimacy are introduced. These are complex topics in themselves and warrant dedicated discussions; however, for this article, a general overview is sufficient. The subsequent discussion delves into the intersection of Australia's social cohesion and Army's social legitimacy to operate and exist within the society it is tasked with protecting. This will highlight Army's role in contributing to social cohesion and the impact on Army that might arise from diminishing legitimacy, should it occur. The second portion of this article will introduce a brief assessment of the sources of gaps and deviations in Army's social legitimacy and identify how this may affect the domestic conduct of operations specified in the NDS.[10] A brief case examination of the role of the 2nd (Australian) Division is included, owing to its intimacy with Army's social legitimacy. Finally, this article will close by suggesting some practical measures by which Army can contribute to social cohesion and concurrently maintain or improve its social legitimacy, such that when or if the ADF is deployed domestically, it will benefit from the support of the local and national populace.

Social Cohesion

In the shadow of conflicts in the Middle East, ongoing Islamophobia, evidence of a rise in antisemitism, and the Bondi Beach terrorism incident, national discussions around social cohesion reached a fever pitch. A Special Envoy for Social Cohesion was appointed in mid-2024,[11] albeit for a brief period of less than a year, and in its place, separate special envoys to combat antisemitism[12] and Islamophobia[13] were appointed. Perhaps because of national events[14] and the profile of these envoys—both of which mention social cohesion numerous times in their plans and recommendations—the current dialogue around social cohesion is constrained largely to religion-oriented or perhaps ethnicity-based dimensions.[15] However, social cohesion encompasses a broader and more intricate scope, as reflected in prevailing Australian definitions.

Adapting the OECD definition,[16] the Australian Human Rights Commission refers to social cohesion in simple form as 'positive social relationships … the bond or "glue" that binds people'. It further explains that a socially cohesive society 'is one which works towards

the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility'.[17] Similarly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's definition explains that cohesion is 'created from connections based on a shared sense of belonging and attachment, similar values, trust and a sense of "social solidarity"'.[18] Five domains have been adopted to describe and measure social cohesion:

- **Belonging**: the sense of pride and belonging people have in Australia and in Australian life and culture, and the belonging they feel in their neighbourhoods
- **Worth**: the degree of emotional and material wellbeing
- **Social inclusion and justice**: perceptions of economic fairness and trust in government
- **Participation**: involvement in political activities and participation in social, community and civic groups
- **Acceptance and rejection**: attitudes toward immigrant diversity, support for minorities and experience of discrimination.[19]

Several of these definitional domains are conceptually useful in describing an interaction between social cohesion and Army's legitimacy. If society has diminished ownership and pride in the Australian Army (belonging), does not recognise its contribution to national wellbeing (worth), perceives it as unfair or loses trust in the organisation (social inclusion and justice), has a reduced propensity to participate in the Army (participation), or observes that the Army has negative attitudes towards diversity and minorities (acceptance), it risks isolation from the cohesiveness of mainstream society. That is, Army would not contribute positively to the social cohesion of society and may in fact become a source of negative public sentiment or even a sponsor of societal discontent, with consequences for the provision of capability.

Significantly, social cohesion is temporal and can change with time. Its characteristics at a point in time, including societal tensions, conflicts, disagreements and flashpoints, are the prevailing domestic, social and environmental contexts in which the Army will deploy. Domestically, good or bad social cohesion will characterise an area of operations, and deployments are affected positively or negatively in response. Social cohesion not only constrains the government's political mandate, dictates strategic stamina and frames any societal polarisation but also specifically affects Army's freedom of manoeuvre in a domestic area of operations.[20] Importantly, social cohesion will remain a dynamic characteristic of the domestic environment into which Army could deploy.

Despite recent commentary on social cohesion in Australia, it is fortunate that recent assessments conclude that 'the relative stability of … social cohesion speaks to the enduring strength of the social fabric of communities across Australia',[21] and that in

comparison with other (OECD) countries, 'Australians' feelings around social connection and social cohesion are generally either similar or better'.[22] It is less fortunate that, perhaps because of the stability, Army does not consider cohesion an external input to capability and may have become complacent about its potential impact.

Social Legitimacy

Sometimes referred to as 'social license', the term 'social legitimacy' has been around in some form for almost half a century, with aspects of its definition derived from the theory of organisational legitimacy first described in 1975.[23] One of these first definitions stated:

> Organisations seek to establish congruence between the social values associated with or implied by their activities and the norms of acceptable behaviour in the larger social system of which they are a part.[24]

A succinct and relevant definition is also provided: 'the acceptance of an institution within a given audience'.[25]

Social legitimacy, in its essence, pertains to an organisation's ability to conduct its activities without causing societal disruption or undermining social cohesion. It is the permission that society gives for it to exist and function. If an organisation lacks legitimacy within society or fails to possess the requisite societal authorisation to engage in its activities, it may find itself unable to operate effectively, thereby compromising or rendering its fundamental purpose untenable. This principle is universally applicable to all organisations, whether public or private, including educational institutions such as universities, banks, insurance agencies, supermarkets, law enforcement entities, charitable organisations etc. None of these organisations are exempt from the imperatives of social legitimacy.

In the Australian Army context, social legitimacy is the extent to which Army is supported by the Australian population and enjoys positive sentiment to the level that allows it to function in society and recruit from its population. However, there are ever-changing and evolving boundaries that define the expectations of a population, such that the requirements for legitimacy can change. What might have been appropriate norms, behaviours, traditions and cultures for Army in the past may undermine its legitimacy in the future. Significantly, gaps in civil–military demographic characteristics may not be as tolerated as they once might have been, and a simple discrepancy in matters such as representation may be enough to undermine Army's legitimacy. Nonetheless, Army's legitimacy is synonymous with its public support at a given moment.

Interaction Between Social Cohesion and Legitimacy

The interaction between social cohesion and social legitimacy is shown in Figure 1.[26] In a harmonised scenario, an organisation will be able to maintain its social legitimacy within a cohesive society (represented as Area A in Figure 1). Its ability to operate, function or provide services will be supported by the population at large, and any changes in society or its expectations will be reflected in or adopted by the organisation. In essence, as long as society remains cohesive and the organisation does nothing to compromise its own legitimacy, harmony and positive sentiment will prevail.

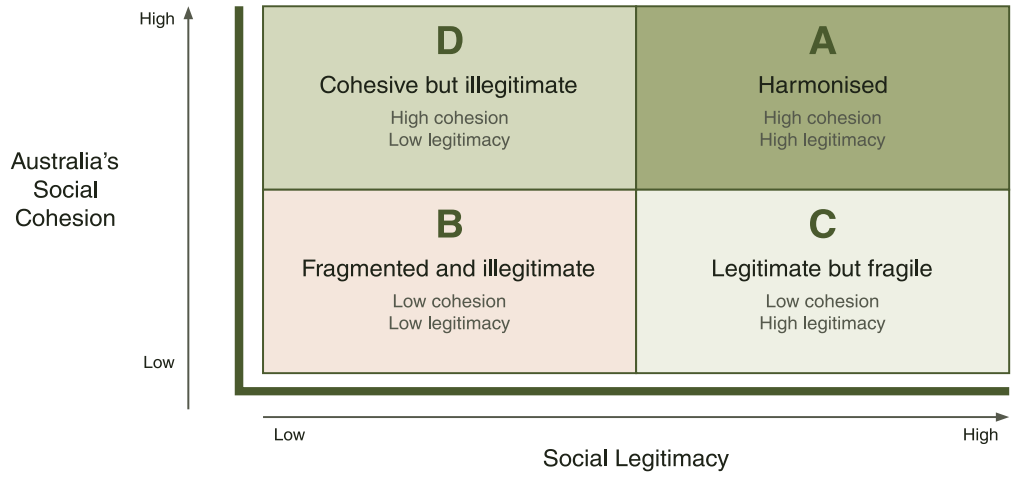


Figure 1: Interaction between social cohesion and social legitimacy

However, society and organisational cultures are not always harmonious, nor do they remain static. Both social cohesion and social legitimacy can deviate or evolve at different times, in different ways or in different directions. Occasionally, this can occur quickly, such as a decisive incident in society or within an organisation (e.g. a scandal); at other times, it can occur gradually over time, such as a deviation in demographic characteristics resulting in a misalignment in values and norms. When deviations in cohesion or legitimacy occur, risks emerge for organisations.

In the absence of societal cohesion, an organisation may find it challenging to attain widespread legitimacy, as it will inevitably be misaligned with at least one sector of society regarding norms, values or purpose (Area B). Consequently, its lack of legitimacy may be forced through society's lack of cohesion rather than anything the organisation has done itself. A pernicious cycle may result: without social cohesion, organisations may

only be able to hire from the sector of society that best reflects the norms and values of the organisation itself, rather than those of the entire population. This practice could exacerbate isolation and further erode legitimacy. Even if an organisation effectively hires from across the broad spectrum of a non-cohesive society, it may simply end up importing aspects of negative social cohesion. This will result in internal organisational conflict and dysfunction, reflecting the lack of wider social cohesion. Regardless, social legitimacy is difficult—although not impossible—to achieve in the absence of social cohesion.

Despite this, it is plausible that an organisation may find a pathway to maintain social legitimacy even when social cohesion is diminishing or has broken down (Area C). Organisational reputation and trust, built over generations, will go some way towards forging legitimacy. However, the ability to perform normal activities may be compromised. Hiring into the organisation will require drawing from a non-cohesive population and somehow reconciling the differences between individuals and groups to form cohesiveness within the organisation, despite externalities. There will be obstacles in effectively operating in a non-cohesive society, and freedom of manoeuvre may be threatened where sentiments towards an organisation differ among societies in different geographic locations. The risks of a challenge to legitimacy will be ever present, and the effort and discipline to maintain legitimacy may be insurmountable in the longer term.

Finally, an existential threat to organisations exists when they have no social legitimacy but social cohesion remains (Area D). This represents an instance where an organisation has lost the trust and confidence of society and can no longer effectively function. Support for the organisation will be diminished, its ability to hire from society will be limited, public sentiment may be hostile, support for public funding will be compromised, and reputational damage may be irreconcilable. In this instance, an organisation will face difficulties in continuing to exist in some environments.[27]

Incidents of corruption, fraud, misconduct, mistreatment and other challenges to values and norms, all of which have occurred within Army over the last decade, can reduce public sentiment and legitimacy. The fact that these types of incidents might not yet have had an enduring or easily measurable impact on Army's legitimacy is a testament to the organisation's longstanding positive public sentiment. However, this does not mean that there are no limitations. High separation rates from 2021 to 2024, coupled with reduced recruiting outcomes over the same period, may indicate wavering desires to serve—which may indicate concerns with legitimacy.[28] The resources required to arrest both separations and recruitment underperformance from 2025 onwards were expansive and costly, and may serve to obscure any underlying social legitimacy metrics.[29]

The practical implication derived from Figure 1 is that there may be a non-reciprocal relationship between social cohesion and social legitimacy. An organisation's enduring social legitimacy is likely only to be achievable when the domestic society (in which the

organisation exists and derives its legitimacy) is cohesive. However, social cohesion does not necessarily guarantee an organisation's social legitimacy. This is partially because organisations themselves influence their own legitimacy, reputation and sentiment.

Army's Contribution to Social Cohesion

While Australia's social cohesion is a likely precondition for the Army's enduring legitimacy, there are several mechanisms by which Army itself contributes to Australia's social cohesion. Underlying each of them is a sense that Army belongs to the nation or, more specifically, the citizenry, and offers the nation a unifying army of which it can be proud.[30] For Army's part, if there is social legitimacy epitomised through high public trust and confidence (including positive sentiment), perceptions of non-partisanship, custody of some of Australia's norms, complicity with domestic and international law, and adherence to professional ethics and codes of conduct,[31] then Army can be used as an embodiment of or a rallying point for social cohesion, or an exemplar of how society should behave.[32] In practice, Army contributes to cohesion through:

- Inclusivity and diversity, demonstrating that Army serves the spectrum of societal demographics equally and fairly (including among ethnic and religious groups). This helps build a multicultural national identity and bridges social divisions.
- Adherence to legal processes and transparency, which aids in public knowledge and perception that the Army is not above the normal requirements of law and can be trusted. This improves public confidence in the Army and, when coupled with visible legal and moral restraint, makes the public more supportive of any operational task.
- Self-regulation, described by the Chief of Army as the 'ability to establish and uphold professional standards'.[33] This provides a sceptical public with some reassurance that Army will address internal incidents, discipline and misbehaviour to the expectations of society, thereby providing an exemplar of regulation.
- Contributions to crisis response, which provide a non-wartime service to the population, strengthen community solidarity and provide clear visibility of professionalism and presence, binding Army to the population through shared adversity and response.
- National symbolism and ceremonies such as involvement in parades, commemorations and observance of national days. These reinforce a sense of continuity between the past and present, connecting citizens to a common narrative of service and sacrifice. This helps bridge social differences and strengthens a collective national identity grounded in shared traditions and respect for public institutions.

While Army possesses a practical ability to contribute to social cohesion, its effectiveness in this regard still requires social legitimacy—a responsibility that lies overwhelmingly with itself. While governments, media, advocacy groups, ex-services organisations and citizenry all contribute to perceptions of Army's legitimacy, Army remains the primary custodian of its own brand (reputation and legitimacy). In short, if Army is observed and perceived to be a unifying organisation within society that is trusted, representative, apolitical and serving the public good, then it will contribute to positive social cohesion. However, if Army does not maintain social legitimacy, its ability to make a valued contribution to social cohesion is compromised, and it may actually become a focal point for negative sentiment that unifies sectors of the population against it (a scenario unlikely in Australia but not unprecedented globally).

Causes of Diminishing Legitimacy and the Impact on Army

Over time, the Australian Army may have become somewhat complacent about its social legitimacy and ability to operate in society (i.e., its freedom of manoeuvre). In the decades since the end of the Vietnam War, when public sentiment towards the Army was arguably at its lowest,[34] and since the introduction of the all-volunteer force in 1973, the reputation of the Army has recovered, along with its social legitimacy.[35] Relative trust in the ADF has been ranked high in reports and surveys, frequently appearing in the top five most trusted organisations,[36] and widespread enduring criticism is relatively rare despite isolated incidents. However, there have been events that have demonstrated the vulnerability of social legitimacy and provided indicators of what can occur when legitimacy is threatened. While the conditions for some of the examples below were created by a government's use of Army, others originated from events within Army itself. In other words, social legitimacy—while largely influenced by an organisation itself—can sometimes be made vulnerable to environmental circumstances and political decision-making.

In 2007, the Howard government launched the Northern Territory National Emergency Response to address child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. This involved deploying Army personnel to provide varying community services primarily oriented towards medical, dental and logistical support. Despite it being a humanitarian supporting role with no combat elements or authorisation to carry weapons, the deployment was criticised as being disproportionate and undermining of First Nations peoples' rights and autonomy: '[b]y deploying uniformed members of the Australian Defence Forces … the Intervention was designed to send a clear message of disruption and control'.[37] Perceptions linger that the Army 'rolled into town'.[38] Despite only operating in a support role and deploying at the direction of the government of the day, Army attracted criticism, which likely reduced the localised social legitimacy of the Army in the affected communities.

By contrast, a paper examining the involvement of the Army Reserve in Operation Bushfire Assist noted that '[p]olitical and community acceptance of the use of the Reserves for this mission appears strong'.[39] The paper called for more deliberate planning and use of the reserves for disaster relief, including 'Reserve units specialising in the tasks needed for disaster relief'.[40] However, as Army's resources are limited, prolonged relief operations have seen some affected communities develop a sense of inequity, particularly if Army has not been present in their area, is slow to respond or lacks the resources to assist. For example, during support for the 2022 New South Wales Flood Recovery efforts, there were reports of Army members receiving abuse from the public reflecting 'heavy criticism over the time taken for the military to respond to the flood disaster'.[41] This can occur regardless of whether Army has been involved in support decision-making or not, awkwardly placing its legitimacy in the control of other authorities such as state governments. There is 'a risk for Defence of creating escalating dependencies and expectations in the community and government'.[42] In this example, at least in the minds of a few individuals, Army had lost its legitimacy. Fortunately, this was not a widely held view, but it does indicate how fragile legitimacy can be during times of high tension and community expectation.

Use of the Army during COVID to assist police in preventing interstate movement, and in enforcing lockdown and quarantine regulations, also opened it to criticism.[43] Legal opinion relating to the use of the military during COVID and the 2019 bushfires noted in its conclusion that 'the federal government should be cautious with its use of [the] military here, due to debate as to whether it is "necessary" in relation to executive power, as opposed to mere convenience'.[44] Fortunately for Army, the provision of support to the authorities during COVID occurred without incidents that would draw enduring criticism. However, in a different, less friendly or less compliant scenario, particularly one that might involve some civil disobedience, support for the Army's involvement might not have been assured, and there is a risk that Army's legitimacy may have been negatively affected by association if law enforcement services undertook more direct enforcement activities.

In January 2020, the Orroral Valley bushfire burned through a significant portion of the Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Subsequent investigation determined that the fire had been started by an Army helicopter spotlight.[45] Fortunately, in this case, the incident had no enduring reputational impact from the perspective of social legitimacy. However, had public sentiment been lower or social legitimacy for Army's activities been on the precipice of collapse, this accident could have been enough to result in the withdrawal of public support—especially if human life had been lost. As it was, the Australian Capital Territory Coroner's report found that '[a]ffected persons suffered emotionally and financially'.[46]

An obvious pattern in the examples above is that risks to social legitimacy emerged when the Army was tasked with domestic support roles outside its core mission 'to prepare land power to enable the integrated force in competition and conflict'.[47] Governments must recognise the ongoing risk that assigning the Army to tasks for which it is not adequately resourced, trained or experienced may undermine its legitimacy and disrupt social cohesion. Expectations for performance in non-warfighting domestic roles may be raised, and the boundaries around what Army should do, what is acceptable and how well it should perform may become blurred or ambiguous. While the longer-term effects on Army are discussed later, there is an inherent trade-off: short-term contributions to Defence Assistance to the Civil Community, Defence Force Assistance to the Civilian Authority or Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief—which should ordinarily improve social legitimacy if performed with professionalism—may increase the risk of reduced social legitimacy if done poorly or if the task itself is not viewed as a legitimate task for an army by the Australian public, potentially affecting Army's legitimacy and its credibility in future warfighting.

Nevertheless, while Army may be directed to undertake tasks that could affect social legitimacy and amplify fractures in social cohesion, there are also examples where Army's (and Defence's) behaviour has risked its own legitimacy. Notable among these over the last 15 years are the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) Skype sex scandal,[48] the findings of the Afghanistan Inquiry (Brereton Report), the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, an inquiry into contamination and a pending inquiry into military sexual violence.

The ADFA Skype sex scandal has been analysed in some depth regarding its impacts on individuals, Defence's culture, and the ADF overall. Some quarters have accused Defence of using its capital (including social, cultural and symbolic capital) to shield or defend itself from scrutiny or negative public perception. Ultimately, in this example, the scandal was not contained and attracted substantial media attention with a likely impact on the ADF's social legitimacy, and 'highlighted how a dispute can not only escalate into the public domain very quickly, but also result in ongoing and serious consequences as a result of a public trial'.[49] The historical incidences of sexual abuse and Defence's response to them became a public matter that was frequently reported in the media and subject to open reporting. In the absence of surveys on the public's perception of Army, the extent to which social legitimacy was affected will remain largely speculative. However, it is notable that the scandal and responses progressed at the same time that the ADF was attempting to increase the representation of women and other diverse groups and, at the very least, would have been unhelpful.[50]

In 2020, a report by the Inspector General of the ADF found credible information on the conduct of war crimes committed by the ADF in Afghanistan between 2005 and

2016.[51] In closing the Afghanistan Inquiry report, the defence minister reflected that the allegations would always be a 'matter for national shame', and noted that the report 'offered a defining opportunity for Defence and the nation to do right in the face of wrong'.[52] The implications for social legitimacy are self-evident in the potential for a loss of trust and confidence in the ADF. It is fortunate that a majority of the public may simply be unaware of the allegations; however, a University of New South Wales (Canberra) report argued that 'these events have had a detrimental impact on public trust in the ADF'.[53]

In 2021, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide was established, with a final report released on 9 September 2024. The commission heard extensive and frequently damning evidence about 'cultural and systemic issues that affect the mental health and wellbeing of military personnel',[54] and specifically noted that its findings may 'also help address the ADF's recruitment crisis and slow the revolving door of employee turnover'. Some evidence explicitly concerned the ADF's treatment of its people, highlighting failures in leadership, accountability and support systems, and underscoring the urgent need for enduring cultural reform to rebuild trust, improve retention and safeguard the wellbeing of those who serve.

Commencing in 2026, and in response to a recommendation from the Royal Commission, the Defence and Veterans' Service Commission will lead an inquiry into military sexual violence.[55] It is expected that some evidence presented at the inquiry will have the potential to harm the reputation of the defence forces and diminish public trust.

Even non-personnel-related inquiries have threatened the broad reputation and trust in the Army among a sceptical population. For example, Defence's response to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances contamination on and around Defence sites[56] received strong criticism from some sectors of the public.[57] Similarly, exercises at the Shoalwater Bay Training Area receive regular scrutiny from various environmental advocacy groups, including 'opposition … on environmental, social, and political grounds'.[58]

The abovementioned events, inquiries and commissions are not exhaustive, but what is observable is that the frequency of inquiries into Defence's activities has increased over the last decade. Public scrutiny and the demand for transparency have increased, for which the role of the media remains instrumental. Whether this increases or decreases trust in Army will depend on the findings of inquiries, subsequent media reporting and, of course, Army's response.

Even the sensitive matter of political impartiality and non-partisanship is occasionally threatened, despite a former Chief of Defence Force's notable effort to avoid such exposure.[59] Political candidates elected to federal parliament such as veterans Andrew Hastie,[60] Luke Gosling[61] and Mike Kelly,[62] and unsuccessful candidates including Mark Wales, Pat O'Neill and, more recently, Grange Chung, have all deliberately

used images or political marketing based around their previous military service during political campaigning. By extension, the risk is that military members are not impartial, undermining the ADF's apolitical reputation, with a potential risk to its legitimacy among sectors of the population that do not share the same political views.

When aggregated, state or federal government employment of the military that generates public discontent or places the military as the face of an unpopular government decision (including accidents and incidents that diminish public respect and trust) risks reducing the Army's reputation and legitimacy. Further, perceived or actual mistreatment of its own personnel, and perceptions of political bias or partisanship among serving or ex-serving members, can also contribute to a loss of social legitimacy. Regardless of the cause, any erosion of social legitimacy has important consequences in two key areas: domestic operations and manoeuvre, and recruiting and retention.

Operationally, compromised social legitimacy can result in a loss of freedom of manoeuvre in the domestic area of operations. Army is dependent on local infrastructure for logistics, local private landholders for training areas and training area access, local government councils for some services, small and large businesses for contracting support, and many others. Army does not have the capacity or resources to conduct these functions without compromising its own capability. In extremis, a local population could obstruct freedom of manoeuvre deliberately by restricting access to lines of communication, industrial strike action, 'go slow' approaches to support, obstructionist contracting support or any range of behaviours that can make operations more difficult than necessary. If Army had to undertake all vital functions itself to requisition services, demand access or otherwise impose itself, this would risk further alienating the populace.

Social legitimacy is also an established precondition for recruitment. Individuals will be reluctant to join a military that is not seen as legitimate, does not command positive public sentiment, is not viewed as a valued career or does not maintain a sound public reputation. Those who join and find solace in a non-legitimate army may reflect some of its less popular attributes, thereby reinforcing and perpetuating its lack of social legitimacy for another generation. This could also create an undesirable perception of exceptionalism[63] or elitism, further distancing the military from society. Recruiting sufficient numbers to provide capability against a climate of threats to its legitimacy would be challenging.

Less obvious is the impact on serving members who may have joined during a period of heightened legitimacy and now observe diminishing public support. It is difficult to speculate on the impact; however, survey data indicates that over one-quarter of serving Army members consider themselves not to have an organisational 'fit' with the Army.[64] Separately, one-quarter of Army members indicated an intention to leave, and one-quarter indicated low or neutral organisational integrity. Fortunately, these

figures have remained relatively stable since 2020.[65] Nevertheless, any fluctuations may suggest a shifting internal landscape influenced by external perceptions of the Army's social legitimacy.

Possible Gaps and Vulnerabilities in Social Legitimacy (Risk Factors)

While the ADF (of which Army is the largest constituent part) currently enjoys relatively high levels of public support,[66] it may be more disconnected from society than perceived, and its social legitimacy may not be as assured as both it and the government would like.[67] There are several existing and emerging data points that may indicate or precipitate an evolutionary decline in Army's social legitimacy, many of which are characteristic of a gradual distancing of Army from society. Other factors are indicative of a society that is less tolerant of institutions that do not (or no longer) reflect the values and norms of the society in which they exist. For Army, these can be broadly grouped into two interrelated concerns: the extent to which it is familiar and relatable to the population (familiarity), and its physical visibility and proximity (presence) within society.

At the time of the 2021 national census, only one in 20 Australian households had at least one person who had served in the ADF (i.e., at least one person who was either currently serving or had previously served in the ADF).[68] Geographically, this potential source of distance and disconnection—which can result in unfamiliarity with Army—is even more pronounced in specific and important areas of Australia. For example, while there are large Army veteran populations centred around Townsville, Toowoomba and Ipswich,[69] some of Australia's largest population centres that are likely to have the greatest influence on Army's national social legitimacy, such as Melbourne and Sydney, have proportionately few.[70] This places an inconsistent weight on military knowledge across the nation, leading to uneven levels of understanding, engagement and trust, and increasing the risk that perceptions of Army are shaped more by distance, misconception or limited exposure than by informed experience.

The location of military bases and units (permanent or reserves) also contributes to this observation of inconsistent military knowledge. For example, Victoria is Australia's second most populous state with one-quarter of the national population,[71] yet has a presence of less than 11 per cent of Army.[72] There is limited permanent presence in Australia's largest city, Melbourne. This lack of presence in major urban population centres, while not directly threatening social legitimacy, has the potential to reduce the extent to which Australians are familiar with the Australian Army. While this article does not argue that force disposition should be based on population, it does suggest that it could be a pragmatic consideration in basing arrangements to help avoid a degradation in society's military knowledge and familiarity.

A lack of familiarity with Army becomes more acute given the recently announced plans to divest real estate, which will further reduce physical presence.[73] Army and the ADF awkwardly flirt with the tensions between the resources necessary to maintain physical heritage (tradition) and the resources required for other purposes. The optimum balance is unclear.[74] Regardless, the need for physical presence and visibility among communities is rarely considered and probably underestimated in the context of maintaining social legitimacy. At least one commentator has lamented that the divestment 'represents the culmination of decades of quiet dislocation that have slowly pushed the Australian Army from the civic and cultural heart' of communities.[75]

Fortunately, a recent report on public attitudes towards the ADF found that public sentiment remains good, with 68 per cent of survey respondents reporting a positive attitude.[76] However, the report acknowledged that 'only 46% of respondents would recommend service in the ADF to a family member', explaining that 'public knowledge of the ADF as an institution, and of the activities it conducts, was very limited'. Significantly, the report found 'clear signs of a positive correlation between knowledge of the ADF and trust in it', indicating constraints on social legitimacy simply through a lack of familiarity—that is, if knowledge of the ADF is compromised or reduced, trust may decline, leading to an otherwise avoidable reduction in legitimacy.

In an illustration of the dynamic nature of legitimacy, public sentiment towards the military and political views are closely linked. When political affiliations change, it can be expected that sentiment would change with them. While centrist political views associated with Australia's dominant Labor and Liberal parties are supportive of the military, people with political leanings towards the Greens, Nationals and minor parties were the 'least positive toward Defence'.[77] This is significant because if social cohesion diminishes in line with partisan political views, the social legitimacy of Army may be collateral. Currently, just over 50 per cent of Greens and Nationals voters are reported to have a positive view of the ADF. Should the representation of Green and Nationals voters increase and support for the ADF does not increase among this group, legitimacy may be reduced.

Finally, Army is demographically dissimilar to the general population, which creates the potential for an expanding social distance that could compromise social legitimacy. Australians under 45 years of age are less willing to defend Australia,[78] and while this reflects a range of generational characteristics including voting intention, it is of concern given that this is also the recruiting demographic. Differences in characteristics such as gender diversity and ethnicity can also contribute to social isolation. Currently, Army does not adequately represent Australia's demographic composition on a range of metrics.[79] To ensure its future legitimacy, it must actively endeavour to enhance its representation in those areas where it may be expected to reflect the expectations of society, fortify its connections with diverse communities and demonstrate alignment with the values of the society from which it originated.

Overall, there is clear potential for gaps in Army's legitimacy to emerge due to reduced familiarity, relatability, visibility and proximity to the (statistically) average Australian. The demographic and physical gap between Army and society seems destined to increase, or not to close enough to prevent it from becoming a legitimacy concern. Differences in norms, behaviour and expectations may also emerge. While the risks have not yet been realised (or tested), there remains time and opportunity to correct any decline, or even to increase legitimacy through deliberate consideration of Army's social legitimacy during strategic planning. With its unique position at the junction of Army and society, the Australian Army Reserve may provide an invaluable mechanism to contribute to Army's social legitimacy, while also being acutely affected by its decline.

Social Legitimacy and the 2nd (Australian) Division

National defence is not yet well understood in the ADF. However, by leveraging the US definition of 'actions taken by the military to safeguard the nation against external threats',[80] the term can be interpreted to refer to sovereign territorial operations in the defence of Australia.[81] For Army, this role has been assigned to the 2nd (Australian) Division (2 (AS) Div),[82] a reserve formation with units located throughout Australia, including in areas not populated by permanent force elements.[83] This distribution of the Division's units and sub-units enhances its familiarity, visibility and proximity to the general public and, with part-time officers and soldiers residing and working within the community, it potentially becomes more relatable to the community.[84] Nonetheless, it is also more susceptible to a decrease in social cohesion or legitimacy at both national and local levels compared to the permanent force.

The extant Army strategy does not delve into detail regarding territorial defence. However, it does apply a broad regional meaning to 'presence', explaining that the 'Australian Army provides a human presence among populations, building trust and protecting and projecting Australia's influence. Our positive networks reassure communities, enhancing security and reducing instability'. Clearly, the 2 (AS) Div operates in this space and context such that territorial defence and Army's community presence are closely interwoven.

Reserve members who are part of a community will feel the loss of legitimacy intimately. Their integration into routine non-Army activities—such as regular employment, education and social networks—will be torn by conflicting allegiances and self-rationalisation of their belonging to an organisation that does not hold social legitimacy. Ultimately, this incongruence could result in the resignation of members, resistance to call-out legislation among those who remain, or their complicity in the reduction of legitimacy.

Significantly, the numerous 2 (AS) Div barracks and facilities are integrated more closely into the infrastructure of towns and cities than those of the permanent forces, which tend to be on larger and more secure bases that are serviced by national contracts. Support for such reserve facilities is often bespoke and relies on relationships with small businesses, sub-contractors and the goodwill of the local community. A breakdown in social cohesion or Army's legitimacy at the national or local level will compromise local logistics support, regional public sentiment and overall freedom of manoeuvre in a nuanced and detrimental way that would be difficult to overcome at a strategic level. In a worst-case scenario, this could constrain the 2 (AS) Div's ability to deploy and conduct operations in areas of the Australian mainland, especially where it requires the material support of the local population.

The extent to which the 2 (AS) Div can influence its own legitimacy is limited, as its association with the broader Army and ADF cannot be easily distinguished by the public. However, the Division can be a crucial asset in Army's overall ability to shape its social legitimacy because of its geographic spread and involvement at the local community level. Accordingly, the effectiveness of sovereign territorial defence will depend not only on capability and readiness but on the Division's ability to sustain trust, credibility and acceptance within the communities from which it is drawn and in which it operates.

Maintaining and Improving Army's Legitimacy

In 2024, the Chief of Army pondered whether Army had 'collectively lost the art of building social license'.[85] His context was oriented towards Army's jurisdiction and the citizenry's willingness to enlist, but it also acknowledged the difficulties of recruiting and community engagement when social legitimacy is reduced. The avenues through which legitimacy can be increased are limited only by creativity but must have, at their core, the purpose of increasing the extent to which Army is familiar, relatable, visible and proximate within society.

In the first instance, recruiting informs the demographic areas in which Army will differ from the rest of society. Where Army can recruit from a cohesive society across the spectrum of talent (i.e. diversity), its prima facie opportunity to reflect the norms and values is enhanced, and the likelihood of social legitimacy increases.[86] In contrast, as I observed in another publication:

If the military does not draw its members in a representative manner, then the norms, behaviours and demographics will not be congruent with those of society and the ADF will jeopardise its legitimacy as one of the nation's institutions.[87]

Beyond recruiting and its own internal mechanisms to maintain legitimacy, such as self-regulation and political impartiality, the Army can turn to external engagement to increase legitimacy in more tangible ways. The comparatively simple suggestions below provide the potential for a positive impact on society by employing influencers, media, politicians and community authorities as catalysts for greater legitimacy. Modest investments in social legitimacy will yield returns when there are future threats to legitimacy.

One recommendation is for a mobile demonstration squadron/company to travel widely and expose the wider community to Army's capabilities. While Army does not have the luxury of an Air Force fly-by or a Navy port visit to inspire and inform the local populace and facilitate visibility and familiarity, it does have vehicles, artillery, helicopters and other hardware. At present, these are confined to a few locations and for the most part, the 'sexy stuff' is rarely seen outside Queensland. There is no tradition of routine public display beyond the capacity of reserve units and occasional agricultural shows, career expos and rare barracks open days. Consideration might therefore be given to a mobile standing demonstration squadron comprising equipment intended to be modified for display and interaction.

The Army has one of the smallest band corps among Western militaries relative to its size or population.[88] The preference for warfighting capability has progressively undermined the value of military bands for community engagement and visibility, reducing their capacity to contribute to the promotion of Army's public image.[89] A local performance from an Army band is not just a display of military musicianship, tradition, uniform and discipline but an opportunity to engage the public in the familiar forum of music, whether the performance is military focused or not. The popularity of the Brisbane Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo[90] demonstrates the potential, but equally, performances can be localised and opportunistic. The permanent force components of the Australian Army Band Corps could be increased to provide this enhanced function.

Community sporting events, such as Run Army, provide an opportunity to ensure Army is familiar, relatable, visible and proximate. These events provide opportunities for engagement, public participation, brand (Army) awareness, charity support and positive media coverage. Where appropriate, they can also be used for commemoration and remembrance purposes.[91] In 2026, Run Army attracted 10,000 entrants across four run distances (2.4 kilometres, 5 kilometres, 10 kilometres and a challenge event) in Brisbane, and a further 3,700 entrants in Townsville.[92] However, such numbers are far below the event's potential and indicate that it is not fully capitalising on the nation's larger population centres.[93] Army might consider a dramatic expansion of Run Army beyond Brisbane and Townsville to other cities and plan longer events to take advantage of a growth in participation by Australians in social and competitive running events like Run Army.[94]

Art, theatre and popular culture are means to engage the public, establish the public's familiarity with Army, humanise its members and offer creative and intellectual outlets for Army personnel. Instead of operating on the organisational fringe of Army,[95] displays, exhibitions, tours and performances could be integrated into routine public relations activities and events.[96] The military arts should be normalised as part of the fabric of community engagement and potentially emerge as a subset of the national arts scene.

Political impartiality must be maintained as the cornerstone of social legitimacy strategies. Army must continue to avoid actions that may create perceptions of partisanship or involvement in political decision-making. While it would be a challenge for the service to enforce, the use of Army barracks and equipment for political announcements should be avoided where possible, and efforts should be made to avoid partisan exposure. Association with the Army may aid a politician's messaging or personal political prospects. There is no reciprocal benefit except a risk that Army may be perceived as a politicised force with preferences in favour of one side of the political spectrum, which would isolate those with differing political views.[97]

Opportunities to enhance the visibility of Army personnel in and through public exhibitions and via Army installations should be encouraged. The longstanding restriction on wearing uniforms in public merits reconsideration, along with careful consideration of any divestment in public-facing facilities and barracks. Wearing uniforms, when appropriate, allows for the immediate public recognition of Army personnel as integral members of society and should be normalised. Similarly, public access to bases through events like open days, parades and exhibitions offers the community opportunities to engage with the Army in their local area, allowing these bases to maintain regional significance and an important place in local communities. From a social legitimacy perspective, the planned divestment of facilities may require particularly careful deliberation and include mechanisms to ensure that public-facing facilities are still available to support social legitimacy initiatives.

Finally, the size of the Australian Army Public Relations Service (AAPRS) should be increased, with a greater mandate to influence social legitimacy. Because of its size, the capacity of Army's public relations is limited and mostly reactive. Its role to 'provide public affairs support for regional community relations activities'[98] is currently constrained and could be expanded to achieve a national outcome with a broader influence. The ADF recruiting website describes the AAPRS's responsibility to 'implement and monitor communication strategies that affect how the Army is perceived in the broader community'[99], and its role is intimately relevant to the maintenance of social legitimacy. The corps could be profitably invigorated to achieve this.

In 2024 the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, established a strategic priority of 'telling our story', which was a tenet he reaffirmed in 2026. This priority aims to connect members with Army's past, give meaning to current service and inspire the next generation of soldiers.[100] This is a useful first step towards Army establishing a narrative to help maintain legitimacy. However, as with all priorities, it requires resources to implement. Without wide-reaching communication mediums, an audience to hear and listen to the 'stories', and positive responses from among the citizenry, the Chief's strategic priority will become analogous to voices in a vacuum. While the 'telling our story' priority could improve the familiarity and relatability of the Army, it requires active effort and planning to maintain, particularly if implementing some of the suggestions provided above.

Conclusion

There is a significant possibility that the Australian Army is complacent about its social legitimacy and takes its position in society for granted. The reality is that Army is vulnerable to the impact of external and internal events and incidents, including decisions made by governments, which can affect its public reputation and standing. There also appears to be an implicit assumption that social cohesion in Australia will remain stable or, if it becomes unstable, that Army will somehow be immune to the negative effects of its disintegration. However, a presumption of sustained legitimacy and stable cohesion cannot be indefinitely relied on. A decline in Army's social legitimacy, whether accompanied by a collapse in social cohesion or not, is entirely plausible.

The implications of reduced legitimacy for Army are significant. In the first instance, the loss of material support from the population would manifest in constraints on Army's freedom of manoeuvre domestically within Australia and on support for overseas deployments. Second, negative public sentiment directly affects recruitment and retention, posing an existential risk to personnel capability. While the Australian Army currently enjoys broad public support, maintaining its legitimacy should not be ignored, and deliberate approaches to improve and sustain positive sentiment are necessary. Given their integration among communities, the members of 2 (AS) Div experience even more acute effects of reduced social legitimacy and social cohesion. Fortunately, there are numerous mechanisms through which Army can enhance its familiarity, relatability, visibility and proximity to the public. The primary challenge lies in recognising that an investment in legitimacy is crucial for Army's enduring capability, as it will be too late to solicit the support of the general public when the nation faces an existential and territorial threat.

About the Author

Colonel Phillip Hoglin graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1994, having completed a Bachelor of Science (Honours) majoring in statistics. He completed a Master of Science in Management through the United States Naval Postgraduate School in 2004, graduated from the Command and General Staff College of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 2006, and was awarded a Master of Philosophy (Statistics) through the University of New South Wales in 2012. He has been involved in workforce analysis since 2004, was the Director of Military People Policy from 2014 to 2017 and the Director of Military Recruiting from 2018 to mid-2020, and is currently a researcher in Workforce Strategy Branch, Defence People Group.

ENDNOTES

1 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026* (Australian Army, 2026), p. 20, at: www.army.gov.au/our-work/strategy/australian-army-contribution-national-defence-strategy-2026.

2 Brendan Nelson, *The Role of Government and Parliament in the Decision to Go to War*, Papers on Parliament no. 63 (Parliament of Australia, 2015), at: www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Publications_and_resources/Papers_and_research/Papers_on_Parliament_and_other_resources/Papers_on_Parliament/63.

3 Phillip Hoglin, 'Who Do We Think We Are? Demographic Changes in the Australian Defence Force and Implications for Social Legitimacy', in Brad West and Cate Carter (eds), *The New Australian Military Sociology: Antipodean Perspectives*, vol. 2 (Berghahn Books, 2024).

4 Examples include Dermot Nolan, 'Social Cohesion, Collective Defence, and the Latent Power of Democracy', *The Defence Horizon Journal* (website), at: https://tdhj.org/blog/post/social-cohesion-collective-defence; and Stefan Meister and Rostoks Toms, *National Cohesion*, DGAP Policy Brief no. 23 (German Council on Foreign Relations, 2025), at: https://doi.org/10.60823/DGAP-25-42996-en.

5 Literature is largely focused on legitimacy in the overseas area of operations or on legitimacy of the mission and objectives. Examples include Yagil Levy, 'Theorizing the Domestic Legitimacy of Using Force', *Journal of International Politics* 58 (2021): 1–17 (2021) at: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00210-2; and Benjamin Krick, Jonathan Petkun and Mara Revkin, 'Civilian Harm and Military Legitimacy: Evidence from the Battle of Mosul', *International Organization* 79, no. 2 (2025): 332–357, at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818325000098.

6 Department of Defence, *The One Defence Capability System (ODCS) Manual* (Department of Defence, 2025). Chapter 6 of this publication lists 10 fundamental inputs to capability, and while it lists the external input of 'industry' as one of those, it includes no other external inputs.

7 Simon Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession', speech, Australian National University National Security College, 25 November 2024, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2024-11-25/challenges-australian-army-profession.

8 The Cove—Australian Army, 'Chief of Army Symposium 2025: Army in Society, Panel Session: The Future of Societal-Military Relations' (video), *YouTube*, 6 October 2025, at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQIE-NKxEDg. Lieutenant General Simon Stuart makes comments at 31:24 and 33:50 regarding the need for Army to 'explain itself'.

9 David Hood similarly argues that society should be recognised as a fundamental input to capability. David Hood, 'Society as a Fundamental Input to Defence Capability', *Contemporary Issues in Air and Space Power* 2, no. 1 (2024).

10 The NDS describes one of the ADF's five tasks as 'defence of our nation and its interests against military attack. This includes defending Australia's sovereign territory'. Australian Government, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra, 2026), p. 31, para. 3.21, at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

11 Prime Minister of Australia, 'Press Conference—Canberra', media release, 29 July 2024, at: www.pm.gov.au/media/press-conference-canberra-13.

12 *Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism* (Canberra: Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, 2025), at: https://www.aseca.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025-aseca-plan.pdf.

13 'About the Special Envoy', *Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia* (website), at: https://www.oseci.gov.au/about.

14 Such as the Bondi terrorist attack for which a Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion was established on 9 January 2026: *Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion* (website), at: https://asc.royalcommission.gov.au.

15 For example, see Government of Australia, *Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion Interim Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), at: https://asc.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/royal-commission-antisemitism-and-social-cohesion-interim-report. This interim report makes a recommendation addressing protection of Jewish holy days and events but no other recommendation concerning social cohesion. Media reporting of the Royal Commission reflects this narrow lens of social cohesion.

16 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World* (OECD, 2011), p. 19, at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/perspectives-on-global-development-2012_persp_glob_dev-2012-en.html.

17 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Building Social Cohesion in Our Communities* (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015), at: https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/WEB_Building_social_cohesion_A4_brochure.pdf.

18 Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 'Social Cohesion and Social Connection', *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* (website), at: www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-cohesion-and-social-connection.

19 James O'Donnell, Alice Falkiner and Katarzyna Szachna, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2025: Social Cohesion Through Troubled Times* (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2025), p. 4, at: https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SI0001_MappingSocialCohesion_2025_v5.pdf.

20 In this context, 'manoeuvre' has the meaning described in Australian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine 1: The Fundamentals of Land Power* (Department of Defence, 2014), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/lwd-1_b5_190914.pdf.

21 O'Donnell et al., *Mapping Social Cohesion 2025*, p. 3.

22 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Social Cohesion and Social Connection'.

23 John Dowling and Jeffrey Pfeffer, 'Organizational Legitimacy: Social Values and Organizational Behavior', *The Pacific Sociological Review* 18, no. 1 (1975): 122.

24 Ibid., p. 122.

25 Lisa M. Dellmuth and Jonas Tallberg, 'The Social Legitimacy of International Organisations: Interest Representation, Institutional Performance, and Confidence Extrapolation in the United Nations', *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 3 (2014): 451–-475 (2014): 454.

26 Markus Loewe et al., *Social Contract and Social Cohesion: Synergies and Tensions between Two Related Concepts*, Policy Brief 2/2024 (Bonn: German Institute of Development and Sustainability, 2024), at: www.idos-research.de/en/policy-brief/article/social-contract-and-social-cohesion-synergies-and-tensions-between-two-related-concepts.

27 The most prominent contemporary example of this is the function of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the United States. For example, see Brandon del Pozo and Barry Friedman, 'ICE Is Failing the Legitimacy Test', *The Atlantic*, 26 January 2026, at: www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/01/policing-open-carry-minnesota-pretti/685767; Matt Loffman, 'Poll: Nearly Two-Thirds of Americans Say ICE Has Gone Too Far in Immigration Crackdown', *PBS News*, 5 February 2026, at: www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/poll-nearly-two-thirds-of-americans-say-ice-has-gone-too-far-in-immigration-crackdown.

28 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence Annual Report 2024–25* (Department of Defence, 2025), at: www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-10/Defence-Annual-Report-2024-25.pdf.

29 Commonwealth of Australia, 'Chapter 4: Resourcing', *Defence Workforce Plan* (Department of Defence, 2024), at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/defence-workforce-plan.

30 For example, Department of Veterans' Affairs, 'The Australian Defence Veterans' Covenant Oath', *Department of Veterans' Affairs* (website), at: www.dva.gov.au/recognition-and-commemoration/australian-defence-veterans-covenant.

31 Australian Army, 'Contract', *Australian Army* (website), at: www.army.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/our-values (accessed 22 March 2026).

32 The opposite can also be true. If the Army did not maintain legitimacy, it might become a source of disruption for social cohesion.

33 Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession'.

34 Alan Ryan, 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War in Retrospect', in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1962–1972* (Army History Unit Department of Defence, 2002), pp. 279–301.

35 Danielle Chubb and Ian McAllister, *Australian Public Opinion, Defence and Foreign Policy: Attitudes and Trends Since 1945* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

36 For example: IPSOS, *IPSOS Global Trustworthiness Index 2024* (IPSOS, 2024), at: www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-11/Ipsos-Trust in Professions.pdf.

37 Diana Perche, 'Ten Years On, It's Time We Learned the Lessons from the Failed Northern Territory Intervention', *The Conversation*, 26 June 2017, at: https://theconversation.com/ten-years-on-its-time-we-learned-the-lessons-from-the-failed-northern-territory-intervention-79198.

38 Stan Grant, 'A Decade on from the NT Intervention, the "Torment of Powerlessness" Lives On', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 21 June 2017, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-21/stan-grant-a-decade-on-from-the-nt-intervention/8638628.

39 Mark Armstrong, *Every Possible Capability: Some Implications of the Army Reserve Call Out for Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020* (Australian Army Research Centre, 2020), p. 25, at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/every-possible-capability-some-implications-army-reserve-call-out-operation-bushfire-assist-2019-2020.

40 Ibid., p. 30.

41 Andrew Greene and Siobhan Heanue, 'ADF Members Subjected to Verbal Abuse from Residents During NSW Flood Recovery Efforts', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 18 March 2022; Warren Barnsley, 'Northern NSW Local Heckles ADF Troops as Anger, Exhaustion Intensifies over Flood Response', *7News*, 8 March 2022, at: https://7news.com.au/news/nsw/northern-nsw-local-heckles-adf-troops-as-anger-exhaustion-intensifies-over-flood-response-c-5974271; Ursula Malone, 'Defence Force Defends Response to Communities in NSW Devastated by Floods', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation,* 7 March 2022, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-08/defence-forces-defend-response-to-flood-affected-nsw-towns/100890002.

42 Armstrong, *Every Possible Capability*, p. 30.

43 Binoy Kampmark, 'The ADF and the Militarised Response to COVID-19', *The Mandarin*, 23 August 2021, at: www.themandarin.com.au/166626-the-adf-and-the-militarised-response-to-covid-19.

44 Anthony Gray, 'The Australian Government's Use of the Military in an Emergency and the Constitution', *UNSW Law Journal* 44, no. 1 (2021): 357–393, at: www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/law/unsw-law-journal/2020-2029/2021/Issue-44-1-11-Gray.pdf.

45 Coroner's Court of the Australian Capital Territory, *Inquiry into the Orroral Valley Fire*, [2025] ACTCD 4 (Canberra: Coroner's Court of the Australian Capital Territory, 2005), at: https://www.courts.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2864921/Inquiry-into-the-Orroral-Valley-Fire.pdf.

46 Ibid., p. 2.

47 Australian Army, 'Our Mission', *Australian Army* (website), at: www.army.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/our-mission (accessed 10 April 2026).

48 Princess Habiba, 'The Australian Defence Force Academy Skype Sex Scandal: Understanding the Implications of Containment', *Armed Forces & Society* 43, no. 2 (2017): 300–321, at: www.jstor.org/stable/48609170.

49 Ibid., pp. 316–317.

50 For example: Andrew Greene, 'More than a Third of Female Australian Defence Force Academy Recruits Report Sexual Misconduct', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 6 June 2024, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-06/third-of-army-recruits-report-sexual-misconduct/103947704; Ellen Ransley, 'Shocking Figures Reveal Grim Reality for Defence Force Recruits, and Raise Questions of Transparency', *The Nightly*, 22 August 2004, at: https://thenightly.com.au/politics/shocking-figures-reveal-grim-reality-for-defence-force-recruits-and-raise-questions-of-transparency-c-15779610.

51 Department of Defence, *Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry Report* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2020), at: www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/afghanistan-inquiry.

52 Richard Marles, 'Statement on the Closure of the Afghanistan Inquiry Report', media release, 12 September 2024, at: www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-09-12/statement-closure-afghanistan-inquiry-report.

53 Richard Dunley et al., *Public Attitudes Towards the Australian Defence Force* (University of New South Wales, 2025), at: www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-canberra/hass/Public Attitudes Towards the ADF Report -V3.pdf.

54 Australian Government, *Final Report*, Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), at: https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-all-volumes.

55 'DVSC to Lead Inquiry into Military Sexual Violence', *Defence and Veterans' Service Commission* (website), at: www.dvsc.gov.au/news/dvsc-lead-inquiry-military-sexual-violence.

56 'Defence Approach', *Department of Defence* (website), at: www.defence.gov.au/about/locations-property/pfas/defence-approach.

57 Joshua Aylward, 'Defence's Toxic Legacy', *Precedent (Australian Lawyers Alliance)* (website), at: www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/journals/PrecedentAULA/2018/30.html.

58 For example, 'Talisman Saber 2019: Defend the Environment from Defence', *Friends of the Earth Australia* (website), at: www.foe.org.au/talisman_saber_2019.

59 Andrew Greene, 'Defence Chiefs Desert Christopher Pyne in Awkward Press Conference', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 28 March 2019, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-28/defence-chiefs-desert-christopher-pyne-in-press-conference/10949250.

60 David Weber, 'Election 2016: Canning MP Andrew Hastie Rebuffs Defence Calls over SAS Uniform Photos', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 26 May 2016, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-26/canning-mp-andrew-hastie-rejects-adf-calls-over-defence-uniform/7448530.

61 'NT MP Using Picture of Himself in Uniform', *SBS News*, 7 May 2019, at: www.sbs.com.au/news/article/nt-mp-using-picture-of-himself-in-uniform/3ucir5e3q.

62 'Labor Candidate Mike Kelly Quits Army After Request Not to Use Uniform in Election Advertising', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 10 June 2016, at: www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-11/mike-kelly-resigns-from-army-after-uniform-election-request/7501370.

63 Such as that noted in Department of Defence, *Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry Report*, p. 329, and identified by Cate Carter and Brad West, 'Introduction: Antipodean Insights into Civil–Military Relations', in Brad West and Cate Carter (eds), *The New Australian Military Sociology: Antipodean Perspectives*, 1st edition, vol. 2 (Berghahn Books, 2024), p. 11.

64 Department of Defence, *April 2024 Workplace Experience – Whole of Defence* (Department of Defence, 2024), at: www.aph.gov.au/-/media/Estimates/fadt/supp2425/Defence/7_Department_of_Defence__Workforce_Behaviours_Survey_2024.pdf.

65 Ibid., p. 2.

66 Richard Dunley, Nicole Townsend, Margaret Hutchison, Tristan Moss, Ashleigh Brown and Rhys Crawley, *Public* Attitudes Towards the Australian Defence Force: 2026 (War Studies Research Group, UNSW Canberra, 2026), p. 3, at: www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/unsw-canberra/hass/2026-07-5253529-PublicAttitudeTowardsTheADFSurveyReport-Final.pdf.

67 For example, in examining the health of Australian civil–military relations at the time, Chalmers argued that the military had become politicised and that there are circumstances where the military can 'fail to realize ideal civil-military relationship standards'. David Chalmers, *Heroes and Fools: Improving Australian Civil–Military Relations* (Defense Technical Information Center, 2003), at: https://doi.org/10.21236/ada415396. Since then, there have been examples additional to that of the main subject of the paper (Children Overboard), such as the Skype scandal.

68 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Australian Defence Force Service', *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (website), at: www.abs.gov.au/articles/australian-defence-force-service#population.

69 Ibid.

70 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Service with the Australian Defence Force: Census', *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (website), at: www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/service-australian-defence-force-census/latest-release.

71 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'National, State and Territory Population', *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (website), at: www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release.

72 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2024–25,* Table 5.3, p. 188. Reported for the permanent force.

73 Department of Defence, *Delivering the Future Estate: Defence Estate Audit Report* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2025), at: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-estate-audit.

74 Ibid., p. 2. The executive summary states that the estate divestment will enable Defence to 'reinvest in the people and capability that Defence needs in line with the strategic priorities of the National Defence Strategy and Integrated Investment Program'.

75 Ian Langford, 'Army "Reform" is a Shameful Retreat, a Moral Failure', *The Australian*, 5 February 2026, at: www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/army-reform-is-ashameful-retreat-a-moral-failure/news-story/37cb11e2ac5ccc720679bf7324e546ca. The article refers specifically to Sydney's Victoria Barracks; however, the comment is equally applicable elsewhere.

76 Dunley et al., *Public Attitudes Towards the Australian Defence Force: 2026*, p. 3.

77 Ibid., p. 8.

78 Ryan Neelam, 'Lowy Institute Poll 2025', *Lowy Institute* (website), at: https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/report/2025/defence-and-security/#willingness-to-defend-australia.

79 Such as gender representation, ethnicity, birth country, religion, marital status and others. See Hoglin, 'Who Do We Think We Are?', pp. 47–61.

80 'Exploring the Legal Definition of Homeland Defense and Its Importance', *US Legal* (website), at: https://legal-resources.uslegalforms.com/h/homeland-defense (accessed 15 April 2026).

81 In his thesis, Mark Armstrong mentions the role of homeland defence for the Army Reserve several times; however, the term is generally still undefined in Australia. Mark Armstrong, *Historical Legacy to National Asset: The Australian Army Reserve in the 21st Century* (Deakin University, 2024).

82 Formal tasking of 2 (AS) Div to undertake homeland security is not clearly evident in most ADF-level strategic documents; however, it is specified in Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026,* p. 17.

83 Department of Defence, *Strategic Review of the Australian Defence Force Reserves* (Canberra, 2024), p. 21, states that 'The 2nd (Australian) Division also acts as the lead agent for generating security and response options in support of long-term homeland defence'. While the term 'homeland' or 'homeland defence' is not specified in the *2026 National Defence Strategy*, it is mentioned five times in the *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026,* albeit without definition.

84 Although the Army Reserve diverges from society in many key demographic characteristics.

85 Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession'.

86 However, in seeking legitimacy a distinction needs to be made between recruiting initiatives, which are activities deliberately intended to increase enlistment, and branding/engagement, which are activities intended to maintain public familiarity and maintain the visibility of Army. In the latter, there is no imperative for a recruiting outcome, although it may be a useful by-product in some circumstances.

87 Hoglin, 'Who Do We Think We Are?', p. 43.

88 For example, the Canadian Armed Forces has six full-time (and 53 part-time) bands and specifically includes civilian engagements in its activities: 'Canadian Forces Music Branch', *Government of Canada* (website), at: www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/showcasing/music/music-branch.html. The UK's Royal Corps of Army Music comprises over 750 members across 12 regular army bands and is the 'public face of the British Army': 'The Royal Corps of Army Music', *UK Army* (website), at: www.army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/about-the-army/corps-regiments-and-units/the-royal-corps-of-army-music. Even the New Zealand Army has over 30 full-time musicians, a higher ratio-to-strength than the Australian Army's 160 full-time musicians.

89 Parliament of Australia, 'Private Members' Business – Army Reserve Bands', House of Representatives, 18 June 2021 (Gai Brodtmann), at: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/8f9c3c2a-1ee7-4657-a602-aef97dd32610/&sid=0218.

90 'Crowds of More Than 110,000 Attend Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo at Suncorp Stadium', *Australian Leisure Management Magazine*, 20 February 2026, at: www.ausleisure.com.au/news/crowds-of-more-than-110000-attend-royal-edinburgh-military-tattoo-at-suncorp-stadium.

91 For example, Army Run Canada Remembrance Row displays images of veterans during the final kilometres of the run. The Brisbane 2026 Run Army incorporated 'Legacy Hill', which included interactive displays from emergency services and community partners.

92 Results available via Run Army website, 'Run Army', *Run Army* (website), at: https://runarmy.org.au/ or 'Run Army', *Sports Event Services* (website), at: https://results.sportseventservices.com.au/series.aspx?CId=16287&RId=6524.

93 By comparison, Canada's Army Run, held in a city (Ottawa) barely a third the size of the Brisbane area, attracts 15,000 participants to Ottawa. The USMC Marathon typically sells out at 40,000 entrants for the full event, and a half marathon held earlier each year attracts 7,500 alone.

94 See, for example, Zachary Gates, 'Once Seen as "Daggy", Running is Now Exploding in Popularity. Why?', *Nine News*, 3 June 2026, at: www.nine.com.au/sport/athletics/australian-social-run-clubs-events-sydney-gold-coast-marathon-city-to-surf-20260527-p601c9.html.

95 Cate Carter and Richard Barrett, 'Culture, Creativity and the Australian Military Identity', unpublished submission (2026).

96 Significantly, this should be distinct and separate from the use of the arts for veteran therapy and wellbeing, and while there may be an overlap, the intent should be for the arts to foster community engagement.

97 Although, as suggested by Dana Pham, there should remain scope for non-candidate political activities. Dana Pham, 'Examining the Importance of Political Activities of Defence Members to Civil–Military Relations', *Australian Army Journal* 22, no. 1 (2026), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/early-access-articles/examining-importance-political-activities-defence-members-civil-military-relations.

98 'Australian Army Public Relations Service', *Australian Army* (website), at: www.army.gov.au/about-us/army-corps/australian-army-public-relations-service.

99 'Public Relations Officer', *ADF Careers* (website), at: www.adfcareers.gov.au/jobs/army/public-relations-officer.

100 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2026*, p. 3.

TWICE THE PROFESSIONAL: THE ARMY RESERVE AND THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF POLYMATHY FOR NATIONAL DEFENCE

Matthew LM Jones and Samuel P Miller

Introduction

Australia's defence problem can no longer be solved by the force-in-being alone.[1] The 2024 and 2026 National Defence Strategies extend this logic, directing the ADF towards an integrated, focused force built on self-reliance, sovereign industrial resilience and civil preparedness.[2] Concept Apex gives this sharper military expression: it describes integrated campaigning as the mechanism by which the ADF contributes to a united whole-of-government effort, and is explicit that military power must be integrated with the other tools of national power, including industry and academia.[3] Read together, these point to the same conclusion: national defence increasingly depends on people who can move between military and civilian systems, not only on capability that sits inside Army alone.

The Reserve has often been discussed in the language of force generation: force allocation, reinforcement, round-out, rotation, mobilisation and surge.[4] While these functions remain necessary, they treat the reservist as a less available version of the full-time soldier rather than as a distinct form of military human capital: someone who brings professional networks, civilian technical expertise and community legitimacy that the permanent force cannot readily reproduce from within itself.[5] In this context, the Australian Army Reserve should not be understood only as a part-time supplement to the permanent force; it is also one of Army's most important institutional interfaces with Australian society.[6] This is already visible in Army's direction for 2nd (Australian) Division, whose largely part-time brigades are now focused on security response, domestic

support operations with partner agencies and Theatre Mission One: Defend Australia.[7] This homeland defence mission (operationalised through Joint Task Force 629 and shaped by Concept Aspire and Concept Lantana) requires 2nd Division's brigades to work with civil authorities, infrastructure operators and communities across Australia, a task that depends as much on civil-institutional understanding as on warfighting competence.[8] It is a mission that also raises a deeper question about what the Army profession requires of its largely part-time division—a question that recent debate about the state of the profession has begun to examine, but that has not yet been fully resolved for a Reserve force whose members swear the same oath and serve under the same legislative and ethical framework as their full-time counterparts.[9]

Recent Army and international professional debate has begun to use terms such as the 'polymath soldier' to describe cross-domain contribution.[10] This article takes up that idea and narrows it to a specific claim: that Reserve service creates the conditions from which a distinct form of military-civilian polymathy (not simply broad exposure or dual professional experience, but disciplined integrative competence across military and civilian domains) could be deliberately identified and developed. This is offered as a conceptual proposition for Army to test: the article argues that the Reserve plausibly contains the raw conditions for this kind of person and sets out what could be tested and instituted to make that potential a reliable capability.

The article first defines military-civilian polymathy and distinguishes it from generalism, T-shaped professionalism and boundary spanning.[11] It then examines whether Reserve service creates plausible conditions for such a capability, why this matters for national defence, what comparative practice suggests, and how Army could test the concept without diluting readiness or military professionalism.

This article adopts a practitioner-informed conceptual analysis methodology, supported by doctrinal reference and narrative synthesis. Defence policy, Army concepts, and literature on Reserve service, boundary spanning, T-shaped professionalism, polymathy, organisational ambidexterity and scalability were examined through the lens of three linked questions: what kind of integration national defence requires; how knowledge moves across professional and institutional boundaries; and whether Reserve service may create conditions for selected personnel to perform that integrative function. These themes were then synthesised into a conceptual model of the military-civilian polymath reservist. The article does not attempt to empirically validate the concept; its purpose is to establish whether the concept is a coherent and useful framework for Army to test further.

The authors write as Army Reserve practitioners. That position provides practical insight into the opportunities and frictions of dual professional service but it also creates a risk of institutional bias. The arguments presented here should therefore be read as a practitioner-informed proposal for Army consideration, but constrained appropriately.

Why 'Polymath'

The word 'polymath' carries risk. Used carelessly, it can sound inflated, nostalgic or unserious: a decorative term for clever people with varied interests. It also risks encouraging exactly the wrong institutional behaviour.[12] Army does not need officers and soldiers who mistake breadth for mastery or who treat civilian credentials as a substitute for military competence. If the term is to be useful, it must be disciplined. In this article, polymathy does not mean omniscience, dilettantism or professional exceptionalism. It means integrative competence: the ability to draw on meaningful knowledge across more than one domain and apply it to problems that no single profession can adequately define or solve.[13]

The adjacent concepts should therefore be treated as related but distinct. The reservist-as-transmigrant literature is useful because it treats reserve service not merely as part-time military labour but as lived movement between civilian and military worlds, involving identity, belonging, obligation and competing social roles.[14] This article adapts this insight for a narrower functional question: whether sustained movement between civilian and military institutions may, in selected cases, create the conditions for a form of integrative capability useful to Army. In this framing, transmigration describes the reservist's social position and identity work. Boundary spanning describes function: moving knowledge across institutional seams.[15] Specialist expertise describes depth within a particular professional field. T-shaped professionalism describes depth in one domain combined with working literacy across adjacent domains.[16]

Military-civilian polymathy, then, does not replace the transmigrant framework so much as build on the structural position it describes: while transmigration explains why reservists sit at the seam between military and civilian worlds, polymathy names a narrower and more demanding capability that may emerge from that position in some individuals. It is proposed here as an exploratory capability framework: the potential of selected reservists to integrate competing military and civilian professional logics into judgement, plans or institutional arrangements that can be acted on under command. The term 'polymath soldier' has been used to describe personnel developed through diverse experience, critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration and conceptual skill.[17] This article does not treat this as evidence of an established professional consensus. Rather, it takes the emerging idea as a useful starting point and narrows it to the Reserve context, where the citizen soldier's movement between systems may create conditions for a specific form of military-civilian polymathy.

In this setting, polymathy is not synonymous with omniscience. No modern officer, soldier or civilian professional can master the full complexity of contemporary national defence. The accumulation of knowledge across modern society has made total mastery impossible, yet this does not make cross-domain competence obsolete.[18] Epstein's

argument in *Range* is useful here as contextual support: breadth and analogy may help in complex environments.[19] The practical military value of the polymath is the ability to recognise relevant knowledge across domains, understand enough of its assumptions to use it responsibly, and translate it into judgement, advice or action.

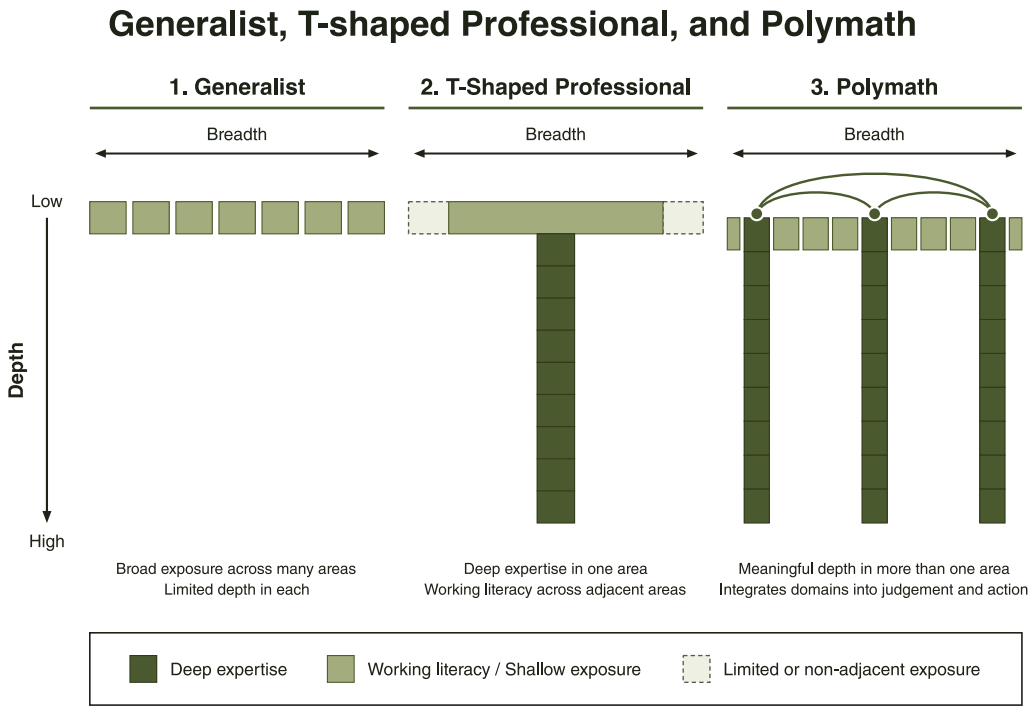


Figure 1: Generalist, T-shaped professional and polymath

Note: This figure distinguishes breadth from depth across three professional archetypes. A generalist has broad but shallow exposure, a T-shaped professional combines deep expertise in one area with broader adjacent literacy, while a polymath has meaningful depth in more than one domain and integrates those domains into judgement and action.

Generalism and T-shaped professionalism, introduced above, show why military-civilian polymathy needs its own definition.[20] A shallow generalist is exposed to many domains without being meaningfully competent in any of them; a polymath has *usable* depth in more than one.[21] The distinction between T-shaped professionalism and military-civilian polymathy is qualitative, not merely quantitative: a T-shaped reservist can explain a civilian system to Army or explain Army requirements to a civilian system, and that dual literacy is valuable (in many roles, it may be all Army requires). Military-civilian polymathy, as earlier defined, describes a more specific and demanding form of integrative

capability.[22] Furthermore, sustaining meaningful depth in two demanding professional domains simultaneously is not merely a matter of effort or aptitude. Ambidexterity theory predicts that exploitation and exploration compete for the same finite resources: time, attention, institutional reward and professional identity.[23] Without deliberate structural support, the gravitational pull towards one domain tends to erode competence in the other.

For this reason, 'polymath' is the right word only if it is used with discipline. It should not imply genius, omniscience or shallow generalism. Its value lies in synthesis, not simply possession: a 'highly capable reservist with relevant civilian expertise' describes two facts sitting side by side and says nothing about whether they have ever been integrated. A T-shaped reservist may be recognised by dual literacy alone; a military-civilian polymath should be recognised by the capacity to turn that dual literacy into disciplined military effect. That distinction is what Army should select for, develop and evaluate, and it is why the recommendations that follow test for demonstrated translation rather than simply cataloguing capable people.

Each of these concepts captures something real: transmigration explains where the reservist sits; boundary spanning explains what they can do across seams; T-shaped professionalism explains the shape of their expertise. But none of them, individually or in combination, captures the integrative act itself: the conversion of competing professional logics into a military recommendation, plan or institutional arrangement that can be acted on under command. That act is what military-civilian polymathy proposes to name, select for and test. The next question, then, is whether the Army Reserve already contains the conditions from which such people can be identified and developed.

The Existing Evidence

The evidence does not support a suggestion that reservists are, by definition, polymaths. It supports a more modest but strategically useful claim: Reserve service creates conditions in which some personnel may develop dual professional literacy, boundary-spanning habits and, in selected cases, integrative judgement. Its members maintain civilian lives and professions while serving within a military institution. They are exposed to Army's command structures, planning processes, doctrine, fieldcraft, logistics, discipline and institutional culture, while also participating in civilian workplaces, professions and communities. The result is a cohort with dual professional literacy.[24] That dual literacy provides a plausible foundation for Army to investigate whether selected reservists can be developed into military-civilian polymaths.

This duality is built into the Reserve model. Reservists are not simply inactive military labour waiting to be mobilised; they balance civilian employment, family, community

and education with part-time military service. They serve across the Navy, Army and Air Force alongside full-time colleagues on exercises and operations, and contribute to border security, domestic disaster relief and emergency support tasks. Reserve sociology has described this position as a form of movement between civilian and military worlds: reservists are neither wholly outside the military institution nor wholly separated from civilian society.[25] In institutional terms, this means the Reserve is not only a force structure; it is also a civil–military bridge, connecting Army to the society, economy, employers, communities and local institutions within which Defence must operate.[26]

The civilian side of this structure matters, and Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–20 illustrates why. Reservists deployed with skills drawn directly from civilian careers (including logistics, engineering, health, and emergency management), and that primary-employment expertise was assessed as material to the operation's effectiveness.[27] More importantly, that contribution extended beyond discrete technical skills. Regionally based reservists brought local knowledge and habitual relationships with civil authorities; Reserve facilities became staging, evacuation and emergency support nodes; and Reserve brigade headquarters coordinated ADF preparation for and response to the disaster. Together, these functions illustrate the integrative potential at issue here: military capability was made more usable because Reserve personnel and institutions were already embedded within, and connected to, the civilian systems through which the response had to operate.

Many reservists may fit the pattern of the T-shaped professional:[28] their civilian profession forms one vertical stroke, while military service provides breadth and, where sufficiently developed, a second form of depth.[29] This does not mean that all such reservists are effective boundary spanners[30] but rather that Reserve service may create the conditions from which boundary-spanning capability can emerge. The progression is therefore conceptual rather than empirically proven in this article: civilian professional depth may provide knowledge of non-military systems; military service may provide command literacy and operational discipline; and the interaction between the two may enable some reservists to move more readily across professional boundaries than can personnel formed entirely within one institutional setting.[31] In a narrow tactical context, this may matter little. In mobilisation, domestic support, industry engagement, civil preparedness, cyber resilience, health planning, logistics or infrastructure protection, it may matter greatly.

There are also potential cognitive advantages, though these should not be overstated. Reserve members regularly shift between different decision cultures. Cognitive-flexibility theory suggests that exposure to multiple representations and ill-structured problems can support adaptive reasoning,[32] while boundary-spanning scholarship shows that knowledge often has to be translated and transformed, not simply transferred, across institutional boundaries.[33] This is consistent with Epstein's broader argument that diverse

experience can improve analogical reasoning and adaptation where problems are uncertain, novel and poorly bounded.[34] This repeated movement between military and civilian systems may create conditions in which some reservists become better practised at recognising which assumptions travel between contexts and which do not.[35] A reservist who has planned in a military headquarters and managed a civilian project may have encountered different ways of allocating resources, communicating intent, accepting risk and measuring success. A reservist who has worked in clinical governance and field command may understand that risk can be simultaneously technical, ethical, legal and operational. However, these examples should be read as plausible pathways for integrative judgement, not as evidence that cognitive advantage automatically follows from Reserve service.

A related possibility is that Reserve service may help Army test and challenge institutional insularity. Professional military organisations require strong internal cultures. Without them, they lose discipline, coherence and fighting power.[36] Yet any strong institution risks path dependency, doctrinal echo chambers and a narrowing of what counts as relevant expertise.[37] Organisational learning literature suggests that institutions must balance exploitation of established routines with exploration of external knowledge, while absorptive capacity depends on the ability to recognise, assimilate and apply knowledge from outside the organisation.[38] Reservists cannot solve institutional insularity by virtue of their status alone. As a minority workforce, they may be just as likely to conform to prevailing organisational norms as to challenge them.[39] Their value depends on whether Army places selected reservists in roles where their civilian expertise is relevant, their military competence is credible, and their alternative perspective can positively influence planning and decision-making. Under those conditions, reservists may help expose Army to external assumptions, constraints and forms of knowledge that are otherwise less visible inside the full-time force.

Some reservists will remain principally part-time soldiers. Others will remain civilian professionals whose military contribution is narrow but valuable. The institutional opportunity lies in recognising those who have, or can develop, genuine dual literacy and integrative judgement. The Reserve plausibly contains latent T-shaped boundary spanners, though their prevalence and the practical effect of developing them further remain open questions rather than established findings. The task for Army is to test which of them can develop towards military-civilian polymathy, then determine where that higher form of competence contributes to national defence. Properly understood, tested and employed, this concept could serve as a practical response to a strategic environment in which Australia's security problems increasingly sit at the intersection of professions, agencies, sectors and levels of war.

National Defence and Polymathy

The argument for Reserve polymathy becomes strategically significant because national defence shifts the problem from military capability alone to national integration. The 2024 National Defence Strategy made a strategy of denial the cornerstone of Defence planning and directed the ADF towards an integrated, focused force.[40] The 2026 National Defence Strategy extended this logic by emphasising self-reliance, sovereign defence industrial resilience, stronger industrial partnerships, civil preparedness and national resilience.[41] These priorities alter the character of the problem itself. They require Defence to operate across systems it does not own, work with institutions it does not command, and generate deterrent effect from national capabilities that sit outside the permanent force.

Concept Apex makes the same point in operational terms.[42] It frames integrated campaigning as the ADF's contribution to united and focused whole-of-government approaches, achieved through the potential of people, ideas and materiel, combined with allies and partners. It is a deliberate and persistent method of generating deterrent effect. As Australia's competitors increasingly exploit the seams between peace and war, military and non-military power, and government and civil society, the importance of integration increases. Apex warns that compartmentalised thinking creates opportunities in the grey zone and that military power alone is inadequate for conflict, just as national power without military power is inadequate for competition.[43] This implies that Defence must anticipate the friction points in a whole-of-nation approach before crisis. It must identify where industry, infrastructure, government, academia, civil society and the ADF will need to connect, and it must build the human mechanisms to make those connections work under pressure. One possible mechanism is the selected military-civilian polymath reservist.

However, military-civilian polymathy is not the only mechanism through which Army can pursue this integration; specialist advice, civil–military cooperation, liaison officers, Australian Public Service (APS) expertise, contractors and conventional boundary-spanning roles all remain necessary. However, these mechanisms are usually organised around coordination, advice or translation: connecting organisations, advising on a defined problem, or moving knowledge across a particular institutional or professional boundary.[44] The military-civilian polymath reservist is proposed as a complementary mechanism. Its distinctive value lies in combining military status, command literacy and civilian professional depth within the same person. Where specialist advice may tell Army what a civilian system requires, and liaison may connect Army to that system, the military-civilian polymath may be able to integrate both logics earlier in planning: identifying where military assumptions will fail in civil settings, where civil constraints will affect military options, and how plans can be adapted before crisis so that they remain lawful, feasible and executable under pressure.

The link between integration and Reserve service is sharpened by Colonel Renée Kidson's recent occasional paper on scalability.[45] She argues that accelerated preparedness requires Defence to think not only about mobilisation as an exceptional act but about scalability as a standing organisational property: the ability to redirect, activate and augment capacity as demand changes. This analysis identifies the importance of 'sense-makers' and 'interconnectors': people who can understand internal organisational constraints, external support systems, and the relationships required to scale across government, industry and the national support base. These are functions rather than personnel categories. A specialist adviser may perform them in a defined technical area, a liaison officer may perform them through coordination, and an organisational boundary spanner may perform them by moving information across institutional seams. The military-civilian polymath reservist is proposed as a narrower and complementary pathway: a selected reservist whose civilian professional depth, military competence and integrative judgement allow them to interpret where capacity exists, where constraints lie, and how Defence can connect to the civil systems on which scalability depends.

A strategy of denial depends on platforms, weapons, sensors and trained formations, but it also depends on the systems that make their use possible. Ports, roads, information technologies, rail, fuel, power, data, maintenance, industry, workforce, hospitals, stockpiles, contracting mechanisms and public confidence all shape the credibility of military power.[46] Therefore, military effectiveness increasingly depends on civil systems being understood, protected, integrated and mobilised before crisis. This is where the logic of total defence becomes relevant. Total defence, in its various national forms, is a way of thinking about the relationship between military defence, civil preparedness, economic resilience, information resilience and social trust.[47] Australia should not import a foreign total defence model uncritically; its geography, federation, political culture, strategic warning assumptions and volunteer military tradition are different.[48] But the underlying design problem is similar: how does a democratic state generate credible national resilience without militarising society or assuming that Defence can solve whole-of-nation problems by itself?

The answer lies in translation between Defence, government, industry and society. Sovereign industrial resilience requires people who understand both military requirements and commercial incentives. Civil preparedness requires credibility with state agencies, local communities, health systems, employers and volunteers. The Army Reserve is plausibly positioned at this junction. This does not mean all such problems require military-civilian polymaths rather than specialists, liaison officers or established boundary-spanning mechanisms. It means that some national defence problems may require personnel who can integrate these perspectives before they harden into separate military, commercial, legal, technical or community constraints. The Reserve is one of the

parts of Army most routinely distributed through civilian employment, local communities and domestic institutions while still remaining within the military profession.

If national defence is a whole-of-nation problem, then the Reserve is one of Army's few institutions distributed through Australian society. The Reserve should not be diverted from warfighting or treated as a generic civil-support workforce; military credibility remains fundamental. Nor is the Reserve the only part of Defence connected to industry, government, academia or community organisations. APS personnel, contractors, liaison officers, specialist advisers and full-time Army personnel also perform important integrative functions. The Reserve's distinctive potential lies in the combination of military membership and continuing civilian embeddedness. Properly identified, developed and employed, selected reservists may help Army understand and access the national systems on which denial, mobilisation, domestic response and resilience depend.

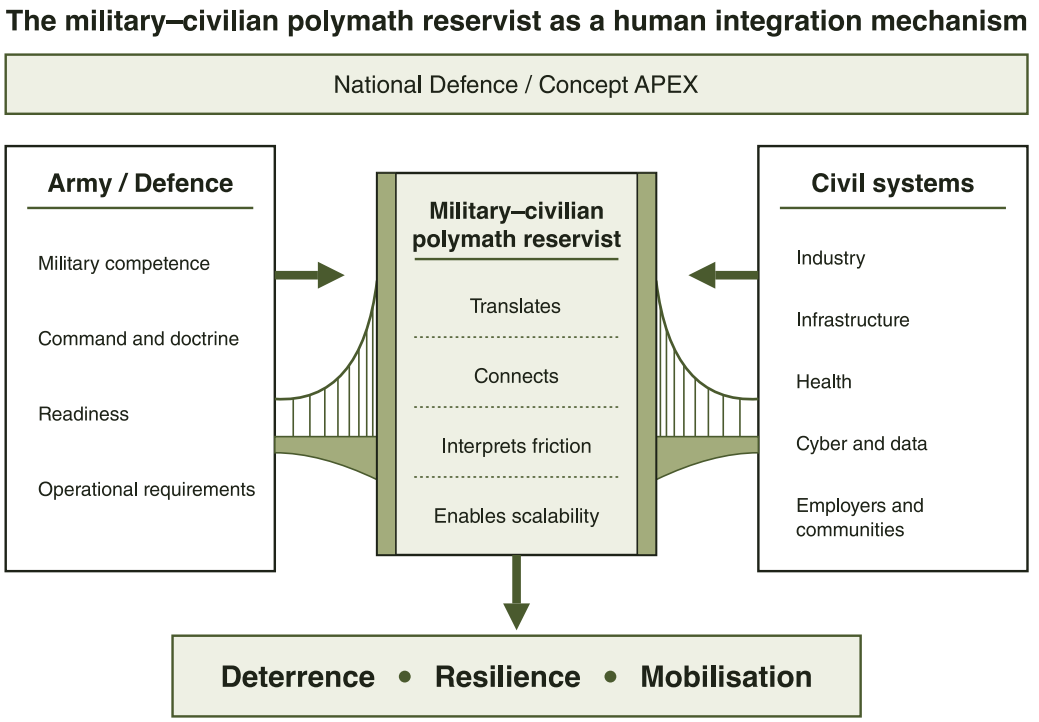


Figure 2: The military-civilian polymath reservist as a proposed human integration mechanism

Note: The figure depicts the potential value of selected reservists whose dual professional literacy can be translated into disciplined military effect. The proposition is that some reservists may be able to connect Army requirements with the civilian systems on which national defence depends.

Military-civilian polymathy is therefore not offered as a decorative label. It is proposed as a human-capital framework for a strategic problem Australia has already recognised in policy but has not yet fully solved in practice. National defence requires people who can integrate military purpose with civilian systems, and the Reserve may contain the setting from which those people can be identified and developed. Army's task is to test that proposition, identify suitable personnel, and employ them where the best evidence supports doing so.

The Comparative Evidence

Comparative examples should be used cautiously. Australia does not need to copy another state's reserve model, and analogies can mislead when they ignore geography, political culture, threat perception, strategic warning time and force structure. Yet comparison remains useful because other militaries have already recognised that reserve forces can do more than merely provide latent force generation. In different ways, the United States and the United Kingdom show that reserve service can connect military institutions to civilian expertise, national mobilisation systems and broader society.

Allied militaries have long used reserve-heavy civil–military roles to draw on civilian skills in complex environments, particularly where the military must operate with local authorities, civilian agencies, industry and communities.[49] Canada, Australia and the United States have each integrated reservists into civil–military cooperation, civil affairs or equivalent roles partly because reservists can bring civilian expertise, local knowledge and professional networks into military planning and execution.[50] This does not demonstrate military-civilian polymathy in itself. In most cases, it demonstrates specialist civilian contribution or boundary-spanning function. However, these examples show that comparable forces have recognised the operational utility of personnel who can move between military and civilian systems.

The United States offers the clearest example of reservist identity as dual professional service. The US Army Reserve's long-standing motto, 'Twice the Citizen', captures the idea that the reservist is both citizen and soldier rather than merely a less available regular.[51] However, this claim describes position and belonging, not necessarily integrative capability. More recent American initiatives show how civilian expertise can be deliberately connected to military transformation problems. The emergence of initiatives such as the Executive Innovation Corps similarly reflects a willingness to draw senior technology expertise into part-time military service for targeted transformation problems.[52]

Furthermore, the 75th US Army Reserve Innovation Command (which frames its mission around Army transformation, experimentation and collaboration across components, services, academia and industry, and publicly emphasises the Army Reserve's 'unique blend of civilian acquired skills')[53] provides an example of how a military can

create structures that convert civilian expertise into military utility. At Cyber Quest 25, the command deployed a tailored multidisciplinary team of 14 reservists to evaluate emerging cyber, electromagnetic warfare and information-advantage technologies in an operationally relevant Army experiment.[54] These personnel combined operational experience across Army cyber, signal and other technical branches with civilian expertise in artificial intelligence, data science and cybersecurity, drawn from sectors including technology, energy, financial services and academia. They assessed prototypes against warfighting requirements, tested their integration with Army systems, identified capability gaps, and structured evidence used to inform requirements development, acquisition risk reduction and future experimentation. The Army explicitly attributed the value of these assessments to the soldiers' 'dual civilian-military expertise',[55] which allowed industry knowledge and operational understanding to be applied together to questions of usability, resilience and military utility.

The United Kingdom provides a different lesson. Its Sponsored Reserve arrangements show one way of formalising the relationship between civilian employment and military requirement. Under the *Reserve Forces Act 1996*, the use of sponsored reservists allows specialist tasks to be performed by trained professionals whose civilian employer has entered into a contract with the Ministry of Defence.[56] This is not polymathy in the fullest sense; it is closer to contracted specialist integration. Even so, it shows that Defence can create mechanisms for moving civilian competence into military service without pretending that all capability must be generated organically inside the uniformed force. The UK experience also shows the friction. Future Reserves 2020 and subsequent reform programs were concerned not only with capability but also with employer support, mobilisation, readiness and the credibility of part-time service within an integrated force.[57] Specialist integration is possible, but it is administratively and culturally demanding.

The comparative conclusion is therefore restrained. The international examples do not prove that reserve forces are inherently polymathic; nor do they provide a model that can be imported directly into Australia. They show something narrower but still important: allied militaries have created structures that make civilian expertise, dual professional identity and boundary-spanning functions militarily useful. An Australian model of military-civilian polymathy must be suited to the nation's own scale, federation, geography, industry base, volunteer military tradition and strategic warning assumptions. The common lesson is that Reserve forces can provide pathways through which selected personnel may integrate military purpose with civilian expertise, where that integration is deliberately identified, authorised, developed and tested.

Counterarguments

The argument for military-civilian polymathy must not become special pleading for the Reserve, as there are serious counterarguments to contend with.

The first counterargument is decisive if ignored: readiness matters more than breadth. A reservist who cannot perform their military role is not strategically useful simply because they possess civilian expertise. As already stated, polymathy cannot excuse poor soldiering. Fieldcraft, fitness, discipline, lawful command, tactical competence and collective readiness remain foundational. The answer is not to lower military standards in order to celebrate civilian breadth; it is to define readiness more intelligently. Recent Army direction reinforces this point. The decision to discontinue the Army Individual Readiness Notice does not dilute readiness; it reflects concern that a narrow administrative proxy for individual deployability can obscure the more demanding requirements of contemporary war, collective preparedness and commander judgement about employability.[58] The same logic should apply to Reserve value. The question is not whether civilian breadth can substitute for military competence but whether particular Reserve roles require additional forms of preparedness because their task involves civil–military translation or access to civilian systems. Polymathy should therefore be understood as a complement to military professionalism, not a substitute for it.

The second counterargument is that Reserve service may produce divided attention rather than polymathy. This is the central developmental risk, as a person can be mediocre in two professions rather than excellent in one.[59] Part-time military service competes with civilian employment, family, study and community responsibilities;[60] military skills require repetition and reinforcement;[61] and civilian professional success may reduce availability for military development.[62] These tensions are consistent with military sociology's treatment of the military, family and civilian employment as competing institutional demands, as well as Reserve sociology's account of reservists moving between civilian and military worlds. True polymathy requires deliberate cultivation, not merely the accidental possession of multiple roles. Army should not treat a civilian job and a uniform as evidence of integrative capability. It should identify those with genuine dual literacy (and ongoing commitment to dual professional development), match them to appropriate roles, and provide professional development that integrates rather than merely alternates between their domains.

The third counterargument is that civilian skills do not automatically transfer into military utility. A lawyer, surgeon, engineer, academic, executive or software developer does not become militarily useful simply by importing civilian credentials into Army. Civilian expertise can be distorted if applied without understanding command, doctrine, operational risk or the ethical demands of military service.[63] Equally, Army can misuse civilian expertise if it treats credentials as interchangeable with competence in a military

context. The value lies in translation, not credentialism. A medical executive/reservist may understand health system fragility but still require significant military understanding to contribute to deployed health planning. A cyber professional may understand technical vulnerability but must understand command responsibility and operational authorisation. An engineer may understand infrastructure but must understand military mobility, survivability and sustainment. For Reserve roles that depend on civil–military integration, Army should identify which civilian skills are relevant, train personnel to apply them in military settings, and employ them deliberately where that translation has operational value.

The fourth counterargument is cultural. Reservists can be marginal inside Army, but this should be treated as a recurring risk rather than a universal condition.[64] They may be judged primarily by availability, by resemblance to full-time service patterns, or by whether their civilian expertise can be translated into a recognised military task.[65] Some scepticism is legitimate. Full-time personnel carry the daily burden of force generation, command climate, training risk and institutional continuity, and claims that part-time service confers superior judgement would rightly be resisted. The answer is not to elevate reservists above the permanent force but to specify different forms of contribution. Some Reserve roles should be measured principally against permanent-force equivalence—for example, a rifle platoon, crew-served weapon detachment or headquarters staff role expected to integrate directly with a formed force. Others should be measured by role-specific utility: a cyber reservist contributing to cyber resilience, a logistics professional mapping industry supply, a health professional advising on health system dependencies, or an engineer supporting infrastructure and mobilisation planning. This distinction does not lower military standards. It asks which standard is relevant to the task. Without it, Army risks expecting all reservists to mimic full-time service patterns while overlooking roles in which civilian expertise, military credibility and boundary-spanning utility may add distinct value.

The fifth counterargument is that employers bear real costs. This is perhaps the most important practical constraint. Reserve service removes people from civilian workplaces, sometimes at short notice, and the burden is unevenly distributed. Small businesses can be hit particularly hard when a key employee or owner is absent, but the problem is not confined to small enterprises. Large organisations may absorb absence more easily in aggregate, yet still depend on senior executives, technical specialists, scarce trades, project leads, middle managers or personnel occupying unique organisational functions. In those cases, Reserve service may be experienced less as a national contribution than as an operational disruption.[66] Legal protections and employer-support schemes are therefore necessary, but they do not remove the friction—they manage it.

This employer problem is, therefore, central to the article's thesis. If national defence requires civil preparedness, mobilisation, industry resilience and access to civilian

expertise, then employers are not merely external stakeholders. They are part of the capability ecosystem through which Reserve value is generated, protected and sustained. A broader national compact would differ from existing employer-support arrangements by treating employer tolerance, workforce depth and flexible service design as mobilisation issues rather than administrative afterthoughts. In practical terms, this would mean earlier engagement with critical employers, clearer notice and predictability where possible, role design that recognises civilian scarcity, and support arrangements that protect the civilian relationships Army depends upon. Army cannot ask more of reservists while ignoring the workplaces that make their dual professional service possible.

A final risk to discuss is governance. The same dual professional position that makes military-civilian polymaths valuable can also create ambiguity. Reservists who work across industry, government, health, infrastructure, cyber or commercial sectors may hold knowledge that is useful to Army but be constrained by professional obligations, employer interests, security requirements, commercial confidentiality or procurement probity. Army should therefore avoid treating civilian access as informal entitlement. If reservists are to operate as translators between Defence and civil systems, their roles must be properly authorised, bounded and supervised. The value of military-civilian polymathy lies not in bypassing institutional safeguards but in helping Army understand external systems while remaining disciplined by law, ethics, security and command.

To conclude, if Army wants to test the benefits of military-civilian polymathy, it should consider and design for them. It must protect readiness, respect employers, train for translation, distinguish specialist value from general availability, and place reservists where their dual literacy is actually relevant. Polymathy is best treated as a capability hypothesis and, like any capability, must be appropriately organised, resourced, tested and employed.

What Army Could Do

If Army treats military-civilian polymathy as a capability hypothesis worth testing, it should stop treating Reserve dual professional literacy as incidental. These recommendations offer a way to test the personnel implications of Concept Apex rather than assuming them. Apex directs the ADF to build integration expertise; integrate nationally, including with industry and academia; build resilient supply chains; develop agile logistics; mobilise the ADF; defend the homeland; and fight disinformation.[67] The Army Reserve may be one of the practical human mechanisms through which Army contributes to those deductions, but that proposition must be first evaluated.

First, Army should establish a Reserve integration register, not merely a skills database. A skills database would record qualifications, occupations and civilian experience. An

integration register would go further by identifying reservists whose civilian expertise, military competence and demonstrated integrative performance make them suitable for national defence tasks. Such a register should not treat credentials as proof of polymathy. It should use a staged assessment: first, whether the reservist has credible military performance and current civilian professional depth; second, whether their civilian expertise is relevant to a Defence problem; third, whether they have demonstrated (through performance reporting) translation ability, including outputs such as mobilisation planning, civil–military coordination, industry engagement, infrastructure resilience, health planning, cyber resilience, emergency management, logistics, regional engagement or employer networks; and fourth, whether commanders judge that contribution to be usable under military authority. Ownership should sit with Army personnel and capability authorities—that is, centralised with the Army's Directorate of Officer Career Management or with the G1 (Personnel) section of Australian Army Headquarters or 2nd (Australian) Division—with access available to formations and headquarters engaged in national defence planning.

Second, Army should pilot a small number of designated integration roles for selected reservists. These should not be honorary appointments, informal advisory positions or a new workforce category. They should be time-limited, task-linked roles within headquarters, planning teams, mobilisation cells, liaison structures or professional military education (PME) organisations where the reservist's purpose is to test whether dual professional literacy can be converted into usable Army output. Selection should be based on the same criteria used for the integration register, and such roles should have clear terms of reference, reporting chains, security boundaries, conflict-of-interest controls and performance expectations. Their value should be assessed against existing alternatives: whether the role adds something beyond a capable staff officer, liaison officer, planner, engagement officer or specialist adviser. The test is not whether the reservist is impressive but whether they can integrate military and civilian logics in ways that improve planning, reveal hidden constraints, accelerate access to relevant expertise or make national defence activity more executable.

Third, Army should use these roles to generate an evidence base. The concept should be tested through pilots, after-action reviews and structured evaluation. Evaluation should ask whether this contribution was distinguishable from that of a capable staff officer, liaison officer, specialist adviser or well-networked reservist. Useful measures would include whether they identified civil constraints not visible in the original plan, translated those constraints into militarily usable options, improved the feasibility of civil–military planning, accelerated access to relevant expertise, strengthened employer or industry engagement, or produced plans that were more executable across military and civilian systems. The key test is attribution: whether the value came from demonstrated integration of civilian professional depth with military judgement rather

than from credentials, personality, seniority or networks alone. In this way, military-civilian polymathy would remain an assessable capability proposition, not an aspirational label.

PME could represent one pilot-testing setting for this concept. Selected reservists with relevant civilian expertise could help develop case studies, exercises and planning problems that require officers to integrate commercial incentives, legal authorities, infrastructure constraints, workforce depth, public trust, emergency management, information resilience and command responsibility. The value would lie not only in importing civilian subject-matter expertise but in testing whether dual professional literacy can improve how Army thinks across military and civilian systems.

Finally, Army should treat employer partnership as a capability requirement. Employer support is not simply human resources administration; it is part of mobilisation architecture. If Army seeks to draw more deliberately on reservists' civilian expertise, it must also protect the civilian relationships that make that expertise current, credible and available. This has implications for workforce design, retention and preparedness. Reserve roles that depend on scarce civilian skills should be designed with greater attention to predictability, employer tolerance, professional currency and the risk of stripping personnel from the very sectors Defence may need during crisis. For strategically important sectors such as health, infrastructure, logistics, cyber, emergency management and industry, employer engagement should occur before mobilisation pressure. The aim is not to privilege employers over military requirements but to recognise that Reserve capability is sustained through a three-way relationship between Army, the reservist and the civilian institution that enables their service.

Taken together, these measures should not create a new class of privileged reservists or dilute military standards. They would provide a disciplined way to test whether selected reservists can convert dual professional literacy into military value. The practical question is not whether a reservist has impressive civilian credentials but whether they can remain credible members of the Army profession while helping Army understand, plan and act across the civilian systems on which national defence depends.

Conclusion

Australia does not have the mass to solve its defence problem by scale alone. Nor can it assume that a small professional military, however capable, can integrate the national systems on which deterrence and resilience depend. National defence recognises that military power now rests on more than the force-in-being. It depends on industry, infrastructure, cyber resilience, logistics, civil preparedness, public trust and the ability of national institutions to act coherently under pressure. These are not peripheral enablers; they are part of the strategic problem.

The Army Reserve sits at this seam. It is not only a pool of trained soldiers who may be called upon in crisis. It is also a standing interface between Army and Australian society. Reservists move between military service and civilian professions, between command systems and commercial systems, between doctrine and regulation, between operational requirements and the constraints of ordinary national life. That movement does not automatically produce strategic value but, when properly cultivated and tested, it may produce people who can understand, translate, and integrate across the boundaries that national defence now makes central.

This is why the language of polymathy matters. The argument is not that every reservist is a polymath or that breadth is inherently superior to depth. Nor is it that civilian expertise can compensate for poor military competence. Instead, military-civilian polymathy only matters when it is disciplined by readiness, command, doctrine, ethics and operational credibility. A reservist who cannot soldier remains a weak instrument, and a civilian expert who cannot translate their knowledge into military utility remains an unused credential. The value lies in integration. Some scholars may reasonably interpret this phenomenon through established constructs such as transmigration, dual professional identity, T-shaped professionalism or boundary spanning. This article does not claim to displace those explanations; it proposes military-civilian polymathy as a more specific framework through which Army can identify and test the integration of civilian and military professional competence.

The Army Reserve appears to contain some of the foundations of that integration. Whatever conceptual framework one uses to describe it, the Reserve demonstrably contains people who move between military command and civilian professions, who understand both institutional worlds, and who can see where military intent meets civilian friction. In a national defence model, that friction is not a nuisance; it is where much of the real work will occur. Army should therefore treat the Reserve as more than a force-generation hedge. Reinforcement, mobilisation and operational employment remain essential but they are not the whole story. The Reserve should also be examined and developed as a national human-capital institution: a place where military professionalism and civilian expertise are deliberately integrated rather than kept in parallel. That requires better mapping of civilian expertise, clearer Reserve career pathways, serious recognition of translation work, stronger employer partnerships, and a clearer account of Reserve contribution that reflects the realities of national defence and integrated campaigning.

The future value of the Army Reserve may lie not only in how many soldiers it can provide in a crisis but also in the kinds of people it can develop before a crisis arrives. Properly cultivated, tested and employed, selected citizen soldiers may become strategic integrators: disciplined military-civilian polymaths able to fight, connect, translate and mobilise across the boundaries of Australian national power.

About the Authors

Major Matthew Jones is an Army Reserve infantry officer and civilian paediatric surgeon currently serving as SO2 Strategic Analysis at the Australian Army Research Centre (AARC). He has commanded at a Company level, posted as an instructor on the Combat Officers' Advanced Course, and deployed on multiple domestic operations. A recent graduate of the Australian Command and Staff Course, he holds a Doctor of Philosophy, a Doctor of Medicine and a Master of Surgery, among several other tertiary qualifications. His current research focuses on the AARC's 2025–26 research priority 'Defence of Australia'. He resides in Melbourne with his wife, Natalie, and their two daughters.

Major Samuel Miller is an Army Reserve infantry officer and civilian engineer and project manager, currently serving as Officer Commanding Bravo Company at 25/49 RQR. He has served in staff and joint roles within the headquarters of 11th Brigade and 1st (Australian) Division, including Army recruiting and as a CIMIC operator and planner, and has deployed on multiple domestic operations. In his civilian career, he delivers complex rail projects for government and private clients and currently leads a multidisciplinary workforce spanning engineering, operations, finance and safety. He is a registered professional engineer and holds a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical) and a Master of Business Administration. He resides on the Gold Coast with his wife, Olivia, and their two sons.

ENDNOTES

1 Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

2 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2024), at: www.army.gov.au/our-work/strategy/australian-army-contribution-national-defence-strategy-2024; Australian Government, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2026), at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

3 Australian Defence Force, *ADF Capstone Concept APEX: Integrated Campaigning for Deterrence*, 3rd edition (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2025).

4 Mark Armstrong, *Every Possible Capability: Some Implications of the Army Reserve Call Out for Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020*, Australian Army Occasional Paper (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2020), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/every-possible-capability-some-implications-army-reserve-call-out-operation-bushfire-assist-2019-2020; Peter Leahy, 'The Australian Army Reserve: Relevant and Ready', *Australian Army Journal* 2, no. 1 (2004), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/volume-2-number-1-2004/australian-army-reserve-relevant-and-ready.

5 Timothy Edmunds, Antonia Dawes, Paul Higate, K Neil Jenkings and Rachel Woodward, 'Reserve Forces and the Transformation of British Military Organisation: Soldiers, Citizens and Society', *Defence Studies* 16 (2016): 118, at: https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=97cdceef-6cf3-3be9-b405-4961dbc6f645; Alistair Edgar, Rupinder Mangat and Bessma Momani, *Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces Through Diversity and Inclusion* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

6 'Benefits of Employing Reservists', *ADF Reserves and Employer Support* (website), at: www.reserveemployersupport.gov.au/employers/benefits-of-employing-reservists.

7 Jon Stewart, 'A Shift of Focus to the North', *Department of Defence* (website), 13 October 2023, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2023-10-13/shift-focus-north; Adrienne Goode, 'Joint Task Group Leads on Homeland Defence', *Department of Defence* (website), 12 August 2025, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2025-08-12/joint-task-group-leads-homeland-defence.

8 'Seminar on "Reflections as Commander of the 2nd (Australian) Division and as Commander of Joint Task Force 629"', *Australian Army Research Centre* (website), 20 November 2024, at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/seminar-reflections-commander-2nd-australian-division-and-commander-joint-task-force-629.

9 Jordan Beavis, 'Introduction—Debating the Australian Army Profession', *Australian Army Journal* 21, no. 3 (2025), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/volume-21-number-3/introduction-debating-australian-army-profession; Jordan Beavis, 'State of the Army Profession—A Reserve Infantry Perspective', *Australian Army Journal* 22, no. 1 (2026), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/state-army-profession-reserve-infantry-perspective.

10 Chris Field, 'The Polymath Soldier: Cove Comp '25', *The Cove*, 4 December 2025, at: https://cove.army.gov.au/article/polymath-soldier-cove-comp-25; Bill DeMarco, 'Polymaths in the Pentagon: The Polymath and Innovation, A Key to Conceptualizing and Winning Tomorrow's Wars', *Mastermind Century Group*, 15 January 2025, at: https://m100group.com/2025/01/15/polymaths-in-the-pentagon-the-polymath-and-innovation-a-key-to-conceptualizing-and-winning-tomorrows-wars-demarco-banter.

11 Morten T Hansen and Bolko von Oetinger, 'Introducing T-Shaped Managers: Knowledge Management's Next Generation', *Harvard Business Review* 79, no. 3 (2001): 106–116; Deborah G Ancona and David F Caldwell, 'Bridging the Boundary: External Activity and Performance in Organizational Teams', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1992): 634–665.

12 Peter Burke, *The Polymath: A Cultural History from Leonardo da Vinci to Susan Sontag* (Yale University Press, 2020).

13 Michael Araki, 'Polymathy: A New Outlook', *Journal of Genius and Eminence* 3, no. 1 (2018): 66–82; Robert Scott Root-Bernstein and Michele Root-Bernstein, *Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001).

14 Eyal Ben-Ari, Edna Lomsky-Feder and Nir Gazit, 'Reserve Soldiers as Transmigrants—Two Decades On: A Research Note', *Armed Forces & Society* 51, no. 2 (2025): 492–500.

15 Ancona and Caldwell, 'Bridging the Boundary'.

16 Hansen and von Oetinger, 'Introducing T-Shaped Managers'.

17 Field, 'The Polymath Soldier'; DeMarco, 'Polymaths in the Pentagon'.

18 Tamir Libel, 'From the Sociology of the (Military) Profession to the Sociology of (Security) Expertise: The Case of European National Defence Universities', *Defence Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 62–84.

19 David Epstein, *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019).

20 Alexander Kalloniatis and Wesley McTernan, 'Rethinking the Perennial Problem of Generalists vs Specialists: Applications in a 5th Generation Headquarters', 26th International Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium (2024); Shannon Nicole Conley, Rider W Foley, Michael E Gorman, Jessica Denham and Kevin Coleman, 'Acquisition of T-Shaped Expertise: An Exploratory Study', *Social Epistemology* 31, no. 2 (2017): 165–183.

21 Charles A O'Reilly and Michael L Tushman, 'Organizational Ambidexterity: Past, Present, and Future', *Academy of Management Perspectives* 27, no. 4 (2013): 324–338, at: https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0025.

22 Araki, 'Polymathy: A New Outlook'.

23 O'Reilly and Tushman, 'Organizational Ambidexterity'.

24 Rachel Woodward, Antonia Dawes, Timothy Edmunds, Paul Higate and K Neil Jenkings, 'The Use of Military Reservists' Civilian Skills in the UK Armed Forces', in Eyal Ben-Ari and Vincent Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 146–164.

25 Ibid.; Edna Lomsky-Feder, Nir Gazit and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Reserve Soldiers as Transmigrants: Moving Between the Civilian and Military Worlds', *Armed Forces & Society* 34, no. 4 (2008): 593–614; Ben-Ari, Lomsky-Feder and Gazit, 'Reserve Soldiers as Transmigrants—Two Decades On'.

26 Edmunds et al., 'Reserve Forces and the Transformation of British Military Organisation'.

27 Armstrong, *Every Possible Capability*.

28 Hansen and von Oetinger, 'Introducing T-Shaped Managers'.

29 Hise O Gibson, *T-Shaped Managers—One Size Does Not Fit All: Exploratory Study from the Military*, Working Paper 22-003 (Harvard Business School, 2021).

30 Joshua L Glazer, Matthew Shirrell, Megan Duff and Dryw Freed, 'Beyond Boundary Spanning: Theory and Learning in Research-Practice Partnerships', *American Journal of Education* 129, no. 2 (2023): 265–295.

31 Franklin C Annis, 'Future Army Leaders: Expert Specialists or Master Generalists?', *From the Green Notebook*, 5 June 2018, at: https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2018/06/05/future-army-leaders-expert-specialists-or-master-generalists.

32 Rand J Spiro, Paul J Feltovich, Michael J Jacobson and Richard L Coulson, 'Cognitive Flexibility, Constructivism, and Hypertext: Random Access Instruction for Advanced Knowledge Acquisition in Ill-Structured Domains', in Leslie P Steffe and Jerry Gale (eds), *Constructivism in Education* (Routledge, 2012), pp. 85–107.

33 Paul R Carlile, 'Transferring, Translating, and Transforming: An Integrative Framework for Managing Knowledge Across Boundaries', *Organization Science* 15, no. 5 (2004): 555–568, at: https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1040.0094.

34 Epstein, *Range*.

35 Wesley M Cohen and Daniel A Levinthal, 'Absorptive Capacity: A New Perspective on Learning and Innovation', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1990): 128–152; Peter Suedfeld, Philip E Tetlock and Sandra Streufert, 'Conceptual/Integrative Complexity', in Charles P Smith (ed.), *Motivation and Personality: Handbook of Thematic Content Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 393–400.

36 Joseph Soeters, 'Organizational Cultures in the Military', in Giuseppe Caforio (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* (Springer, 2018), pp. 251–272.

37 Eliot A Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service* (Cornell University Press, 2019); Sean Collins Murray, 'Review: *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* by Irving L Janis', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1983): 654–656.

38 Andrew Hill and Stephen Gerras, 'Systems of Denial: Strategic Resistance to Military Innovation', *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 109–133; Cohen and Levinthal, 'Absorptive Capacity'.

39 James Griffith and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Reserve Military Service: A Social Constructionist Perspective', *Armed Forces & Society* 47, no. 4 (2021): 635–660.

40 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024*.

41 Australian Government, *2026 National Defence Strategy*.

42 Australian Defence Force, *ADF Capstone Concept APEX*.

43 Australian Defence Force, ADF Capstone Doctrine ADF-C-0: *Australian Military Power* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024); Australian Defence Force, 'Expanding Integration', *ADF Capstone Concept APEX*.

44 Henrique Garbino, Jonathan Robinson and João Valdetaro, *Civil-Military What?!*: *Making Sense of Conflicting Civil-Military Concepts* (Providence: Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies, 2004).

45 Renée Kidson, *Accelerated Preparedness: Scalability Insights for Defence*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 22 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2024), at: https://doi.org/https://doi.org/.

46 Australian Defence Force, ADF-C-0: *Australian Military Power.*

47 Matthew LM Jones and Andrew Maher, *Towards Total Defence: A Literature Review and Feasibility Assessment for Australia*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 39 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2026), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/towards-total-defence.

48 Matthew Jones, 'Australia and Total Defence: Not a Nordic Clone', *Land Power Forum,* 7 May 2026, at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/australia-and-total-defence-not-nordic-clone.

49 John E Lapham, *Exploring the Complexities of Army Civilians and the Army Profession* (U.S. Army War College, 2013).

50 Graham M Longhurst, 'The Evolution of Canadian Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)', *Canadian Military Journal*, Winter 2006–2007 (2007): 55–64.

51 Richard B Crossland and James T Currie, *Twice the Citizen: A History of the United States Army Reserve, 1908–1983* (Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, 1984).

52 U.S. Army Public Affairs, 'Army Launches Detachment 201: Executive Innovation Corps to Drive Tech Transformation', *U.S. Army* (website), 13 June 2025, at: www.army.mil/article/286317/army_launches_detachment_201_executive_innovation_corps_to_drive_tech_transformation.

53 '75th U.S. Army Reserve Innovation Command: About Us', *Army Reserve* (website), at: www.usar.army.mil/Commands/Functional/75th-Innovation-CMD/About-Us (accessed 23 May 2026).

54 Matthew Chlosta, '75th U.S. Army Reserve Innovation Command Evaluates Emerging Army Technologies at Cyber Quest 25', *Army Reserve* (website), 18 November 2025, at: www.usar.army.mil/News/News-Display/Article/4334647/75th-us-army-reserve-innovation-command-evaluates-emerging-army-technologies-at.

55 Ibid.

56 UK Ministry of Defence, *Reserve Forces Act 1996*, at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/14.

57 Woodward et al., 'The Use of Military Reservists' Civilian Skills in the UK Armed Forces'.

58 Simon Stuart, *Chief of Army Decision to Discontinue the Army Individual Readiness Notice (AIRN)*, 1 June 2026 (Canberra: Australian Army, 2026).

59 Oksana Koryak, Andy Lockett, James Hayton, Nicos Nicolaou and Kevin Mole, 'Disentangling the Antecedents of Ambidexterity: Exploration and Exploitation', *Research Policy* 47, no. 2 (2018): 413–427, at: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048733317302093.

60 Mady Wechsler Segal, 'The Military and the Family as Greedy Institutions', *Armed Forces & Society* 13, no. 1 (1986): 9–38, at: www.jstor.org/stable/45305754.

61 Winfred Arthur Jr, Winston Bennett Jr, Pamela L Stanush and Theresa L McNelly, 'Factors That Influence Skill Decay and Retention: A Quantitative Review and Analysis', *Human Performance* 11, no. 1 (1998): 57–101, at: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327043hup1101_3.

62 Woodward et al., 'The Use of Military Reservists' Civilian Skills in the UK Armed Forces'.

63 Ibid.

64 Pamela Schulz, 'Who Is Defending Defence?', in Nigel Starck (ed.), *Legacies of War* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), pp. 163–174; Samantha Crompvoets, *Exploring Future Service Needs of Australian Defence Force Reservists*, Australian Government report (Canberra: Australian National University, 2013).

65 Brad West, 'The Future of Reserves: In Search of a Social Research Agenda for Implementing the Total Workforce Model', *Australian Army Journal* 14, no. 1 (2018), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal-aaj/volume-14-number-1-autumn/future-reserves-search-social-research-agenda-implementing-total-workforce-model; Alex Douglas, 'Reclaiming Volunteerism: How a Reconception Can Build a More Professional Army Reserve', *Australian Army Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 13–24.

66 Brad West and Josh Healy, 'Drawing on Reserves: Assessing Civilian Employer/Manager Support for Employees' Part-Time Military Service', Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 28 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2025), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers/drawing-reserves.

67 Australian Defence Force, *ADF Capstone Concept APEX*, Table 1.

HARDWIRING ADAPTATION THROUGH EXPLORATION

Christopher Wooding

2026 Chief of Army Essay Competition Winner (Chauvel Prize)

> *The need to learn from mistakes, to exploit new opportunities, and adapt to complex situations in order to defeat an adversary on the 'other side of the hill' are enduring and timeless.*
>
> *Aimee Fox, Learning to Fight*[1]

The Australian Army faces a period of global uncertainty, change and competition. This period is straining the ability of militaries to adapt and remain effective in the face of compounding security challenges.[2] Using James G March's exploitation-exploration dichotomy, this essay argues that the Australian Army should reframe adaptation to focus on exploration through parallel experimentation and enhancing knowledge management. This essay first introduces adaptation and March's dichotomy before examining the limits of the Army's current approach to exploration. This essay then introduces parallel experimentation to improve Army's approach to exploration, especially for long-term competition and conflict. This discussion is situated within the context of the emerging tactical regimes and the Indo-Pacific. Finally, this essay discusses the role of knowledge sharing in exploration to support institutional adaptation. Hardwiring adaptation in any institution is a challenging endeavour, requiring numerous elements to coalesce. However, doing so is essential to sustaining military effectiveness now and into the future.

Framing Adaptation

Adaptation, like its related term innovation, is about changing to improve performance (or effectiveness) in a particular context.[3] It is contingent on context, which is composed of both environmental changes and the actions of another entity. The aim is not for the best performance in absolute terms but for better performance relative to an adversary.

Being contingent on these factors introduces a temporal aspect: adaptation must keep pace with change.[4] This temporal aspect has gained greater prominence in recent years due to increasing calls for accelerated change.

The idea of 'accelerated change' is a recurring argument underpinning the importance of military adaptation. It argues that militaries must be increasingly responsive to change to remain relevant in the face of an increasingly dynamic operational environment. Although the term is frequently repeated, including by the Australian Army, Andrew Carr notes there is no consensus on what is meant by 'accelerated change'.[5] Carr argues that this perception is the result of our inability to interpret the current rate of change through historical frameworks. In other words, current mental models no longer provide sufficient usefulness in interpreting and acting in today's world. For militaries, this challenge is experienced as increasing adaptation lag—the gap between identifying a problem and implementing an effective solution.[6] As rate of change accelerates, adaptation lag rises as system capacity becomes increasingly unable to cope.[7] When adaptation lag becomes excessive, militaries lose effectiveness—often resulting in defeat.

Reducing adaptation lag, and thus maintaining the ability to adapt, requires understanding adaptation as a process. Aimee Fox, in her excellent study on organisational learning in the British Army during the First World War, succinctly describes this process:

> Put simply, individuals learn through intuition and interpretation. Once learning has been interpreted, it can be shared with others and integrated at the group level before it is subsequently institutionalised at the organisational level.[8]

Fox's description, similar to others in the field of military innovation studies, highlights how knowledge is generated and then moves through the organisation to produce institutional adaptation.[9] In addition to this process, adaptation features two inter-related approaches: exploitation and exploration. Advanced by political scientist James G March, these approaches describe differing loci of learning and change but occur through the same process described above.[10]

Exploitation is 'the refinement and extension of existing competencies, technologies and paradigms'.[11] The results of exploitation are often 'positive, proximate, and predictable', meaning that exploitation is faster and more certain compared to exploration.[12] Exploitation has lower short-term risk. Exploitation raises the reliability of performance; that is, it makes performance more consistent. This being the case, exploitation often promotes uniformity and standardisation. In knowledge management terms, exploitation is a convergent approach.

Exploration is the 'experimentation of new alternatives'.[13] It raises mean performance; that is, exploration can increase the average and the maximum performance of a

system. In contrast to exploitation, the results of exploration are 'uncertain, distant, and often negative'.[14] This means that exploration carries greater inherent inefficiency and risk. Exploration is thus more costly than exploitation in the short term and more prone to failure. Whereas exploitation benefits from uniformity, exploration benefits from variability—differences in approaches to the same problem.[15] This variability and the search for alternatives make exploration a divergent approach, in contrast to exploitation. Notably, exploration is more than simply the search for new technologies. It is also exploring alternative methods and organisations to maximise the benefits of new technology.[16]

The relationship between exploitation and exploration is non-linear, interdependent and nested. The interaction between exploitation and exploration is a feature of the adaptation process, which frequently moves between investigating alternatives and selecting the best-fitting solutions.[17] Alternatives are explored until a suitable option is selected for exploitation, and then exploration may start again. Exploiting one approach may involve the exploration of sub-elements. A simple example is refining a vehicle by exploring alternative engines. This is useful to acknowledge because adaptation is not a single-level process. It occurs at and across multiple layers. Retired Australian Army major general Mick Ryan describes this in terms of various levels: battlefield/tactical, strategic/institutional, political, international.[18] Knowledge is generated and moves across organisational layers simultaneously. This relationship between exploitation and exploration is fundamentally a knowledge management challenge—discussed later in this essay.

Though both approaches operate simultaneously and interact with each other, they compete for limited resources. This competition for resources shapes adaptation opportunities but changes with time and context. Adaptation, particularly in military contexts, is:

> a constant balancing act, an ongoing search for the equilibrium of being able to change just enough, but not too much. … [Where] the best equilibrium today may not be the best equilibrium tomorrow.[19]

In this sense, the balance between exploitation and exploration is dynamic.

A useful paradigm for exploring this dynamic balance is James P Carse's finite and infinite games. In Carse's own words, '[a] finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play'.[20] For militaries, particular wars might be considered finite games. The aim is to achieve a specific political outcome, and each war has its own character. Infinite games, in contrast, might be the regular competition that exists outside a particular war. The aim is to maintain sufficient effectiveness to enable governments to continue to act. During finite games, militaries may be incentivised to prioritise exploitation over exploration; the reverse might be true of infinite games.

Despite the shifting balance between exploitation and exploration, there are clear costs for focusing on one function to the exclusion of the other. Systems which exploit without exploring are 'likely to find themselves trapped in sub-optimal stable equilibria'.[21] Those systems which explore absent exploitation will realise the costs of exploration without gaining its benefits. March concludes that in competitive environments, exploration is essential for long-term success, despite the short-term effectiveness of exploitation.[22] Exploration, therefore, is essential to preparing for long wars. Lawrence Freedman notes that 'the longer a conflict lasts, the more pressure there is for innovations in tactics and technologies that might yield a breakthrough'.[23] While clear benefits exist for exploration, the balance often favours exploitation.

The Tendency for Exploitation

Organisational and individual tendencies drive a preference for exploitation. The faster, more positive and more certain results of exploitation account for part of this favouritism. These traits make exploitation appear a more efficient and less risky use of resources compared to exploration. These traits also make sharing any adaptations across the organisation simpler, as it is easier to assess the suitability of an adaptation in different contexts when feedback loops are faster, clearer and more precise. The positive feedback loop that occurs with increasing competence expands on these reasons. As competence with an approach increases, so does the likelihood of positive reward. This in turn reinforces the use and improvement of that approach, creating a self-reinforcing loop.[24] This loop affects the burden of evidence for change. Barno and Bensahel argue that the burden of evidence rests with reform, not with the status quo.[25] In other words, militaries tend to look for evidence that a new thing works, rather than evidence that an old thing no longer works. Exploitation avoids this challenge because it is an extension of the status quo, rather than challenging the status quo.

Bureaucracies are particularly prone to exploitation bias. Barno and Bensahel note that bureaucracies are designed not to change, instead offering predictability, continuity and clarity by reducing uncertainty.[26] Bureaucracies achieve this through various mechanisms but predominantly do so through uniformity. Such attempts to reduce uncertainty inherently minimise exploration and the ability to adapt to new and different contexts. This is a systemic source of resistance to change in bureaucracies. Barno and Bensahel note the additional factors that affect military resistance to change:

- chance and friction
- strategic interaction with the adversary
- the radical difference between peacetime and wartime
- the existential costs of failure.[27]

These reasons result in what pseudonymous military blogger Secretary of Defence Rock describes as the tendency 'to cling to inherited ideas, cultural preferences, and bureaucratic routines long after those ideas have become obsolete'.[28] Take, for example, Andrew Carr's critique of the Army's use of time, which seeks to exploit rapid action:

> [A]s many in Army and across Defence have already experienced, there is only so much extra pace that can be achieved within an organisation or on a battlefield. Each additional increase is more difficult and costly.[29]

The organisational tendency for exploitation is mirrored in individual tendencies and compounded by social dynamics. As Fox writes, 'Though bound by a shared ethos, the army was still an organisation made up of individuals with their own motivations, ideals, and agency'.[30] Vested interests, internalised norms and motivations, among other factors, all influence adaptation and resistance to change. Studies in psychology and behavioural economics have demonstrated individual preferences for exploitation, such as prospect theory. Developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, prospect theory suggests that people tend to be loss averse.[31] This suggests that people will tend to prefer the reliability of exploitation to the risks of exploration, reinforcing the positive feedback loop identified by March above. The centrality of individuals and social dynamics to the adaptation process means that the presence of the exploitation preference in individuals is a feature of adaptation that must be accounted for, in addition to systemic organisational tendencies.

In improving exploration, Army must be careful to avoid impeding adaptation with unnecessary policy, convoluted processes and extraneous work. There are already numerous critiques of militaries placing process over product—that is, mistaking activity for outcomes. In *The Rules of the Game*, naval historian Andrew Gordon argues the Royal Navy of the First World War was handicapped by inappropriately elevating process over product.[32] Similar critiques have been levied against modern military establishments, one suggesting that:

> it isn't process per se that is the problem, it is our dysfunctional relationship with process that is all wrong. As an organisation, we have erred towards a risk-averse, process-driven culture that treats process as the ends rather than the means. Our obsession with this is prioritising convenience over imagination, and this is actively harming our ability to think and adapt.[33]

These critiques suggest an enduring preference for exploitation over exploration. Australia is by no means immune from this preference. Ryan has argued that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has adopted a slow, zero-risk management approach instead of an approach better suited to rapid adaptation. This critique implicitly reflects a preference for exploitation over exploration. Ryan has repeatedly argued in recent years that the ADF—and by extension the Australian Army—lacks the elements needed for rapid adaptation. He stresses the need to learn directly from operating contexts more rapidly, share lessons across institutions and alliances, and adapt force structures to account for new technologies.[34]

Army's existing approach is heavily centralised. Authority to accept risk is consolidated in senior positions rather than delegated to the lowest levels. Change is dependent on formal experimentation programs that support top-down adaptation and a single dedicated experimental unit rather than being conducted by regular units to experiment within constraints. Even where bottom-up innovation is encouraged, such innovation is often small scale until given the institutional seal of approval. Further, reliance on centralised mechanisms for capturing and analysing data reduces the effectiveness of bottom-up efforts. Major exercises focus on building competence and confidence in processes, tactics and equipment—which, though important, resemble exploitation rather than exploration.[35] Reliance on centralised mechanisms for sharing knowledge increases adaptation lag between units, as such mechanisms are often slow, beholden to well-meaning process. Army's existing approach reflects organisational choices in allocating limited resources and choosing centralised and formalised mechanisms over alternatives. However, this approach, while valuable, is insufficient to guarantee Army's ability to adapt to the continually changing character of war.

Exploration in the Indo-Pacific

Australia's operational environment plays a significant role in how the Army should hardwire adaptation and exploration. This environment is defined by several considerations, such as strategy, alliances and national industrial base. For this essay, however, the chief considerations are tactics and geography. These are the most prominent factors in driving the physically dispersed operational environment that increasingly defines modern combat.

Reconnaissance-strike tactics (RST) is a new tactical regime emerging from trends such as battlefield transparency and pervasive surveillance; precision mass and concentration of effects; protection and concentration of forces; and vulnerability of enablers and logistics.[36] Based on several descriptions, RST is defined as the fusion of intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance capabilities with precision fires and electronic warfare capabilities to create opportunities for manoeuvre forces.[37] RST is driving the dispersion of forces for protection, with concentration only occurring once the appropriate conditions are met. RST and the notion of dispersed forces are reflected in anti-access/area denial systems and the 'stand-in' concepts to address them. Dr David Kilcullen has suggested that 'stand-in' concepts must be distributed and self-sufficient, among other features, to be effective.[38] This means that even within a geographically constrained area, individual force elements will still be separated from one another much of the time. This challenges how militaries capture, analyse and share knowledge—particularly in cyber-degraded environments—and requires new information processing capabilities to fight and learn.[39]

This challenge is exacerbated by the geography of the Indo-Pacific, which encompasses a vast area of the Earth's surface. Although predominantly ocean, interspersed with occasional islands, the area to Australia's north is characterised by archipelagos. Archipelagos are interconnected littoral spaces. This extends the dispersion of land forces, despite the shorter distances in archipelagos compared to other parts of the Indo-Pacific.[40] These other parts, and their greater distances, remain relevant to knowledge management due to the need to learn with allies. Operations involving multiple nations are among the most challenging, yet they are essential for competing and fighting in the Indo-Pacific. Differing cultures, doctrine, authorities, strategic considerations and more complicate how allies learn from one another. Figuring out how to learn with other nationalities is not discretionary but presents a challenge exacerbated by the distances of the Indo-Pacific. Though work is already occurring in this regard, simply having the mechanisms to share knowledge across an alliance does not ensure its efficacy.

One concept that offers utility for understanding how exploration and knowledge management operate under distributed conditions is parallel experimentation—multiple, simultaneous experiments occurring across different elements that address a common problem in different ways.[41] Each experiment provides feedback on possible solutions and on the problem itself, improving subsequent adaptation efforts. Parallel experimentation is driven by variability across several factors, but notably context and judgement. This variability underpins how different solutions emerge to the same problem. This is provided by constraints, which facilitate coordination through 'a general system within which individuals and groups [can] develop their own solutions'.[42] Constraints are either top-down, such as senior directives, or enabling, such as doctrine.[43] Constraints mean that variability is applied in a constructive direction without being uniform across the force.

Parallel experimentation, though emergent, was essential to the success of the United States Navy (USN) in the Pacific during the Second World War. Trent Hone, in his study on that topic, describes how the variations throughout the USN made it 'possible to conduct multiple parallel experiments, each intended to solve the same basic problem'.[44] This allowed the USN to rapidly explore potential options and identify suitable methods. The USN employed parallel experimentation repeatedly throughout the early 20th century, on problems such as fire-control systems and combat information centres.[45] Through the fleet, 'different ships implemented different approaches, allowing the Navy to compare a variety of potential solutions simultaneously'.[46] Fundamental to the success of parallel experimentation were the mechanisms to learn and disseminate knowledge. Without these mechanisms, such as type commands, knowledge generated from individual experiments could not be exploited by the fleet.[47]

A contemporary example of parallel experimentation is Ukraine's Brave1 Market, a points-based system that uses market forces and gamification for parallel experimentation and adaptation. Points earned by soldiers for killing enemy combatants are spent to purchase more equipment. The distribution of point earning and spending (combined with other feedback like reviews) indicates the effectiveness of methods. Military commands adjust points to incentivise which problems are explored, acting as constraints. Notably, the Brave1 Defence Cluster—a large group of small to medium defence companies—also engage in parallel experimentation through the same Brave1 Market mechanisms. Successful methods and equipment are more likely to be imitated and shared, while competition between units drives exploration of new methods to earn more points.[48] The Brave1 Market delegates authority to explore to the front line and provides a mechanism to share the results of experiments with others, both military and industry, for exploitation.

Parallel experimentation offers a new paradigm for adaptation, one that emphasises delegating and connecting exploration. Delegation enables adaptation at the lowest echelon suitable. Connection permits a community of exploration that learns collaboratively. Rather than simply applying more resources, parallel experimentation is about shifting how current resources are spent, delegating who can spend them and sharing the results. This offers the Army a more resilient and responsive approach to adaptation, particularly in distributed environments.

Philosophically, parallel experimentation also reduces the pressure to find the next big thing. Instead, parallel experimentation is about solving the problems facing individuals in their local contexts and giving the organisation the opportunity to learn from those solutions. This paradigm shift aligns with existing scholarship on the impact of leadership and organisational culture on adaptation—which emphasises leaders who 'embrace a more decentralised mode of command style, exhibit personal openness, and cultivate a climate of evidence-based inquiry' and cultures which permit 'the freedom to experiment, to offer new ideas and opinions, and to cross traditional institutional boundaries'.[49]

Parallel experimentation will likely be the dominant form of exploration in the distributed contexts resulting from RST and the Indo-Pacific's geography. Learning how to apply parallel experimentation can support Army's long-term exploration and effectiveness across competition and conflict. Despite its benefits, parallel experimentation presents the most challenging form of knowledge management. There remains a need to capture, analyse and share knowledge across disparate contexts to ensure military forces can continue to explore and adapt, especially when disconnected from more centralised capabilities. Success requires robust and distributed knowledge management capabilities. Without these, adaptation will remain localised and its benefits minimised, though not its costs.

Understanding Knowledge Management in Adaptation

Knowledge management is the capacity to capture, analyse and share lessons and ideas. This nests within the broader topic of organisational learning and adaptation. Knowledge management is an institutional process, involving the flow of ideas from their points of origin to their points of utility across various networks of individuals and groups. Fox identifies four networks involved in organisational learning—see Table 1. These networks play a crucial role in capturing, analysing and sharing information across organisations, and in institutionalising that knowledge, with both formal and informal mechanisms. In other words, knowledge management connects parallel experimentation into a unified exploration effort.

Table 1 – Learning Networks[50]

Liberal	Informal, unstructured learning between individuals. Primarily occurs through incidental interactions or through pre-existing relationships. Produces 'relatively rapid learning at a lower level' (than the institution).
Horizontal	Informal learning between groups. Reflects collaborative learning as opposed to individual learning—e.g., 6RAR sharing doctrine with 8/9RAR. Often anonymous as it reflects group rather than individual identities. Strengthened by similarities between groups.
Vertical	Formal, structured learning often directed from the top down. Focused on solving specific problems.
External	Learning from sources outside the organisation. Three primary sources: adversaries, allies and civilian experts.

The individuals that compose the networks exist in multiple networks simultaneously. Fox finds that the degree to which learning is diffused across the organisation is a function of the size and extent of networks involved.[51] The more interconnected the networks are, the more opportunities for ideas to move between nodes and be diffused across the organisation. Fox notes:

> [T]ime spent circulating amongst new people and in different locations, whether that was a new branch or expeditionary force, enhanced individual networks and made links that were of enduring utility to the process of learning.[52]

Strong networks enable faster knowledge flow and feedback loops to explore and identify the best-fitting solution. Interconnected networks further improve the flow and feedback of knowledge because information can flow through multiple avenues simultaneously to reach a wider audience. This allows multiple experiments to profit from the results of any

single experiment, creating a community of exploration. In large organisations featuring tens of thousands of people, such as the Army, the ability for information to shortcut across it enhances the Army's capacity to explore, connect and exploit various options.

Increasing opportunities for idea flow is useful to exploration because it allows others to collaborate on an idea, rather than simply receive knowledge. Computer scientist Alex Pentland writes that 'the most consistently creative and insightful people … spend an enormous amount of time seeking out new people and different ideas'.[53] Fox similarly describes how individuals 'learn from colleagues via discussion and debate'.[54] Fox terms this aspect 'smartening friction', which improves ideas by exposing them to competition and challenges which must be overcome to be accepted.[55] Smartening friction is thus a type of feedback, gleaned from interacting with other ideas and perspectives. Lessons from other individuals, groups and theatres can influence adaptation in other people, groups and theatres. Knowledge is transferred across the networks to be used by others, either in original form or further modified to suit local conditions.

Without the involvement of other parties, such as industry or other government departments, in collaboration, exploration may not be possible due to lack of resources to experiment with new equipment, ideas or organisations. External networks are particularly important as they serve various purposes in adaptation. While adversaries are the most obvious source of feedback, allies and civilian experts provide additional sources of variation that can inform exploration. Further, civilian experts, in the form of industry and business, can often be crucial to exploration through the production of equipment or prototypes. Ukraine's Brave1 Market is a clear example of the interconnectedness of networks and the role of civilian expertise in adaptation.

Not all solutions arise with a clear problem or use in mind. These solutions must move across networks to find the appropriate problems. Many problems can only be resolved by the combination of multiple ideas. Knowledge sharing enables the accumulation of ideas that can solve a problem when combined. Paul Kennedy, in *Engineers of Victory*, notes there was never a single 'wonder weapon' that arrived perfectly formed. Instead, the solutions resulted from several complementary developments coming together after many setbacks. Each of the case studies Kennedy presents, from anti-submarine warfare in the Battle of the Atlantic through long-range escort for strategic bombers to amphibious warfare, reinforces this convergence of ideas and technologies.[56] These ideas were brought together by sharing knowledge across networks and, through constraints, selecting which problems to solve and thus providing common direction to exploration.

Aside from spreading and improving ideas, knowledge management is fundamental to the institutionalisation of adaptations. Knowledge must move from individuals, where learning first occurs, through groups to the organisation so that knowledge can be embedded within the formal strictures of the organisation. Institutionalisation is crucial to the

sustainment of adaptation and learning. Without institutionalisation, knowledge is easily forgotten and must then be continually re-learnt, often at a cost. In terms of exploitation and exploration, institutionalisation is the transition of knowledge from being explored to being exploited.

Organisations must have learning mechanisms that can collect and interpret knowledge and feedback. Without formal mechanisms, often incumbent in the vertical network, adaptations remain localised, thus limiting the benefits for exploration.[57] The presence of formal learning mechanisms is crucial to institutionalising knowledge and fully learning the lessons of combat. However, these learning mechanisms are imperfect—they will be unable to capture all lessons of war. This is particularly true for the disaggregated nature of liberal and horizontal networks in knowledge sharing. Fox summarises this challenge:

> The real problem though was the knowledge that fell between the cracks, occurring outside the army's institutional processes. The army tried to harness the knowledge found within these individual exchanges through conferences and discussions after training schools: it recognised that such knowledge was important. However, the ad hoc occurrence of these exchanges was far more difficult to capture and codify.[58]

Fox's summary highlights the difficulties of disaggregated knowledge and of tacit knowledge. Though mechanisms, such as those identified by Fox, can mitigate knowledge loss across wide networks, there will still be gaps in what is captured. This is particularly the case for tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge presents a major challenge to knowledge management, which will be discussed later.

In addition to collating results of exploration, organisational learning mechanisms must support analysing those results. This informs the selection of ideas for exploitation across the organisation—though it should not unnecessarily constrain localised adaptations. Learning mechanisms which analyse the results of exploration provide feedback based on aggregated data to inform problem framing, constraints and subsequent experimentation. Such learning mechanisms can resolve differences in subjective experiences based on different contexts to improve how localised solutions transfer across the institution.[59]

A significant challenge in analytical mechanisms is the selection of appropriate metrics and separating the various factors involved in military effectiveness. As Fox and others have noted, there is a multiplicity of factors that complicate assessing military performance and the impact of organisational learning on that performance.[60] This challenge also highlights the sensitivity of military outcomes to such contextual factors as well as the enduring role of chance, fog and friction.[61] Despite these challenges, learning mechanisms must provide means to assess performance rather than simply

capturing data without subsequent action.[62] One mechanism for this is the use of constraints. Constraints provide measures of performance and effectiveness by setting direction, as previously discussed. This allows captured knowledge to be analysed and facilitates adaptation.

Institutionalisation is not just the preservation of knowledge in formal and informal strictures. It is also the transfer of institutional knowledge to members of the organisation. This occurs through both formal and informal (or ambient) mechanisms to inculcate members into the group. This is, in part, what allows ideas to be exploited by the organisation. Organisations should, where possible, transfer critical knowledge through formal and deliberate mechanisms rather than ambient transfers. Relying too much on ambient transfer risks learning the wrong lessons and doctrine, as Gordon notes.[63] However, not all knowledge can be transferred explicitly. Significant portions of knowledge are transferred ambiently through, for example, socialisation processes, on-the-job training and mentoring.[64] These mechanisms are also how tacit knowledge is transferred. While militaries should not be reliant on informal dissemination mechanisms, militaries must equally recognise their ubiquity and usefulness in sharing knowledge. Formal learning mechanisms must therefore be complemented by a variety of informal mechanisms, often occurring through liberal and horizontal networks, so individuals and groups can 'interpret and make sense of their experiences and share new operational knowledge through social interaction'.[65] Getting this knowledge transfer right matters because adaptation is contingent—the options of the system are constrained by previous choices. Learning the wrong lessons can limit future choices and reduce the adaptability of the system.

Dissemination mechanisms change because of the dynamic balance between exploitation and exploration. Hone argues that exploration was initially dominant in the USN because it possessed a small officer corps and featured a slow socialisation process prior to the Second World War.[66] The rapid influx of officers and sailors due to mobilisation demanded a rapid socialisation process, which shifted the USN's focus to exploitation and reduced variability. The mobilisation of the British Army during the First World War demonstrated a similar pattern.[67] In both cases, variability was reduced to limit risk and loss and quickly integrate civilians into the military. March affirms this aspect, noting that slow socialisation processes, combined with moderate turnover, 'sustained variability of individual beliefs, thereby improving organisational and average individual knowledge in the long run'.[68]

The potency of modern computing and communication systems can support the distributed exploration and knowledge management necessary for large-scale combat operations. However, this must be tempered by discipline to avoid overwhelming knowledge management systems. Writing about command and control, Gordon argues

that increasingly capable communications systems result in their increased use. In Gordon's words, 'the volume of traffic expands to meet capacity'.[69] The risk here, as it applies to adaptation, is that knowledge management systems will become overloaded—a triumph of noise over signal. An excess of knowledge to analyse and share may not only overload the systems responsible for managing that knowledge but may also overload the recipients of that knowledge, who may be unable to absorb new knowledge. These are the exact conditions which increase adaptation lag and diminish the ability to cope with accelerated change. Such a risk is also an example of process over product, where knowledge is transferred without consideration of the recipients' capacity to absorb that knowledge. Another way to view this challenge is in terms of resources.

Leaders play a significant role in managing and authorising the use of resources to investigate new ideas. New ideas flow from the various points across an organisation to the points of authority that can approve and resource change. The resources involved, however, are more than simply money or material—they are also time and workload. Without sufficient capacity in terms of time and workload, individuals and organisations will be unable to interpret their environment or changes within it.[70] Leaders must be able to effectively manage capacity to ensure Army's people can 'connect the dots across functions, imagine alternative futures, and make sense of their work' instead of allowing 'a culture of urgency and perpetual motion' to crowd out exploration.[71]

Conclusion

The importance of exploration is captured by Sir Michael Howard's famous remark:

> I am willing to dogmatically declare that whatever doctrine the armed forces are working on now, they have got it wrong. I am also tempted to declare that it does not matter that they have got it wrong. What does matter is their capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.[72]

The capacity to 'get it right' depends on the organisation's capacity for exploration. Without the mechanisms to investigate alternative approaches, there is little way to escape the tyranny of exploitation. Militaries which can effectively utilise exploration are more likely to encounter winning ideas and alternatives than those which exclude exploration in favour of a bias for exploitation.

Exploration allows organisations to anticipate changes in war—drawing on Douhet's famous remark that 'victory smiles on those who anticipate changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur'.[73] The remarks of Douhet and Howard may, on the surface, appear mutually exclusive—one

claims anticipation over adaptation, the other the reverse. These remarks, however, are complementary. One must continue to explore alternatives and anticipate changes despite the probability of getting it wrong, because exploration is what enables one to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.

Parallel experimentation offers the Australian Army an approach to capitalise more on the creativity of its people, across all levels of the organisation, by creating a community of exploration. Parallel experimentation uses variability through delegation and connection to drive exploration. This, in turn, is a function of Army's knowledge management. Though perfection is unattainable, enhancing knowledge management can improve the returns of exploration in competition and conflict without the major resources needed to directly increase exploration.

Though exploration comes with costs and risk, the long-term effectiveness of the Army depends on the quality of its exploration efforts. Delegating the authority to explore and connecting the explorers, Army can mitigate the risks of exploitation and centralised exploration. Hardwiring adaptation means being able to both exploit and explore—parallel experimentation offers a useful paradigm to improve how Army explores and adapts to constant change.

About the Author

Lieutenant Chris Wooding is an Australian Army officer. He has previously published in the Australian Army Journal, Journal of Contemporary Issues in Air and Space Power, and in blogs such as Grounded Curiosity and The Forge. He also has a chapter published in Australian Perspectives on Air and Space Power: Past, Present, Future (2023). Chris is the 2025 recipient of the Wrigley Prize for the Chief of Air Force Writing Competition.

ENDNOTES

1 Aimée Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

2 '2026 National Defence Strategy and 2026 Integrated Investment Program', *Department of Defence* (website), at: www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2026-national-defence-strategy-2026-integrated-investment-program.

3 There is a noted lack of consensus within military innovation studies over definitions for adaptation and innovation. For this essay, adaptation is used as the umbrella term for adaptation, innovation and other similar terms to avoid the quagmire of differing definitions. David W Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Frank Hoffman, *Mars Adapting: Military Change During War* (Naval Institute Press, 2021).

4 Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire*, pp. 9–10.

5 Australian Army, *The Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024* (Australian Army, 2024); Andrew Carr, 'Owning Time', *Australian Army Journal* 20, no. 1 (2024).

6 Oleksandra Molloy, 'Drone Warfare in Ukraine: From Myths to Operational Reality – Part 1', *Australian Army Research Centre* (website), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/land-power-forum/drone-warfare-ukraine-myths-operational-reality-part-1.

7 The capacity to adapt is not solely held in military organisations. As will be highlighted later in the essay, external organisations, such as industry or civilian expertise, also factor into adaptation lag. Therefore, reducing adaptation lag involves the removal of several barriers between agencies both internal and external to militaries.

8 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, p. 52.

9 Frank Hoffman's 4-I Model and Trent Hone's description of innovation describe similar processes of adaptation. Frank Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, pp. 6–8, 38–43; Trent Hone, *Learning War: The Evolution of Fighting Doctrine in the U.S. Navy, 1898–1945* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 138.

10 Hoffman offers a similar model based on a continuum moving from adjust to adapt to innovate. This continuum is not used here due to earlier choices on terminology around adaptation and innovation. Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, pp. 6–8.

11 James March, 'Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning', *Organization Science* 2, no. 1 (1991): 71–87.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Hone, *Learning War* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 138.

16 Ibid.; Friedman, 'Reconnaissance-Strike Tactics, Defeat Mechanisms, and the Future of Amphibious Warfare'.

17 Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, pp. 38–43; Hone, *Learning War*, p. 138.

18 Mick Ryan (16 April 2025) 'The New Adaptation War', *Futura Doctrina*; Mick Ryan (15 April 2025) 'Placing Adaptation at the Heart of Defence Strategy', *Futura Doctrina*.

19 Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire*, p. 17.

20 James P Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility* (Free Press, 2012), p. 1.

21 March, 'Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning'.

22 Ibid.

23 Lawrence Freedman (27 April 2025) 'The Age of Forever Wars', *Comment Is Freed*.

24 March, 'Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning'.

25 Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire*, pp. 16–17.

26 Ibid., pp. 10–12.

27 Barno and Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire*, pp. 12–17.

28 Secretary of Defense Rock (22 January 2026), 'So You Want to Know Military', *History Does You*.

29 Carr, 'Owning Time'.

30 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, pp. 71–72.

31 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), pp. 278–288.

32 Gordon, *The Rules of the Game*, pp. 151, 576.

33 Ben Johnson, 'Are We All Process Monkeys Now?', *Wavell Room* (website), at: https://wavellroom.com/2023/03/17/process-monkeys.

34 Mick Ryan, 'Australia's New National Defence Strategy Must Embrace Adaptation as Warfare Evolves', *The Interpreter*, 11 February 2026, at: www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-s-new-national-defence-strategy-must-embrace-adaptation-warfare-evolves.

35 Mick Ryan, 'Home on the Range: The Australian Army Prepares for the Future', *The Interpreter*, 23 September 2025, at: www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/home-range-australian-army-prepares-future.

36 TX Hammes, 'The Changing Character of Warfare: Defense Dominates the Battlespace', Advanced Technology for Strategists course, Australian War College, 2025; Jack Watling, *The Arms of the Future: Technology and Close Combat in the Twenty-First Century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

37 BA Friedman, 'Reconnaissance-Strike Tactics, Defeat Mechanisms, and the Future of Amphibious Warfare', *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 15, no. 2 (2024): 54–78; TX Hammes, 'The Tactical Defense Becomes Dominant Again', *Joint Forces Quarterly* 103, no. 3 (2021): 10–17; Hammes, 'The Changing Character of Warfare'; Frederick W Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Mason Clark, Karolina Hird, Nataliya Bugayova, Kateryna Stepanenko, Riley Bailey and George Barros, *Ukraine and the Problem of Restoring Maneuver in Contemporary War* (Institute for the Study of War, 2024); Watling, *The Arms of the Future*; Jack Watling, *Emergent Approaches to Combined Arms Manoeuvre in Ukraine*, RUSI Insight Papers (Royal United Services Institute, 2025).

38 David Kilcullen, 'Stand-in Manoeuvre in a Contested Littoral Environment', *Australian Army Journal* 19, no. 2 (2023): 238–262.

39 Friedman, 'Reconnaissance-Strike Tactics, Defeat Mechanisms, and the Future of Amphibious Warfare'.

40 Peter Dean, 'The (Re)Rise of the Archipelagic Army: Geography, History, and the Ongoing Utility of Land Power in Australia's Littoral Arc—A Primer', *Australian Army Journal* 19, no. 2 (2023): 1–24.

41 Hone, *Learning War*, p. 139.

42 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, p. 77.

43 Hone, *Learning War*, p. 15.

44 Ibid., p. 141.

45 Ibid., p. 141.

46 Ibid., p. 141.

47 Ibid., p. 136.

48 Henry Campbell, 'Now That's Innovation: Ukrainian Army Units Compete for Weapons; Start-Ups Compete for Their Business', *The Strategist*, 27 May 2025, at: www.aspistrategist.org.au/now-thats-innovation-ukrainian-army-units-compete-for-weapons-start-ups-compete-for-their-business.

49 Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, p. 46; Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (Random House, 2013).

50 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, pp. 53–72.

51 Ibid., pp. 72–73.

52 Ibid., p. 94.

53 Alex Pentland, *Social Physics: How Social Networks Can Make Us Smarter* (Penguin Books, 2015), p. 26.

54 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, p. 94.

55 Ibid., p. 94.

56 Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (Random House, 2013).

57 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, p. 72; Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, pp. 257–259.

58 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, pp. 100–101.

59 Molloy, 'Drone Warfare in Ukraine: From Myths to Operational Reality – Part 1'; Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*.

60 Fox, *Learning to Fight*; Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*.

61 John Severini and Stephen Biddle, 'The Importance of the Battle of Savo Island', *War on the Rocks*, at: https://warontherocks.com/the-importance-of-the-battle-of-savo-island.

62 Hoffman, *Mars Adapting*, pp. 257–259.

63 Gordon, *The Rules of the Game*, p. 580.

64 Fox, *Learning to Fight*, p. 95.

65 Ibid., p. 101.

66 Ibid., p. 128.

67 Ibid., pp. 204–239.

68 March, 'Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning'.

69 Gordon, *The Rules of the Game*, p. 582.

70 Carr, 'Owning Time'.

71 Benjamin Day and Roderick Parkes, 'NATO's Dutch Disease: Can a Wartime Mindset Survive an Injection of Resources?', *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (website), at: www.fpri.org/article/2025/08/natos-dutch-disease-can-a-wartime-mindset-survive-an-injection-of-resources.

72 Michael Howard and AJ Wilson, 'Military Science in an Age of Peace', *The RUSI Journal* 119, no. 1 (1974): 3–11.

73 Guilio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (Air University Press, 2019), p. 27.

Australian Army Journal
2026, Volume XXII No 3

WEAPONISED CURIOSITY: A THEORY OF ARMY

Matthew Jeffries

2026 Chief of Army Essay Competition Runner-up

How can we rewire the Army to continually adapt to the changing character of war?

> *In times of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.*
>
> *Eric Hoffer*[1]

The 2023 Defence Strategic Review found that the Australian Defence Force was 'not fully fit for purpose'. In November 2024 the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart AO DSC, confirmed this in his own words: 'I am not assured that our systems are yet enough to win the battle of adaptation in the face of a major war in our region.'[2] In April 2025, he returned to the same theme, quoting the theorist Carl H Builder:

> An Army requires a theory of an Army … there must exist something in addition to its soldiers and tanks and guns—a concept, a strategy, a notion of who it is and what it wants to be, of what it is about and what it wants to be about.[3]

This essay accepts both Stuart's diagnosis that Army's systems are not yet enough and his solution, 'a theory of an Army'.

The Australian Army has actively pursued adaptation down the same path since at least 2011. Plan Beersheba restructured the combat brigades.[4] Accelerated warfare reframed the operating environment, and 'Army in Motion' refined how Army responded.[5] The Defence Strategic Review reset the strategic guidance,[6] and the National Defence Strategies operationalised it.[7] Each effort was substantial and well resourced. None of these activities has been enough to convince Army's most senior officer that we are ready to meet the future threat. Army has not failed to adapt because it lacks effort, professionalism or reform activity. It has failed to adapt because most reform has

operated inside Army's inherited model of itself. To continually adapt to the changing character of war, Army must make that model visible, testable and answerable.

This essay argues that reform has missed the layer at which adaptation actually happens. Two decades of structural and cultural reform have rearranged Army based on its understanding of a world that no longer exists. To rewire Army to continually adapt to the changing character of war requires epistemic reform: reform of how Army knows, tests and updates what it believes about itself. Assumptions have to come into the open. They have to be tested against evidence. People who change their minds have to be rewarded for it. Army has to weaponise curiosity. Three institutional rewires do that work, and a fourth move amplifies the learners Army already has. The rewires create permanent institutional surfaces on which the model becomes visible: an external model audit, observation-bound doctrine and a standing model audit. These artefacts are hardwired through amplification of the learners Army already has, the people who can read what the surfaces show. What makes the four moves distinct from previous reform is that they target Army's understanding of itself, 'a notion of who it is and what it wants to be, of what it is about and what it wants to be about'.

A Model Army

An organisational model is the institutionally held set of underlying assumptions about the world that the organisation operates in. Edgar Schein places these underlying assumptions at the deepest of three cultural levels, beneath the published values and the visible artefacts that organisations more readily discuss.[8] Argyris and Schön describe the same layer as the institution's 'theory in use': the level at which things are actually done, an internal operating model below the 'espoused theory' that strategy documents articulate.[9] Karl Weick calls it the 'enacted environment': the world the institution constructs through its own processes and procedures and then proceeds to act within.[10] In this essay, Army's 'model' means its inherited theory-in-use: the assumptions embedded in how it plans, buys, trains, promotes, writes doctrine and measures readiness.

Organisational studies converge on several characteristics common to institutional models. Within Army the underlying assumptions that define the model are rarely articulated. They can be inferred from the operating procedures the institution maintains: what it plans for, how it acquires capability, how it manages careers, how it codifies knowledge, and how it measures itself. Another characteristic of the Army model is that it is inherited. It is not chosen by the people who live inside it. It is the medium through which institutional thought is conducted and activities are executed. Over time, the world in which the model operates changes; the model does not pace this change, except by deliberate effort. The gap between the model and the world widens silently because the

model's output continues to look rational when there is no mechanism to question if the world that the model was developed for still exists.

The key claim of this essay is that underlying assumptions that reinforce the model are not interchangeable with the structural and cultural layers that reform has so far addressed. Restructuring the brigades or rewriting the values statement does not test the underlying assumptions. The institution can complete a five-year cultural reform program, write new doctrine, and stand up new force elements without reforming the model that drives the theory of Army. Without a mechanism to test the model's alignment to the changing character of war, Army will not close the adaptation gap.

In *Military Misfortunes*, Eliot Cohen and John Gooch describe institutional reorganisation as a substitute for thought rather than a result of it.[11] They observed a clear pattern: a diagnosis is made, and a structure is announced, published, briefed and resourced. A new diagnosis arrives, and a new structure is announced. The activity satisfies the demand for response without testing the model inside which the diagnosis was made. The gap between the model's understanding of the world and the reality of the world grows.

The Russia-Ukraine war clearly demonstrates the gap. Brave1 was established in April 2023 by the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation. In April 2025, Brave1 Market launched with 1,500 suppliers and over 540 grants, billed as 'the Amazon for the military, giving units the ability to buy exactly what they need, right when they need it'.[12] This emerging defence innovation ecosystem supported the growth of Madyar's Birds, the 414th Unmanned Strike Aviation Regiment, which achieved brigade status in January 2025.[13] Ukraine established a new military procurement and distribution system and a new military brigade focused on cutting-edge emerging drone technology, fielded by an army at war, under fire, while losing terrain. Ukraine's government and armed forces were forced to confront a changing world; they were forced to become learners.

The priorities of a military preparing for war and a military at war are different. Their models of the world are different. Australia is moving further toward a centralised delivery model in the form of an integrated Defence Delivery Group from 1 July 2026, with an independent Defence Delivery Agency from 1 July 2027.[14] The trajectory is centralisation away from the units that procurement is meant to support. A Ukrainian unit can access a website to order equipment. An Australian unit must work through the centralised structure. The December 2025 Major Projects Report from the Australian National Audit Office found that Defence's major equipment acquisition projects have averaged 21 months of schedule slippage.[15] The average project slippage time is the time it took Ukraine to establish, equip and field a cutting-edge drone brigade and an online military marketplace accessible by individual units.

The Bounded Model

More than six decades of theoretical research articulate why the Australian Army has not yet built a durable mechanism to 'be masters of our most consequential trade'.[16] The value of this theory is not academic ornament; it is that the theory explains why smart people inside serious institutions can make rational decisions that still leave the institution misaligned with reality.

Herbert Simon's foundational insight is that decision-making is rational only inside a model the decision-maker occupies and largely cannot see. Simon writes that human decision-making is 'intended and bounded' and that decision-makers 'satisfice because they have not the wits to maximize'.[17] The decision-maker cannot capture the full complexity of the model due to limited information, limited cognitive capacity and limited time. Every decision an institution makes is rational within its bounds and its own understanding of its world.

In their 1958 publication *Organizations*, March and Simon treat the organisation as an information-processing system that acts on a simplified internal representation of its environment.[18] The organisation does not perceive the world. It perceives the briefs, doctrines and reports through which the world has been prescribed to it. Bounded rationality, once organisational, becomes a defining property of the model. Decisions made within the bounds of the model appear rational to the decision-maker because they are aligning to the model's construct.

In their 1963 publication *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* Cyert and March argue that an organisation does not behave; its members behave, and the pattern of those behaviours is what the organisation is.[19] Each member acts within the model that the institution has supplied. The aggregate of those model-bound decisions is the institution's output. There is no separate institutional intelligence sitting above the decisions and correcting them. If the model drifts, every individual decision drifts with it, and the drift is invisible at the individual level because each decision still looks rational inside the model the institution provided.

In 1995, Karl Weick named the perceptual mechanism by which institutions hold their model in place: sensemaking. Weick describes sensemaking as the process by which institutions construct intelligibility from streams of events.[20] The institution receives events already sorted into the categories the model provides. When events fit the model, the model is confirmed. When events fail to match the model, the institution re-fits the events. As a defensive routine, the institution reclassifies anomalies, softens contradictions, and obfuscates signals that should disturb the model.

In 1990, Argyris defined defensive routines as the patterns by which organisations protect themselves from the threat of learning something that they would rather not know. His formulation is that defensive routines 'make the undiscussable undiscussable and make their undiscussability undiscussable'.[21] The model itself becomes one of those undiscussables. Questioning it is read by the institution as disloyalty, naivety or category error. In a 1978 publication with Schön, Argyris gave this its sharpest form: institutions can engage in single-loop learning that adjusts behaviour within the model, but will suppress double-loop learning, which adjusts the model.[22] Defensive routines are why model-level audits do not happen even when model-level failure is obvious.

The five theoretical concepts, when stacked together, form a single mechanism. Institutions adapt to their model of the world rather than to the world itself. The model is supplied by the institution. The model drifts as the world changes. The drift produces no internal signal because the model's decisions look rational from within. Sensemaking re-fits any anomaly back into the model before it can register as a contradiction. Defensive routines prevent the model itself from being discussed openly and honestly. Its rational response, within its model, is to apply more of the model. The harder it tries, the less the gap closes, because the effort is measured against a world that no longer exists. The mechanism's combined effect is the suppression of curiosity itself.

This is the theoretical foundation for why decades of structural reform may not have closed the adaptation gap despite serious institutional effort. It is not for lack of effort or professional mastery within the institution. Reform inside the model is single-loop learning. It measures the institution's behaviour against its own metrics, which are themselves part of the model. New structures, new doctrines and new technology are absorbed into the existing model and rendered legible by it. The gap that the reforms were meant to close is the gap between the model and the world, and that gap is exactly what the institution's own instruments cannot measure.

Army's Inherited Model

Army's model is visible in five places, each a behavioural default: what the institution plans for, how it acquires capabilities, how it manages careers, how it codifies knowledge, and how it measures itself. Together they describe the world the institution implicitly believes it is operating in.

The central organising case for Army planning remains force-on-force land combat, even where strategic guidance has moved on. The strategic directions sequence that runs from Plan Beersheba (2011) through Accelerated Warfare (2018) and Army in Motion (2020) modernises the language but preserves the model. Other tasks (littoral, long-range strike,

information manoeuvre, supporting joint effects) are appended to this model rather than displacing it. The consequence is that the reform intended to achieve adaptation is filtered through the legacy model.

Technology is the most obvious gap between the model and the real world. Ukraine's Brave1, examined above, illustrates the gap at speed. The compressed timeframes are even more stark when compared with the Defence capability life cycle, which routinely spans 10 to 20 years for major land systems. The cycle's tempo assumes more stability than the current environment provides; it therefore risks producing obsolescence by design rather than by accident. These extended cycles become less tolerable as autonomous systems, machine learning and robotics are moving along steep capability curves. If the trajectory holds even loosely, a 2026 capability decision taken against a 2016 technology baseline is being made against a reference point now multiple orders of magnitude obsolete by the time the system enters service. It was procured for a world that no longer exists.

Why the Model Is Invisible

Diane Vaughan's *The Challenger Launch Decision* examines the closest historical analogue to the position the Australian Army now occupies. NASA did not lose Challenger because individuals were negligent. NASA lost Challenger because, over the preceding 30 years, the agency's model of acceptable solid rocket booster O-ring erosion drifted by small steps.[23] Each compromise was rational and accepted by NASA's model of the world. No single decision crossed a visible line. The model itself was never re-examined because it was not anybody's job, and the people best placed to do so had built their careers inside it. The disaster on 28 January 1986 was the moment the model's misalignment with reality became visible. Vaughan named the pattern: normalisation of deviance. Within Army each individual cell, directorate, branch and group acts to meet their commander's intent within the rational bounds of their area. It is not currently anybody's job to question the bounds of the model. The Australian Army risks normalising deviance—not through negligence but through repeated rational decisions made inside an unexamined model.

The Australian Army's promotion system is one of the central instruments by which the model is preserved. Don Snider and Lloyd Matthews, in *The Future of the Army Profession*, identified the dynamic with reference to the United States Army: the profession is shaped most powerfully by the gates at which its members are advanced.[24] An officer with 20 years invested in the existing planning process, orders format and reporting chain has a rational interest in the continued relevance of those skills. Within the current career management model there is no incentive to question underlying

assumptions. This is the ordinary arithmetic of professional life, not a moral failing. Officers who diverge from the model at the captain or major level do not reach the appointments at which the model's framing could be revisited. The selection mechanism is doing exactly what it was designed to do. It rewards exemplary performance in the bounded rationality of the current model.

Lieutenant General Stuart's November 2024 Australian National University address illustrates the mechanism in operation. The Chief of Army organised the Army profession around three pillars (jurisdiction, expertise and self-regulation), named command accountability as the wellspring of self-regulation, and identified that the command relationship between Army and the individual has not thrived these last two decades.[25] The address is rich in the language of accountability. It does not connect the call for accountability to the gates at which the institution actually advances its officers. This is not a critique of the Chief of Army; it is an example of the power of the model. Even when the most senior officer in the Army identifies the right terrain, the prescription that follows operates within the constraints of the model the diagnosis was built to expose.

Professional military education is the final reinforcement. The Australian Command and Staff Course, which is required for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, delivers Joint Professional Military Education at the institutional level around a syllabus that presents the existing planning model as the syllabus to master.[26] Students are assessed on their fluency in the model. The model is not flagged as a model; it is taught as the way the world is. A graduate who has internalised the model is, by the institution's own standards, more professionally developed than one who has not. The medium of thought becomes invisible in proportion to how thoroughly it is taught.

Three Rewires

Three interventions within the Army's existing authority would force the institution to perceive its own model. The rewires are themselves structural. They create new artefacts, new cells, new registers and new accountabilities. This essay's diagnosis is that two decades of structural reform have not produced epistemic change. Why would three more structural interventions succeed where prior ones have failed?

The answer is that prior reforms operated within the institution's existing model of itself. They rearranged the structures, the doctrines and the artefacts the model already knew how to produce. The three rewires proposed here are structural in form but epistemic in function. Each one creates a permanent institutional surface on which the model itself becomes visible to its inhabitants. None of them requires the institution to abandon the model immediately. Each requires the institution to put the model on the public record,

where it can be examined by people who do not share the model's assumptions and where its outputs can be tracked against the world. The structural form is the means by which the epistemic surface is created and held in place.

The External Model Audit

The first rewire is a permanent panel that sits outside Defence and reports to the Chief of Army. Its members come from places Defence rarely listens to: executives from sectors that turn over faster than Army; academics in organisational behaviour, strategic studies and decision science; allied scholars; and a small number of recently retired Australian officers whose only job is to translate. The panel meets once a year and has one question to answer: what assumptions in Army's operating model reflect a world that no longer exists? The findings go to the Chief of Army in writing. They run in the Army newspaper. Army publishes a response to every one of them within 90 days.

The composition matters. The objection that recently retired Australian officers are by definition inside the model is correct, which is why the panel's centre of gravity must sit outside the profession. The objection that NASA also had external advisory panels and they did not prevent the Challenger disaster is also correct, which is why the discipline of the rewire is not the panel's findings but the public response. NASA's panels reported privately and produced documents that were filed. The rewire's discipline is that the institution must respond, on the public record, to every finding. The pain point that forces change is the publication-and-response mechanism, not the panel's authority.

The mechanism has a working precedent in Australian Defence at the strategic level. The 2023 Defence Strategic Review was led externally by Sir Angus Houston and Professor Stephen Smith, demonstrating that an independent review at the Defence strategic level is institutionally possible.[27] The RAND Arroyo Center has provided the equivalent multi-decade external advisory function for the United States Army.[28] What does not currently exist in Australia is the standing, service-level, public-response version.

The Observation-Bound Doctrine

The second rewire connects the units that observe the gap between the model and the world to the directorates that codify the doctrine. Soldiers and junior officers in operational and exercise rotations operate within a different model (immediate, tactical, embodied), and the cross-model triangulation between their observations and the institution's codified knowledge is the signal the system needs. The evidence that Australian soldiers and junior officers can produce that signal is in the volume of professional writing already published by *The Cove*, the *Australian Army Journal* and the *Land Power Forum*.[29] The current institutional reflex is to read these outlets and to leave the doctrine cycle untouched.

Every unit returning from a major training event, exercise or operational rotation would be required to produce a structured learning artefact in a fixed format: what was expected, what was found, what changed our minds, and what the institution does not yet know. The artefact is produced by the unit in the arena, not by a directorate observing from within its own bounded rationality. Each artefact is formally tagged to specific doctrine publications. Each tag carries one of three values: this observation challenges the publication's claim, this observation supports the publication's claim, or this observation has no view on the publication. Tags aggregate in a doctrine-challenge register held by the ADF Doctrine Directorate.

When a piece of doctrine receives three independent challenge tags from three separate units, its review date is automatically advanced and the doctrine must be reviewed within 90 days. The review must address each challenge tag by accepting the challenge and updating the doctrine, or by contesting the challenge and explaining, on the public record, why the observation does not generalise. The threshold is small enough to act on early signals and large enough to filter idiosyncratic observations. The trigger for change moves from the codifier to the observer.

The objection is correct: soldier observations are model-bound too. The mechanism still works because they are also the fastest signal Army receives, and because triangulating between what soldiers see in contact and what doctrine codifies is the cheapest way to surface a gap. The pattern has working precedents. The United States Army runs the Center for Army Lessons Learned. NATO runs the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre. The Internet Engineering Task Force retires superseded standards through its request-for-comments obsoletion process. Each one couples observation to codification on a fixed cadence.[30]

The Standing Model Audit

The third rewire is the continuous companion to the first. The external model audit interrogates the institution's assumptions periodically and from outside; the standing model audit interrogates them continuously and from within. Together the two constitute Army's model audit capability. The panel surfaces what the institution has stopped seeing because it has stopped looking; the standing model audit surfaces what the institution is failing to see while it watches.

The mechanism is an Army digital vault, located in the Chief of Army's office and sized as a thin technical team. The cell ingests three classes of feeds onto a single inspectable surface:

- existing G1 to G8 reporting feeds

- external allied capability gazettes, technology benchmarks, Australian National Audit Office findings, coalition lessons learned, and open-source intelligence on the operating environment Army is preparing for
- registered forecasts—every formal Army strategic document, capability plan, force-structure decision, threat assessment, and operational concept registers its load-bearing forecasts, with a stated condition for failure.

Machine-learning software runs in the background, testing every registered forecast against the data Army holds and the signals the world is throwing off. When a forecast begins to fail, the cell flags the gap and traces every decision that rests on it. The Chief of Army sees the live picture at any moment: (1) where Army is now, (2) where the world is heading, (3) what the institution has been telling itself about that world, and (4) the gap between the (2) and (3). Calibration is no longer something the officer in post brings or fails to bring. It belongs to the institution. The cell carries the track record from one rotation to the next, and incoming officers inherit it as the starting position.

Philip Tetlock's Good Judgment Project[31] and the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity's Aggregative Contingent Estimation program proved the same point. Score forecasters on calibration over time, and accuracy improves, both for the forecaster and for the institution that holds the scores. The standing model audit borrows the method. The line that appears on the promotion-board summary is 'the officer updated when the variance signal arrived'. That is what the system is now rewarding: responsiveness to evidence.

A cell with only internal feeds is a high-fidelity mirror; a cell with internal reporting, external feeds and accountability forecasts is a continuous audit. The minimum viable version is a structured forecast register, live data feeds, and a quarterly variance review. The full instrumentation is a five- to 10-year body of work. The pattern is already being used in allied militaries: Palantir's Maven Smart System is becoming a US Department of Defense program of record in 2026,[32] and the US Army's March 2026 contract with Anduril for Lattice commits US$20 billion to the same pattern at operational altitude,[33] with Australia as the second-largest adopter under AUKUS Pillar II.[34] The standing model audit applies the pattern one floor up at the institutional altitude.

Amplifying the Learners

The three rewires create surfaces on which the model becomes visible. Surfaces are inert without people who can read them and act on what they see. Across Army those people already exist, scattered through every rank. They hold small platforms and deep institutional knowledge, whose questioning of the model has gone without

institutional backing. The fourth move is to identify them and give them voice. Project Ruthless calls openly for 'red tape targeteers' willing to challenge entrenched systems;[35] the Deputy Adjutant General leads engagement directly with frontline soldiers and non-commissioned officers. Army Innovation Day has awarded 51 contracts to industry pitches optimising the soldier and the force.[36] *The Cove* and the *Australian Army Journal* already give voices outside the model a way back in. The amplification move wires them together with permanent budget lines, position descriptions that outlast their current holders, and a single institutional commitment that keeps the rewires in place. The move is thinner than the rewires by design. The institution can specify a surface. It cannot specify a learner.

Objections

The strongest objections deserve direct answers.

The first defence is that the rewires are structural reforms in their own right. The external panel forces Army to write its underlying assumptions down and answer for them. Observation-bound doctrine puts a number on the gap between what doctrine codifies and what the field reports. The standing model audit keeps the institution's model under inspection against the world, continuously.

The second objection is that we have tried this before. We have—the First Principles Review in 2015, Pathway to Change in 2012 and again in 2017, the Defence Strategic Review in 2023, and the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide report in 2024. None of them aimed at changing how the institution holds its own picture of the world. They were structural and cultural reforms run by senior sponsors—exactly the kind this argument has been criticising. What none of them touched is whether Army's model is open to interrogation in the first place. No Australian reform program has tried it.

The third objection is the most serious. As Vaughan describes, NASA learned to see what it had stopped perceiving only after the Challenger disaster. The rewires proposed here might also be absorbed by an institution whose instinct, faced with an audit, is to shelve it; faced with a doctrine challenge register is to dispute the tags; and faced with a standing model audit is to register only forecasts that cannot be falsified. The reply is that the rewires reduce the probability of that outcome rather than eliminate it. A public response is harder to ignore than a private one. A doctrine review is hard to defer when three independent units have surfaced the same gap. A track record of calibrated forecasts outweighs a single contested judgement. The rewires do not guarantee adaptation. They make the failure to adapt visible early enough to act on, and they leave each successive Chief of Army a surface on which to stake the case for action.

Each rewire needs a permanent home outside the Chief of Army's office. The United States Army's Center for Army Lessons Learned has survived a long line of Army Chiefs of Staff because it sits inside the Training and Doctrine Command and is codified in regulation (Department of the Army Pamphlet 11-33). The model audit needs the same kind of regulatory anchor. The doctrine challenge register has to live inside a directorate with its own command authority. The standing model audit requires a permanent technical and analytical home, with position descriptions and budget lines that survive the people who currently hold them. Without permanent homes, the rewires depend on each successive Chief of Army to defend them. That is the failure mode the diagnosis predicts.

Conclusion

The Australian Army has spent more than a decade treating an epistemic problem as a structural one. Continuing the same pattern will produce the same result. The question the 2026 Chauvel Essay asks is how to rewire the Army to continually adapt. The answer this essay has offered is not a further restructuring of the bricks the institution is built from but the installation of permanent institutional surfaces: a firm foundation on which the model itself becomes visible, examinable and answerable.

The Australian Army has prided itself in being a professional and learned organisation. Over the last few decades, it has found itself exquisitely prepared and structured, and culturally reformed for a world that no longer exists. Epistemic reform invites external voices to question our assumptions; it links the doctrine to our soldiers and uses machine learning to connect the pieces of our organisation that we cannot connect ourselves. Taken together, these moves constitute the theory of Army Lieutenant General Stuart has called for. Under the current system it is not anybody's job to fix the model. Through epistemic reform and weaponised curiosity it can become everyone's job to exemplify, amplify and empower an Army of learners.

About the Author

Major Matthew Jefferies is a Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers officer serving in workforce design within G1 Army at Army Headquarters. He enlisted as a combat engineer in 2001 and graduated from the Royal Military College in 2004. He has served in unit, joint and headquarters roles, including a secondment to the Australian Submarine Agency, and deployed to Afghanistan in 2011 and the Middle East in 2019. He holds a Master of Strategic People Management from UNSW Canberra. He is interested in how Army learns, adopts and adapts technology to empower its people.

ENDNOTES

1 Eric Hoffer, *Reflections on the Human Condition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 22.

2 Simon Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession', speech, ANU National Security College, 25 November 2024, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2024-11-25/challenges-australian-army-profession.

3 Simon Stuart, 'Strengthening the Australian Army Profession', speech, Lowy Institute, 3 April, 2025, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2025-04-03/strengthening-australian-army-profession.

4 Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013), p. 85.

5 Rick Burr, *Accelerated Warfare: Futures Statement for an Army in Motion* (Department of Defence, 2020), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/other/accelerated-warfare; Rick Burr, *Army in Motion: Commander's Statement for Australia's Army* (Department of Defence, 2020), at: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/other/accelerated-warfare.

6 Department of Defence, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

7 Department of Defence, *2024 National Defence Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024); Department of Defence, *2026 National Defence Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2026).

8 Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

9 Chris Argyris and Donald A Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

10 Karl E Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, 2nd edition (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

11 Eliot A Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

12 'About Brave1', *Brave1* (website), at: https://brave1.gov.ua/en; 'Ukraine Officially Launches Brave1 Market—the First Online Defense Technology Marketplace for the Ukrainian Army', *Digital State UA* (website), 28 April 2025, at: https://digitalstate.gov.ua/news/tech/brave1-market-ukrayina-zapuskaye-marketpleys-viyskovykh-innovatsiy.

13 'Madyar's Birds Regiment Expanded to Brigade', *Militarnyi*, 10 December 2024, at: https://militarnyi.com/en/news/madyars-birds-regiment-expanded-to-brigade.

14 'Reforming Defence Capability Development and Delivery', media release, *Defence Ministers* (website), 1 December 2025, at: www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2025-12-01/reforming-defence-capability-development-delivery.

15 Australian National Audit Office, *2024–25 Major Projects Report*, Auditor-General Report No. 16 of 2025–26 (Canberra: Australian National Audit Office, 2025).

16 Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession'.

17 Herbert A Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization*, 4th edition (New York: Free Press, 1997).

18 James G March and Herbert A Simon, *Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1958).

19 Richard M Cyert and James G March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

20 Karl E Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 1995).

21 Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990).

22 Chris Argyris and Donald A Schön, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

23 Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), at: https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo3625477.html.

24 Don M Snider and Lloyd J Matthews (eds), *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

25 Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession'.

26 'Australian Command and Staff Course', *Defence* (website), at: www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/education-training/courses/australian-command-staff-course (accessed 30 April 2026).

27 Department of Defence, *National Defence*.

28 'About Arroyo', *RAND* (website), at: www.rand.org/ard/about.html (accessed 30 April 2026).

29 *The Cove* and the *Land Power Forum* are managed by the Australian Army; the *Australian Army Journal* is published by the Australian Army Research Centre.

30 Department of the Army, *Pamphlet 11-33: Guide to the Army Lessons Learned Program* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2022); NATO Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre, *The NATO Lessons Learned Handbook*, 3rd edition (NATO: 2016); 'Informal Guide to IETF Process Documents', Internet Engineering Task Force (website), at: www.ietf.org/process/informal (accessed 30 April 2026).

31 Philip E Tetlock and Dan Gardner, *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* (New York: Crown, 2015); Dirk B Warnaar et al., 'The Aggregative Contingent Estimation System: Selecting, Rewarding, and Training Experts in a Wisdom of Crowds Approach to Forecasting', AAAI Spring Symposium: Wisdom of the Crowd, 2012.

32 Brandi Vincent, 'DOD Components Face "Aggressive" Timeline for Maven Smart System Transition', *DefenseScoop*, 15 April 2026, at: https://defensescoop.com/2026/04/15/palantir-maven-smart-system-pentagon-program-transition-feinberg.

33 'U.S. Army Awards $20B Anduril to Deploy Lattice AI Open Architecture for Battlefield Integration', *Army Recognition*, 23 March 2026, at: www.armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2026/u-s-army-awards-20b-anduril-to-deploy-lattice-ai-open-architecture-for-battlefield-integration; 'Lattice for Mission Autonomy', *Anduril* (website), at: hwww.anduril.com/lattice/mission-autonomy (accessed May 2026).

34 'Anduril's Lattice Platform: Architecture, Accountability, and the Future of Autonomous Warfare in American Defense Strategy', *Foreign Affairs Forum*, 21 April 2026, at: www.faf.ae/home/2026/4/21/andurils-lattice-platform-architecture-accountability-and-the-future-of-autonomous-warfare-in-american-defense-strategy.

35 'Australian Army Implements Ruthless Program to Cut Bureaucratic Tape, Empower Front-line Leaders', *Defence Connect*, 16 February 2026, at: www.defenceconnect.com.au/land/17688-australian-army-implement-ruthless-program-to-cut-bureaucratic-tape-empower-frontline-leaders-2.

36 'Call for Innovative Pitches to Optimise the Soldier for Littoral Operations', media release, *Defence* (website), 23 May 2024, at: www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2024-05-23/call-innovative-pitches-optimise-soldier-littoral-operations.

Australian Army Journal
2026, Volume XXII No 3

BOOK REVIEW

Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023
ISBN: 978-0-2280-1929-9, 454pp, RRP $95.00AUD (paperback)

Editors: Joakim Berndtsson, Irina Goldenberg and Stéfanie von Hlatky

Reviewed by: Matthew Jones

Joakim Berndtsson, Irina Goldenberg and Stéfanie von Hlatky's 2023 edited volume *Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century* offers a timely examination of how modern defence organisations are broadening their approach to national security beyond the regular military. Focusing on 'total defence' as a concept, the book explores integration across full-time military, reserve forces, civilian personnel and private contractors. Through comparative case studies, the contributors highlight the cultural, structural and institutional challenges of forging a unified defence enterprise. The contributors argue that harnessing all of these elements is essential in an era when threats range from great-power conflict to pandemics and natural disasters. The book's overarching message—that defence is a whole-of-nation endeavour, not the sole preserve of full-time soldiers—resonates strongly with the Australian Army's current focus on flexible force generation and national resilience.[1]

The editors describe a 'total defence force' (TDF) as a holistic defence workforce encompassing not only regular armed forces but also reservists, defence civilians, and contractors.[2] This concept signals a shift away from viewing defence as the military's exclusive domain towards a 'whole-of-society' approach. Contemporary threats—from hybrid warfare and terrorism to pandemics and natural disasters—demand capabilities and expertise beyond what regular forces alone can provide. Many countries have adopted integration models such as the UK's 'Whole Force',[3] the US's 'Total Force'[4] or Canada's 'Defence Team'[5] to better blend military sub-organisations and personnel groups. Crucially, the editors observe two core implications of the TDF approach. **First**, defence is no longer the purview of uniformed militaries alone; a broad spectrum of civilian agencies, industries and auxiliary personnel must be integrated, forcing

militaries to share expertise and status with new partners. **Second**, this emphasis on integration raises challenging questions about organisational culture and group identity—how can disparate groups cooperate effectively, and what are the limits of intergroup collaboration? Throughout the volume, these themes recur as contributors examine the interplay of full-time soldiers, part-time reservists, civil servants and private contractors within evolving defence structures. The scope of the book is so wide that it is impossible to discuss all the notable chapters contained within; below is a selection of the topics covered.

Sweden's reactivation of its total defence concept—after years of focus on expeditionary missions—is chronicled by Louise Olsson and Chiara Ruffa. A significant issue proved to be retention and workforce diversity: expanding the force with conscripts and civilians meant confronting longstanding norms about who 'fits' in the military. Even with strong political backing, implementation was a struggle where military culture had not adjusted. This case offers a cautionary lesson for Australia: adopting a total defence model will require redefining career paths and creating flexible service options to attract and retain the broader talent pool needed for modern operations.

Another chapter shines a light on the 'hybrid civilian'—defence civilians who operate alongside the military in deployed or critical roles. Sarah Jane Meharg's analysis shows that these individuals often serve as bridges between the armed forces and the civilian world. They can liaise with other government agencies, NGOs or local communities in ways uniformed personnel sometimes cannot, thus adding agility in complex missions. However, Meharg also points out that these civilians inhabit a grey zone of identity, which can lead to misunderstandings or under-utilisation if military personnel are unsure how to incorporate them. The takeaway for an army like Australia's is the importance of deliberately preparing and empowering such hybrid roles. Their contribution needs to be deliberately planned and valued as part of the total force.

The book does not shy away from the persistent tensions between full-time regulars and part-time reservists. Vincent Connelly's study of the British Army reveals familiar frictions: regulars sometimes doubt reservists' dedication or skills, while reservists often feel under-utilised. Connelly and, similarly, Howard Coombs in his Canadian case study, show that deliberate measures can narrow these gaps. Joint training, exchange postings, and updated policies that put part-timers on equal footing are among the practical steps they highlight. Both authors stress that proper integration is not achieved by proclamations alone—it requires persistent effort to break down biases and administrative barriers. For the ADF, the message is that cultural change and flexible personnel management are as important as structural reform in unifying the regular and reserve elements.

Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century also touches on the role of private industry and contractors in the defence ecosystem. A chapter on private military and

security companies by Michelle Jones acknowledges the specialised capabilities contractors provide, while warning of risks in over-reliance. Loss of in-house skills and unclear command authority are potential downsides. The lesson for Australia is that industry partners should be part of the total force, but with proper oversight and retention of core military expertise.

In its conclusion, the book's editors pull together these various thematic threads and emphasise key lessons. The editors repeatedly underline the benefits of a diverse defence workforce (more perspectives, surge capacity) as well as the barriers that must be overcome (cultural differences, legal and bureaucratic hurdles). Their recommendation is for deliberate strategies to foster common purpose and trust. Senior leaders must champion an inclusive 'one team' ethos, and routines like joint training and personnel exchanges should become standard to break down stereotypes. For the ADF—striving to integrate better its regular, reserve and public service components—such insights validate current efforts and highlight that building true resilience means military and civilian contributors working hand-in-glove in any crisis.

Overall, this book is both informative and thought-provoking for Australian Army and Defence leaders, particularly those involved in force design, workforce strategy and civil–military coordination centred around the National Defence Strategy. It arrives at a moment when countries from northern Europe to the Indo-Pacific are re-evaluating how to mobilise all national assets for defence. The volume shows how allied nations are redefining their forces to be more flexible and inclusive, implicitly asking whether we in Australia are doing enough to break down our own silos and leverage all of our talent. The volume does not provide one-size-fits-all answers, but its comparative insights and real-world lessons can guide our thinking. As the Australian Army pursues greater adaptability, cultural integration and civil–military partnership, *Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century* offers encouragement and concrete ideas. It affirms that many militaries are on a similar journey—and that with learning and adaptation, the goal of a truly integrated and resilient defence force is within reach.

About the Reviewer

Major Matthew Jones is an Army Reserve infantry officer and civilian paediatric surgeon currently serving as SO2 Strategic Analysis at the Australian Army Research Centre. He has commanded at a company level, posted as an instructor on the Combat Officers' Advanced Course, and deployed on multiple domestic operations. A recent graduate of the Australian Command and Staff Course, he holds a PhD in paediatric surgery, a Doctor of Medicine and a Master of Surgery, among several other tertiary qualifications. His current research focuses on the Chief of Army priority research area 'Defence of Australia'. He currently resides in Melbourne with his wife, Natalie, and their two daughters.

ENDNOTES

1 Australian Army, *Australian Army Contribution to the National Defence Strategy 2024* (Australian Army, 2024).

2 Joakim Berndtsson, Irina Goldenberg and Stéfanie Von Hlatky, 'Introduction', in Joakim Berndtsson, Irina Goldenberg and Stéfanie Von Hlatky (eds), *Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), p. 3.

3 John Louth and Trevor Taylor, *Beyond the Whole Force: The Concept of the Defence Extended Enterprise and Its Implications for the Ministry of Defence* (RUSI, 2015).

4 Ryan Kelty and Richard E Niemeyer, 'Civilians in the US Military's Total Force', in Morten G Ender, Ryan Kelty, David E Rohall and Michael D Matthews (eds), *Inclusion in the American Military: A Force for Diversity* (Lexington Books, 2023).

5 See Lise Arseneau and Amy Cameron, 'The Composition of the Defence Team', in Irina Goldenberg, Angela R Febbraro and Waylon H Dean (eds), *The Defence Team: Military & Civilian Partnership in the Canadian Armed Forces & the Department of National Defence* (Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2015).

/ BOOK REVIEW

Contemporary Military Reserves: Between the Civilian and Military Worlds

Routledge, 2022
ISBN: 9781032307213, 262 pp, $92.99

Editors: Eyal Ben-Ari and Vincent Connelly

Reviewed by: Jodie Lording

Contemporary Military Reserves: Between the Civilian and Military Worlds is an ambitious and thoughtful contribution to the sociology of military reserve service. Bringing together 12 chapters organised across four thematic sections, the volume seeks to move reserve forces out of the margins of military scholarship and place them at the centre of debates about force design, legitimacy and civil–military relations.[1] Rather than treating reservists as latent workforce pools, the editors frame reserve service as a socially embedded practice, shaped by identity, obligation and negotiation across civilian and military domains.[2]

The conceptual backbone of the book lies in two integrative ideas articulated in the introduction: reservists as 'transmigrants' who move repeatedly between civilian and military worlds, and the existence of multiple formal and informal contracts that bind reservists not only to the state but also to employers, families and communities.[3] These concepts give the volume a coherence often lacking in edited collections and encourage the reader to think about reserve service as relational and negotiated rather than purely institutional. Importantly, the editors do not present these ideas as a rigid framework but as sensitising concepts through which diverse national cases can be read comparatively.

One of the book's most consistent arguments is that integration between regular and reserve forces cannot be achieved solely by the declaration of policy on the topic. Across a number of author contributions, integration emerges as uneven, fragile and contingent on local practice. Canadian and British cases, for example, demonstrate how organisational charts and reform rhetoric frequently obscure persistent cultural differences between regular and reserve forces at unit level. Integration, where it occurs,

is shown to depend less on formal structures than on trust, prior service histories and informal accommodations. This finding has clear resonance for the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The language of the Total Workforce System (TWS) similarly promises seamless integration, yet *Contemporary Military Reserves* suggests that, without sustained attention to how integration is enacted in practice, such promises risk remaining aspirational rather than realised.

A second, and more unsettling, theme concerns the cumulative cost to reservists of inhabiting multiple identities. Reservists can be understood as social and organisational hybrids—simultaneously soldiers and civilians, positioned both within and outside the military system and committed to each sphere, while also continually moving between military and civilian contexts. The chapter examining the United States Army Reserve and National Guard is particularly informative. By linking identity, health and wellbeing, the authors show how repeated transitions between civilian employment and military service generate identity strain for individuals over time. This pressure is intensified by the National Guard's dual role as both a war-fighting force and a domestic emergency responder. While the US federal–state context is distinctive, the underlying dynamic is not. Australian reservists have increasingly been mobilised or employed for domestic crises—from the 2019–20 bushfires to pandemic response to cyclones and floods—often without adequate policy provisions to support their recovery before returning to civilian work. The book implicitly raises a question that remains largely unanswered in Australian policy: how much strain can a reserve force absorb before goodwill, wellbeing and retention begin to erode?[4]

If identity and wellbeing form one analytical axis of the volume, employer relations and skill transfer form another. Several chapters interrogate the (now familiar) assumption that reservists' civilian skills can be readily translated into military capability. The United Kingdom case is particularly revealing in this regard. Despite strong enthusiasm at the policy level for harnessing civilian expertise, the evidence suggests that such skills are unevenly recognised, poorly mapped to military roles and frequently constrained by organisational culture. Employers, while rhetorically supportive, face real costs when reservists are mobilised repeatedly, and institutional mechanisms to mitigate these costs are often underdeveloped.[5] For Australia, where the TWS relies heavily on the presumed portability of civilian skills and employer goodwill, these findings function as a caution. The volume proposes a meaningful argument that skill transfer requires active institutional mediation rather than reliance on informal arrangements or goodwill alone.

The most conceptually rich material appears in the Israeli case studies, where reserve service is embedded within a broader social covenant between citizens and the state. Here, the transmigrant concept is explored not merely as an analytical metaphor but as a lived reality shaped by obligation, legitimacy and collective memory.[6] While Australia's strategic environment and mobilisation needs differ markedly from Israel's, the contrast is instructive.

The Israeli case demonstrates what is largely absent in many other contexts: an explicit articulation of what the state owes its reservists in return for repeated service. For the ADF, this raises an uncomfortable but important question. Beyond contractual arrangements, what covenant—if any—supports Australia's growing reliance on reserve soldiers?

Notably, the book does not seek to reconcile the tension between high-obligation and low-obligation reserve systems. Instead, it allows these models to sit uneasily alongside one another. Reserves are expected to be simultaneously flexible, cost-effective and rapidly deployable, while remaining firmly embedded in civilian life. The volume documents the consequences of this contradiction without resolving it. This restraint is analytically honest, though readers seeking prescriptive solutions may find it frustrating. At the same time, it stresses the difficulty of treating reserve forces as a universal solution to contemporary defence challenges.

From an Australian perspective, one absence is striking. Although Australian scholars are cited throughout the volume—including Mark Armstrong; Samantha Crompvoets; Jodie Lording; Geoff Orme and E James Kehoe; Hugh Smith and Nick Jans; and Brad West—there is no Australian-authored chapter.[7] This omission reflects a deeper structural issue rather than editorial oversight. More than a decade ago, Jans characterised the state of military sociology in Australia as underdeveloped and institutionally fragile.[8] While dated, his critique remains pertinent. Australia has yet to build a sustained research community of military sociologists capable of contributing systematically to comparative studies of reserve service.[9] As a result, Australian experiences appear to be acknowledged but not fully represented in international scholarship.

Despite this limitation, *Contemporary Military Reserves* makes a significant contribution. Its value lies not in offering a blueprint for reserve reform but in reframing how reserve service is understood. By foregrounding identity, obligation and negotiation, the book challenges militaries to confront the social realities that underpin part-time service. For the ADF, the implications are substantial. If reservists are indeed transmigrants, policies premised on flexibility and goodwill require stronger institutional support. If employer cooperation is essential, it cannot be assumed.[10] And if reserve service is to remain sustainable, the informal contracts binding reservists to the Australian Defence Organisation must be made visible, credible and reciprocal.

In summary, this volume deserves close attention from Australian policymakers, scholars and practitioners concerned with the present and future of reserve forces. It is analytically rigorous, conceptually ambitious and quietly challenging. At the same time, its omissions—particularly regarding Australia—highlight the need for greater domestic investment in military sociology. Until that gap is addressed, Australia's reserve—and arguably regular—experience will continue to be discussed through the lenses of others rather than articulated on its own terms.

About the Reviewer

Brigadier Jodie Lording CSM is an Australian Army reservist with over 30 years' experience. She has commanded at home and on operations, including deployments to Timor, the Middle East and Domestic Operations. She also served as the chief logistic planner within a 3-Star Coalition Headquarters. Her civilian career centres on learning and development, human resource management and IT business management, coupled with serving on a number of boards. Jodie holds numerous academic qualifications in music, education and strategic studies. Her academic interests centre on military sociology, with a particular emphasis on phenomenological methodologies. Her doctoral research examines army reserve recruitment and retention in Australia and the United Kingdom, while her most recent postgraduate work explores how diarchal structures are experienced within defence culture. She was awarded the Secretary and CDF prize at the Defence and Strategic Studies Course in 2024. She is currently Commander of the 5th Brigade.

ENDNOTES

1 The volume's sections are: 'Between Military and Civilian Spheres', 'Identity and Motivation', 'Transferring Skills' and 'Political Dimensions'. The contributions include nationally grounded studies from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, Argentina, South Korea and Estonia, alongside a chapter examining reserve forces through NATO's approach to total defence. Together, these contributions demonstrate a comparative reach beyond the usual Anglophone focus, even as much of the empirical weight remains transatlantic. Eyal Ben-Ari and Vincent Connelly, 'Contents', in Eyal Ben-Ari and Vincent Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves: Between the Civilian and Military Worlds* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2022), p. vii.

2 See Ben-Ari and Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves*.

3 See ibid., 'Introduction: Negotiating Reservists: Transmigration and Multiple Contracts'.

4 Australian scholars cited in the volume address this issue intermittently; however, their work does not yet constitute a clearly identifiable or sustained academic focus.

5 On employer relations and the limits of civilian skill transfer, see Rachel Woodward et al., 'Civilian Skills and Military Needs: The Case of the United Kingdom', in Ben-Ari and Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves*; Eleri Lillemäe, Taavi Laanepere and Kairi Kasearu, 'Multiple Contracts Concept as Opportunity to Ease Challenges for Estonian Employers' Obligations Concerning Employees' Reserve Service in Military', in Ben-Ari and Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves*.

6 Nir Gazit, Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Covenants and Contracts: The Israeli Reserve System', in Ben-Ari and Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves*. See also Edna Lomsky-Feder, Nir Gazit and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Reserve Soldiers as Transmigrants', *Armed Forces & Society* 34, no. 4 (2008): 593–614.

7 In the introduction, the editors explicitly cite Australian scholarship by Crompvoets (2013), Lording (2015), Smith and Jans (2011) and West (2018); other Australian authors appear only later in the volume. Ben-Ari and Connelly (eds), *Contemporary Military Reserves*, p. 1.

8 Nick Jans, 'The Sorry State of Military Sociology in Australia', *Australian Defence Force Journal* 175 (2008): 43–50.

9 The Australian Defence College has made substantive progress in developing a research community of practice (CoP) for doctoral candidates and graduates to facilitate information sharing and peer support. This CoP extends well beyond military sociology to include research across a wide range of disciplines relevant to Defence.

10 Brad West and Josh Healy found that Australian civilian employers had 'limited appreciation' for the 'transferability of skills attained through reserve service', with some Army reservists 'frequently' experiencing hostility, sanctions and discrimination in their civilian workplaces. See 'Executive Summary', in Brad West and Josh Healy, *Drawing on Reserves: Assessing Civilian Employer/Manager Support for Employees' Part-Time Military Service*, Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 28 (Australian Army Research Centre, 2025).

/ BOOK REVIEW

Symbols and Sacrifice in War: National Identity and the Will to Fight

Georgetown University Press, 2025
ISBN: 9781647125783, 264pp, $44.95 USD

Author: Kirstin JH Brathwaite

Reviewed by: Andrew Frain

The relationship between national identity and combat motivation is, without question, a topic of huge importance. At the same time, there are no widely accepted authoritative accounts of that relationship; nor are there trusty playbooks for practitioners. Those charged with navigating the currents of national identity as they pertain to military effectiveness—when training and enculturating military personnel, for instance—must rely on their own intuitions or, instead, on the educated speculation of seasoned colleagues. It is in this context that we should applaud Kirstin JH Brathwaite's attempt to bring theory and empiricism to this topic.

In *Symbols and Sacrifice in War: National Identity and the Will to Fight,* Associate Professor Brathwaite offers the reader a clear-cut explanation of how the strength and content of national identity relate to combat motivation, in the form of a new theory: the national identity theory of combat motivation. In this theory, high levels of willingness to fight are predicted when there is a unified national identity and when the goals of war align with the myths and symbols of that identity. The presence of either one of those, unity or alignment, will result in minimally adequate willingness to fight.

The striking simplicity of the theory is likely to win over some readers. Other readers, however, will worry whether a theory so clear cut will inevitably be an overreach. Is too much overlooked in the accompanying analysis of combat motivation? It is a brief treatise, after all, with six chapters across approximately 200 pages. The book begins with a theory and methods chapter, followed by one chapter analysing national identity and other structural elements across Second World War British imperial forces, then a chapter for each of the Malayan, North African and European operational theatres. Unfortunately, yes, by the concluding chapter, the reader is never within reach of meaningful support for tenets

of national identity theory. Such is the gulf between evidence and conclusion that it is worth reverse-engineering the book's core argument so as to understand how that gulf arose.

National identity theory appears to have been tilted off course by the choice to develop the theory as an antidote to small-unit cohesion analyses of combat motivation. As the author tells it, small-unit cohesion is, by and large, the dominant explanation for combat motivation, such that any other contributing factors are diminished or outright disregarded. That characterisation of the relevant literature is a distortion. Small-unit cohesion perspectives largely arose to refute the widespread presumption that larger-scale sociological structures, such as religions or nationalities, will be the most potent source of commitment to a military cause.[1] The small-unit cohesion message is simply that it is common for soldiers to be highly motivated to protect the dignity and safety of those who share the same lived experience as them (i.e., those within the 'band of brothers'[2]).

It is the act of stripping small-unit cohesion analyses of that analytical context,[3] and caricaturing them into a standalone and complete theory of combat motivation, that allows national identity theory to be pitched as a crucial missing piece of the puzzle. And that might have been fine—unnecessarily adversarial to the extant literature, yes, but not fatal for the argument. The irrevocable damage occurred when the author went on to adopt a bold and implicitly quantitative position: in general, national identity will trump small-unit cohesion as a driver of combat motivation. Such a *quantitative* position requires, of course, *quantitative* substantiation—substantiation that cannot be achieved with the limited qualitative data presented across chapters.

The data in question, as selected by the author, is combat performance across British, Indian and Australian forces. And while the operational and tactical accounts are compelling, they are a narrow selection. The author suggests that limiting data collection to those forces and theatres allows us to maximise comparability on key dimensions by controlling for other factors (e.g., the adversary, material circumstances, doctrine), just as one would in a quasi-experiment. To be sure, such an approach would be excellent for demonstrating that national identity has the *potential* to impact combat motivation. It is not, however, a suitable way of determining (a) when it will, and (b) to what extent. For one thing, in quantitative research, control comes at the expense of generalisability; each factor held constant raises a question about ecological validity.

More concerning still, and by the author's own admission, across the militaries and theatres placed under the microscope, very limited data was available on truly small-unit cohesion (e.g., platoon or company). Instead, the book's analysis targeted battalion and brigade-level indicators (e.g., the UK regimental system, the brevity of pre-deployment training for Australian forces). These are a poor proxy for the often highly localised and organic bonding that the small-unit cohesion analysis attempted to bring to light.[4] It should be obvious that without sufficient data or source material on small-unit cohesion,

one cannot reasonably make claims about the importance of national identity for combat motivation and effectiveness. Certainly one should not make the concluding claim, as the author does, that those seeking to foster combat effectiveness need not pay much mind to small-unit cohesion and should instead focus on leveraging national-level phenomena: 'there is no need to worry about social cohesion within small units as it is neither necessary nor sufficient for creating will to fight'.[5] At bare minimum, such an assertion should be tentative and be balanced with an acknowledgement of empirical findings that suggest the opposite. For instance, an Israeli Army study found that focusing on national identity was associated with lower company potency.[6]

It is worth repeating that the book's topic of study, national identity as it impacts combat motivation, deserves the attention it has received in this book, and more. It is appallingly understudied. Indeed, readers might consider the path not travelled. In another version of this book, or perhaps in a future edition, one could begin with the uncontroversial position that national identity is almost certainly *one of a number of factors* that can impact combat motivation and operational effectiveness. The manner in which national identity has that impact could then be investigated through the lens of established models of persuasion and organisational commitment.[7] Upon that foundation, we could be treated to a rich exploration of the many ways that national identity and mythology are expressed and sustained by symbolism (e.g., images, stories, rituals), as well as the manner in which national identity may be aligned or misaligned with the attitudes, experiences and motivations of military members in the preparation for, and during, conflict.[8]

Symbols and Sacrifice in War does offer readers the occasional rich treatment and novel insight that this topic deserves. Unfortunately, by heedlessly seeking to establish national identity theory as the foremost consideration for combat motivation, much opportunity is missed. Despite this, for academics interested in the psychology and sociology of morale and combat effectiveness in contemporary Western militaries, this text is thought-provoking and worth one's time. For military practitioners in search of solid analytical footing on which to base their actions and advice, I would instead recommend Anthony King's *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (2013).

About the Reviewer

Dr Andrew Frain completed his PhD in social psychology at the Australian National University. His research interests centre on the social identity approach and science integrity, with particular interest in research translation. Andrew has worked in the Australian Department of Defence Directorate of People Intelligence and Research and was the convenor of the Australian War College ACSC Leadership Theory module from 2016 to 2022. Andrew would typify Michael Billig's 'antiquarian psychologists', always drawn to the dustiest corner of the library.

ENDNOTES

1 In the words of one First World War general, 'I came out of the war with the definite impression that [comradeship] was perhaps the strongest constructive moral factor, stronger than patriotism, and in many cases stronger than religion'—Chester I Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 148.

2 William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (n.d.).

3 One should always remember that 'no intellectual theory can be properly understood merely in terms of what the theorist is proposing, but it also needs to be seen in terms of rival ideas which the theorist is opposing'—Michael Billig, 'Remembering the Particular Background of Social Identity Theory', in WP Robinson (ed), *Social Groups and Identities: Developing the Legacy of Henri Tajfel* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996), p. 341.

4 Early examples are Leornard Berkowitz, 'Group Norms Among Bomber Crews: Patterns of Perceived Crew Attitudes, "Actual" Crew Attitudes, and Crew Liking Related to Aircrew Effectiveness in Far Eastern Combat', *Sociometry* 19, no. 3 (1956): 141–153; Daniel M Goodacre, 'Group Characteristics of Good and Poor Performing Combat Units', *Sociometry* 16, no. 2 (1953): 168–179; Edward A Shils and Morris Janowitz, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 280–315.

5 Kirstin JH Brathwaite, *Symbols and Sacrifice in War: National Identity and the Will to Fight* (Georgetown University Press, 2025), p. 199.

6 Boas Shamir, Eliav Zakay, Esther Brainin and Micha Popper, 'Leadership and Social Identification in Military Units: Direct and Indirect Relationships', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 3 (2000): 612–140.

7 John C Turner, 'Explaining the Nature of Power: A Three-Process Theory', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 35, no. 1 (2005): 1–22; John P Meyer, David J Stanley, Lynne Herscovitch and Laryssa Topolnytsky, 'Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment to the Organization: A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents, Correlates, and Consequences', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* 61, no. 1 (2002): 20–52.

8 The qualitative analysis would ideally be coupled with two further elements: a) quantitative observations, such as enlistment rates and measures of national identification, and b) theorising on the fingerprint that national identity, or similar social identities, will have in the asymmetrical and technologically enabled conflicts of the 21st century, often involving ideologically driven non-state actors.

/ BOOK REVIEW

Strategic Imagination: Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant

Australian National University Press, 2025
ISBN 9781760466954, 249 pp, Open Access

Editor: Andrew Carr

Reviewed by: Nick Bosio

Strategic culture and strategic imagination are intrinsically linked. To truly exercise strategic art, a practitioner should understand both. Such understanding is more than theoretical – it should be a habit-of-mind. For strategic culture, one should be able to trace the concept and its practical manifestation in the thinking, strategy, and action of nations and groups. Such ability helps practitioners of strategy understand their own nation better and gain insight into how other nations may perceive the world. While much has been written to help practitioners understand strategic culture, the opposite is true for its interdependent partner, strategic imagination.

Strategic Imagination, edited by Andrew Carr, is a critical contribution to understanding strategic imagination. Building on the late Brendan Sargeant's thinking and writing, the book helps explain strategic imagination and its practical uses. For the Australian Army officer, it is doubly important as the book places strategic imagination within an Australian context. This book is structured in three parts: the concept of strategic imagination, the practice of strategic imagination, and remembrances of Brendan Sargeant. While the first two parts explore strategic imagination, the book's real power is how it makes four points clear to practitioners of strategy and war. First is defining strategic imagination as distinct from other theories and concepts. Second is the need to leverage other disciplines, history, and fiction to build strategic imagination. Next, the book explains why strategic imagination is important: its power to shape both strategy and strategic culture. Finally, the book makes explicit Australia's strategic culture. Combined, these points reinforce a key theme of strategic art: understanding and leveraging alternative perspectives is critical to good strategic art and strategy.[1]

To best understand strategic imagination, it is necessary to grasp what it seeks to overcome and uplift: strategic culture. While strategic culture is a contested idea, Colin Gray provides the best description. Gray defines strategic culture as: 'The underlying national [group] culture that is the root of, and influences, strategic behaviour …[where strategic behaviour is] the preferred approach a nation takes to strategic problems'.[2]

Understanding strategic culture helps readers better engage with the concept of strategic imatingation.

Three chapters are key to explaining strategic imagination as a distinct and vital concept. The first is Sargeant's own words, presented in the second chapter, 'The Australian Strategic Imagination: Origins and Form'. This chapter provides the foundation for the discussion of strategic imagination. Next is Ian Hall's 'Thinking about Strategic Imagination' (Chapter Seven). Hall provides cross-disciplinary insight to strategic imagination. Finally, Stephan Frühling's 'Approaching Australian Defence and Strategic Policy through Strategic Imagination' (Chapter 13) helps readers place the concept within the Australian discourse. While it is ironic that *the* book on strategic imagination does not clearly define the concept, these chapters enable a reader to understand that it is about using imagination to see approaches that differ from the norm. Sargeant describes imagination as an exercise of imaginative power over material reality. Such power seeks a way to change reality.[3] Hall explains imagination as envisioning 'something beyond the bounds of our immediate perception'.[4] Anthea Roberts, in her chapter 'Imagination and Scholarship', describes imagination as 'night science' where creativity is used to develop new ideas.[5] Frühling reinforces that imagination is about challenging one's self-conceptions and accepted norms.[6] Combined, these reflections lead a reader to understand that strategic imagination is 'the ability to envision national power beyond the bounds of a nation's immediate policy, thinking, or strategic culture to find new approaches or set new cultural norms'.[7]

This definition indicates that strategic imagination involves considering problems from different perspectives. Doctrine and military education include many tools to help practitioners consider problems from different perspectives. However, Sargeant and Hall both make clear that real strategic imagination, and imagination more broadly, is best achieved through broad knowledge and experience. What Sargeant, Hall and others authors in this volume discuss is the need for strategic and military artists to have a broad range of mental models. Mental models are 'deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures or images that influence how' an individual (or group) understand theories, concepts, and the real world.[8] Such models directly influence creativity and decision-making. Having a broad range of mental models enables individuals and groups to engage with and consider problems in alternative and different ways.[9] Strategic imagination is grounded in having a diverse and broad range of mental models.

Many of the authors within *Strategic Imagination* discuss how to increase imagination. Sargeant is most clear: engage with and understand alternative concepts that are not normally related to strategy or national security. Sargeant advocates for practitioners to engage with a wide variety of disciplines and information genres. Often, non-security-related disciplines and genres can help provide alternative ways of thinking about the strategic environment, people, and problems. As Sargeant observes, disciplines often provide structured methodologies for exploring and understanding context, environments, and problems. For him, literary theory was an important alternative way to think about the strategic environment and strategy. Sargeant and other scholars also advocate engaging with fiction to consider the world through different perspectives.[10] In both cases, leveraging alternative methodologies and viewpoints can yield new insights, enabling practitioners to envision national power actions beyond the bounds of immediate policy and thinking. Sargeant's arguments of how to build strategic imagination also highlight the power such imagination provides.

Imagination's power is to seek new ways to change reality. This statement is a key theme throughout the first two parts of *Strategic Imagination*. This theme is also why strategic imagination is so important. Key strategic concepts were generated through imagination that Australia now considers are normal. Rory Medcalf in 'The Indo-Pacific as Strategic Imagination' highlights how Sargeant, while in the Department of Defence, envisioned the concept of the Indo-Pacific in the 2013 White Paper. This concept has changed Australia's – and many other Indo-Pacific nations' – perspective of the region. Frühling traces how Australian leaders and policymakers have reimagined Australia's place in the region and the world, generating significant change in strategic policy and posture – for good and for bad. Sargeant himself writes that '[a] strong imagination represents a discontinuity and may manifest in the emergence of new modes of expression and new forms [of action or power]. In this respect, strong imagination asserts primacy over continuities represented by tradition.'[11]

As seen from the above, a strong strategic imagination enables practitioners to question current norms and thinking, consider alternative perspectives and approaches, and find new ways to overcome challenges and threats. Strong imagination can even overcome and change strategic culture. Such imagination requires a broad range of mental models, generated through experience, professional education, and curiosity about other ideas and ways of thinking.[12] Nevertheless, strong imagination is not enough. If it is not grounded in reality, it can lead to unfounded or confused outcomes, as Frühling observes in his discussion of the Defence of Australia-era of thinking.[13] Grounding strategic imagination leads to the book's final key point: understanding Australia's strategic culture.

While many authors discuss what comprises Australia's strategic culture, the interview with Dennis Richardson in Chapter Six, 'Imagination and Policy', is the most insightful. Richardson succinctly explains Australia's strategic culture as four elements. First is a strong ally, more powerful and with global weight. The second element is engagement in the region. Next is a commitment to international institutions, as such institutions can – when working – enhance a middle power's weight. Finally, Australia has always pushed for more liberalised trade.[14] Other authors, including Hall, Carr, Medcalf, Sargeant and Frühling, all reinforce and expand on Richardson's points. Combined, these authors outline how Australia's geography, population density, and economy shape the emphasis on and priority given to its four elements of strategic culture.

By making clear Australia's strategic culture, *Strategic Imagination* provides both the current norm and the envisioned change, the traditional and the discontinuity, the material reality and the power of change. In effect, strategic culture is the retractive and passive *yin*, while strategic imagination is the expansive and active *yang* of strategic art. Both are complementary and in tension. Both are required for good strategic art, as only with an understanding of the norm can strategic imagination help a practitioner determine *when* and *where* to adapt.

Brendan Sargeant was a powerhouse within Defence, and a critical practitioner-academic (pracademic) at the Australian National University. His unexpected loss was felt across the national security establishment, and diminishes Defence discourse and the furthering of Australian strategic understanding. Nevertheless, his insights, advice, and thinking have had a lasting effect on many, including this reviewer. His capacity to seemingly effortlessly consider, synthesise, and use multiple perspectives and worldviews to develop novel approaches exemplifies strategic art. *Strategic Imagination* is a fitting tribute to Brendan Sargeant.

About the Reviewer

Colonel Nick Bosio has held various command and staff appointments across tactical, campaign, and strategic posts within Australia and on operations. His experiences include serving as Chief of Campaign Plans for a 3-star Coalition Headquarters, Commanding Officer of the 6th Engineer Support Regiment, and Deputy Head/Director of Military Strategic Plans. Colonel Bosio holds a Bachelor of Engineering, three Master's degrees, and a research doctorate (PhD) focusing on military theory, strategic studies, and systems thinking. He is the author of the Australian War College's *On Strategic Art* Handbook. He is currently the Director of Strategic Preparedness in the Military Strategic Plans Division.

ENDNOTES

1 See *On Strategic Art* for further discussion: Nicholas J. Bosio, *On Strategic Art: A Guide to Strategic Thinking and The Australian Strategy Formulation Framework*, ed. Australian War College (Canberra, ACT, Australia: Australian War College, 2024), 29-32. https://theforge.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/On%20Strategic%20Art%20-%20A%20Guide%20to%20Strategic%20Thinking%20and%20the%20ASFF%20%28Electronic%20Version%29.pdf.

2 Bosio, *On Strategic Art*, 31. While outlined in *On Strategic Art,* this definition is derived from Gray. See: Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back, "*Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 50.

3 Brendan Sargeant, "The Australian Strategic Imagination: Origins and Form," in *Strategic Imagination: Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant*, ed. Andrew Carr (Canberra, ACT, Australia: ANU Press, 2025), 18.

4 Ian Hall, "Thinking about Strategic Imagination," in *Strategic Imagination: Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant*, ed. Andrew Carr (Canberra, ACT, Australia: ANU Press, 2025), 91.

5 Anthea Roberts, "Imagination and Scholarship: The Role of Creativity and Complexity," in *Strategic Imagination: Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant*, ed. Andrew Carr (Canberra, ACT, Australia: ANU Press, 2025), 66.

6 Stephan Frühling, "Approaching Australian Defence and Strategic Policy through Strategic Imagination," in *Strategic Imagination: Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant*, ed. Andrew Carr (Canberra, ACT, Australia: ANU Press, 2025), 170-72.

7 This definition is derived from the three listed chapters, with particular reference to Hall, "Thinking about Strategic Imagination," 91.

8 Quote is from Senge: Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, Kobo ePud ed. (London, England, UK: Random House Business Books, 1990), 8.

9 See Klein and Storr for analysis. Bosio summarises the wider research. See: Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, Second Printing ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press, 1998), 32-35; Jim Storr, *The Human Face of War*, ed. Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman, Birmingham War Studies, (London, England, UK: Continuum, 2009), 143-53. 55; Nicholas J. Bosio, "Gaming to Win: Enhancing Military Decision-Making," *Australian Army Journal* XVIII, no. 1 (2022): 42-45; Bosio, *On Strategic Art*, 12-14.

10 See Bosio for a summary of fiction's use to strategic thinking and imagination, as well as other scholars that advocate for the use of fiction to increase strategic imagination. See: Bosio, *On Strategic Art*, 105-06.

11 Sargeant, "Australian Strategic Imagination," 14.

12 This is known as a pluralist habit-of-mind. See: Nicholas J. Bosio, "An Analysis of the Relationship between Contemporary Western Military Theory, Systems Thinking, and their Key Schools-of-Thought" (Doctor of Philosophy Doctorate (research), Australian National University, 2022), http://hdl.handle.net/1885/260048.

13 Frühling, "Approaching Australian Strategic Policy," 173-75.

14 Dennis Richardson, "Imagination and Policy," in *Strategic Imagination: Essays in Honour of Brendan Sargeant*, ed. Andrew Carr (Canberra, ACT, Australia: ANU Press, 2025), 86-86.

/ BOOK REVIEW

Military History Supremo: Essays in Honour of David Horner AM FASSA

ANU Press, 2025
ISBN 9781760466831, 400 pp, Open Access

Editors: Joan Beaumont and Garth Pratten

Reviewed by: Michael Scott

In opening the 2025 Chief of Army History Conference, (then) Lieutenant General Simon Stuart reminded us of Professor Sir Michael Howard's advice that military professionals should 'study history "in width, in depth, and in context"'.[1] The Army profession is built upon three pillars: jurisdiction, expertise and self-regulation. 'Expertise' is the distinctive professional body of knowledge that underpins the Australian Army's 'capacity to educate, to train and to experience Army professionals, throughout their careers'.[2] While the Chief of Army Professional Study Guide 'has a deliberately strong focus on military history',[3] the formal study of military history is not as strong in Australian professional military education as it is for some of our allies and partners.[4] In the absence of a tradition of rich formal military history education, *Military History Supremo: Essays in Honour of David Horner AM FASSA* offers an excellent starting point for the self-guided study of Australian military history by military professionals.

Military History Supremo is a *festschrift*, 'a book intended to honour a respected academic, with research essays in his or her field of expertise written by colleagues or former students'.[5] Professor Emeritus David Horner's own acclaimed scholarly contributions to Australian military history over nearly five decades have made him a 'supremo' in his field. This honorary marque is a play on the title of the book *Defence Supremo*, Horner's 2000 biography of Sir Frederick Shedden, the Secretary of the Department of Defence from 1937 to 1956.

David Horner's Contribution to Military History

Numbering some 32 books and over 100 articles and minor works (all of which are listed in appendices to *Military History Supremo*), Horner has written official, corps and unit histories and military biographies on strategic policy and planning; strategy and command; command and leadership; and intelligence.

Horner's research seeks to strengthen our understanding of the world and inform discussion beyond academia, but not to impose his opinions, as Horner stays out of contemporary strategic debates.[6] In an interview, Horner described his role as a military historian as to 'bring order to chaos and make the complex seem simple'.[7] He seeks to accurately capture events using strong evidence, gathered through meticulous research, to bring order from chaos with clarity, comprehension and insight for readers.[8] Horner's military experience provides authority to how he writes and understands the 'whole mechanism of war'—from the strategic to the operational and down to the tactical.[9] In addition to his military experiences, Horner possesses key skills that enable him to effectively achieve these purposes.

The research and writing skills that make Horner a military history supremo are those which every upcoming historian should develop and master. A positivist, Horner takes a critical systematic approach to his research.[10] A judicious and balanced empirical researcher who supplements Australian and foreign archival records with interviews, reviews of contemporary records and, finally, secondary sources, Horner sets the benchmark to which historians should aspire.[11] Underlying Horner's scholarship is the essential humanity in war. He has a 'balancing regard for the "fog of war"', puts command in the context of the political–military relationship and takes into account the personality and individual qualities of commanders, as well as the system in which they operate.[12] Unlike some previous official historians, who focused at the tactical level, Horner, in the context of the political circumstances, analyses the whole mechanism of war in detail to ensure the complexities of war and the war–politics nexus are understood.[13]

One of the key strengths of Horner's work is his capacity to write clearly yet authoritatively, and instruct the academic and the general public alike.[14] His writing uses a narrative style, in a top-down fashion, and brings out issues as it goes.[15] Horner writes without fear or favour, showing respect for all combatants, and provides measured and logical judgements from his empirical research.[16] Horner's work combines traditional military history with broader sociopolitical contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of Australia's military and strategic history.

What the Book Covers

Military History Supremo is a collection of 15 essays by renowned Australian and international academics covering the range of military history topics on which Professor Horner has authored or edited works. The essayists celebrate Horner's value as a military historian, and most of the essays have been written in styles inspired by him. The topics are diverse, spanning strategic decision-making for Ambon in the Second World War; high command in Bengal in 1849 to 1950; command of the 1st Australian Division in the First World War; coalition warfare in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2010; intelligence; space in the Australian Defence Force; peacekeeping; and mortuary affairs. The volume showcases the fundamental skills of an effective military historian as well as providing lessons for the contemporary military professional.

Garth Pratten's biographical essay explores Horner's journey as a soldier-scholar: an individual with long experience across both the military and academia.[17] Horner entered the Royal Military College at Duntroon in January 1966 and was commissioned in December 1969 having won multiple prizes, including the CEW Bean Prize for History.[18] He saw active service as an infantry platoon commander in Vietnam before oscillating between academic and regimental postings, including on staff at the Joint Services Staff College. Horner resigned from the Australian Regular Army in 1990 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (but continued service as a reservist until 2002) to become a research officer at the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. His military experience underpinned his esteemed scholarship by 'deep and authentic knowledge of the requirements and challenges of employing military force'.[19]

There are two essays in this collection that do not closely follow David Horner's approach; instead they attempt to link military history to emphasise perspectives on contemporary issues. Hugh White's 'History Frames Policy: David Horner and the Future of Australia's Defence' and Bob Breen's 'Disappointing the Dragon: An Australian Strategy and Fourth Armed Service for the Grey Zone' are interesting reads but do not provide the same level of tribute as the other essayists. These essays selectively use historical military events to strengthen arguments without exploring them. White cites historical events, such as Britain's abandonment of any substantial strategic role in Asia after 1904 and the final withdrawal east of the Suez,[20] to reinforce his position that the US might do the same, without investigating these events in any detail. Similarly, Breen calls out the 1930s British 'Singapore Strategy' when considering contemporary strategic circumstances, without detailed comparison to the historical reference.[21]

A seldom-considered aspect of war concludes the volume: the policy and practice of large-scale mortuary affairs. The Vietnam War was the first time repatriation of the deceased became a standard practice; however, despite the demonstrably lower number of battlefield casualties in Vietnam compared to the world wars, Australia was reliant on overstretched US mortuary and embalming services provided by military and civilian staff.[22] While not 'new under the sun', this major logistic issue (fortunately) has no recent Australian practice, meaning that learning the lessons from military history is the best starting point for military planners.

Why Read This Book?

General James Mattis USMC wrote, 'Ultimately, a real understanding of history means that we face NOTHING new under the sun'.[23] In this vein, lessons can be garnered from *Military History Supremo* at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. There are many insights applicable to the current strategic environment, as well as to the possibility of war in our region.

For instance, parallels to today can be drawn from the 1930s and the decades that followed World War II, specifically with the UK's failed Singapore Strategy and subsequent withdrawal from east of the Suez in the 1950s.[24] Such lessons include strategic failures due to incorrect assumptions, beliefs and impressions of Western might held by political and military leadership.[25] An example is the failed defence of Ambon and Timor in the Second World War, where 'impressions about the presumed superiority *and permanence* [original emphasis] of imperial power' at the strategic level overshadowed the realities of intelligence and available fighting forces.[26] Overconfidence in one's abilities and an underestimate of those of one's adversary are repeated throughout history. Effective command and control of complex battlespaces has been difficult to achieve, including in coalition operations such as those in Afghanistan, where unity of command and unity of effort was challenging when rationalising national goals and operational objectives.[27] These issues will continue in future multinational operations. Successful command and leadership in war requires commanders to possess strong moral courage, undertake detailed planning to minimise casualties, and emphasise continual training in theatre to learn and adapt.[28] Lieutenant General Sir Harold Walker, explored in essay seven, exemplified such leadership when in command of the 1st Australian Division in the First World War.[29]

Overall, *Military History Supremo* provides ample evidence of Horner's influence as a scholar, of his mentorship of up-and-coming academic historians and of the inspiration his

work has provided to countless students, military officers and casual readers.[30] The book is an easy read. Each essay is independent of the others and examines seldom-studied aspects of Australian military history.

Junior military historians should start—and those more senior should deepen—their study by reading *Military History Supremo* to understand how to effectively study and capture military history, based on reflections of Australia's pre-eminent living military historian. As a part-time military historian, I have learned what is required to be an effective scholar of military history. As a senior military leader and planner, I have gained insights from history that I can apply to future complex military problems. Reading *Military History Supremo* has strengthened my expertise as a military professional, in particular regarding leadership at all echelons and being conscious of hubris and cognitive biases in decision-making. I commend this book to others who seek to enhance their expertise in the profession of arms.

About the Reviewer

Brigadier Michael Scott CSC is currently Deputy Commander Forces Command and Deputy Army G7. He is a graduate of the USMC Command and Staff College and School of Advanced Warfighting, and of the Defence Strategic Studies Course. Brigadier Scott has seen operational service in Solomon Islands, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Iraq, and on Operation Resolute. His most recent postings include Director General Defence Preparedness, Director Indo-Pacific Infrastructure and Director Current Military Commitments. A qualified civil engineer, he has commanded combat engineers at troop, squadron and regiment levels. He is the Head of Corps for the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers. Brigadier Scott has recently commenced research for a PhD in history through UNSW Canberra.

ENDNOTES

1 Simon Stuart, 'Opening Address', Chief of Army History Conference 2025, 19 November 2025, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2025-11-19/opening-address-chief-army-history-conference-2025.
2 Simon Stuart, 'The Challenges to the Australian Army Profession', address to the Australian National University National Security College, 25 November 2024, transcript at: www.army.gov.au/news-and-events/speeches-and-transcripts/2024-11-25/challenges-australian-army-profession.
3 Australian Army, *Chief of Army Professional Study Guide* (Canberra: Australian Army, 2025), p. 3.
4 The Royal Military College of Australia at Duntroon established a Faculty of Military Studies in April 1968.
5 Joan Beaumont and Garth Pratten, 'Introduction', in Joan Beaumont and Garth Pratten (eds), *Military History Supremo: Essays in Honour of David Horner AM FASSA* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2025), p. 8.
6 Ibid., pp. xvii, 3, 43, 340.
7 Ibid., p. 218.
8 Ibid., p. 35.
9 Ibid., p. 34.
10 Ibid., pp. 57, 20.
11 Ibid., p. 272.
12 Ibid., pp. 44, 251, 88, 131, 149.
13 Ibid., pp. 34, 366.
14 Ibid., pp. 3, 37.
15 Ibid., pp. 36–37.
16 Ibid., pp. 57, 251, 272.
17 Ibid., pp. 15–16.
18 Ibid., pp. 25–28.
19 Ibid., p. 1.
20 Ibid., p. 120.
21 Ibid., pp. 345–349.
22 Ibid., pp. 379–382.
23 Jill R Russell, 'With Rifle and Bibliography: General Mattis on Professional Reading', *Strife*, 7 May 2013, at: https://strifeblogdotorg2.wordpress.com/2013/05/07/with-rifle-and-bibliography-general-mattis-on-professional-reading/comment-page-1.
24 Beaumont and Pratten, *Military History Supremo*, pp. 72, 111, 345, 120.
25 Ibid., p. 72.
26 Ibid., p. 72.
27 Ibid., pp. 227–228, 237–238, 270.
28 Ibid., pp. 154, 155–156, 164, 173, 175, 176.
29 Ibid., pp. 155–156, 158, 166–167, 173–175.
30 Ibid., p. 1.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY JOURNAL

The *Australian Army Journal* (AAJ) focuses on the presentation of contested and evidence-based research and analysis. The Australian Army Research Centre (AARC) is looking for well written, scholarly AAJ submissions on topics related to Army and the land domain, with a particular focus on the priority research topics identified in the Army Futures Research Framework. These topics include:

State of the Australian Army Profession. The analysis of the past, present and future state of the profession of arms in an Integrated Force, including how Army needs to adapt to the enduring nature and changing character of war.

Littoral Manoeuvre. Operations and manoeuvres in the Indo-Pacific including the protection of key trade routes and maritime approaches.

Defence of Australia. Army's contribution to the Integrated Force in homeland defence.

Robotics and Autonomous Systems and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance. Assurance mechanisms for AI in operational settings, and systems of enabling infrastructure.

The AARC welcomes submissions from professionals of all ranks and experience, academics, industry and think-tanks. Articles should comprise structured arguments that lead to logical conclusions or recommendations that can help posture Army for future land warfare challenges in the short, medium and long term. The AARC is particularly interested in *AAJ* submissions that:

- deliver analysis based on tactical or operational level experience
- provide a perspective on issues that challenge orthodox views
- place the lessons of historical experience in a contemporary context.

Process

Authors work with the AARC's editorial team in a process of iterative review. Initially, submissions are assessed for their suitability by the AARC Academic Research team, with selected articles then subjected to a double-blind review by an academic and a subject matter expert. Articles deemed appropriate for further consideration are presented to the *AAJ* Editorial Advisory Board for consideration. The Director General, Future Land Warfare is the ultimate publication authority for all *AAJ* content.

Please note that the AARC cannot accept articles which have been published elsewhere or are currently under consideration for publication with another journal.

Word length (including endnotes)

Journal articles can be between 4,000-8,000 words in length (excl. references)
Book reviews should be between 800-1200 words (excl. references)

Author biography

A 100-word (approx.) biography should be included that outlines a summary of your educational history and professional experience.

Deadline

The AARC accepts *AAJ* submissions throughout the year with the submission deadlines for each Edition published on the AARC website (https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/about-us/contribute)

Formatting and Style

Guidance on formatting and style is available in the Submission Guidelines for AARC Publications (https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/about-us/contribute/editorial-advice-contributors).

Please make your submission using the AARC's Contribute page (https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/about-us/contribute/contribute-article-paper-or-publication).

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN ARMY OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

Are you studying towards a postgraduate degree or doctorate and writing a substantive research paper related to the land domain? If you have written an original manuscript on a priority topic identified in the Army Futures Research Framework, the Australian Army Research Centre (AARC) may be interested in publishing your work as an AARC Occasional Paper (https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/occasional-papers). Priority topics include:

State of the Australian Army Profession. The analysis of the past, present and future state of the profession of arms in an Integrated Force, including how Army needs to adapt to the enduring and changing character of war.

Littoral Manoeuvre. Operations and manoeuvres in the Indo-Pacific including the protection of key trade routes and maritime approaches.

Defence of Australia. Army's contribution to the Integrated Force in homeland defence.

Robotics and Autonomous Systems and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance. Assurance mechanisms for AI in operational settings, and systems of enabling infrastructure.

The AARC welcomes submissions from professionals of all ranks and experience, academics, industry and think-tanks. Papers should comprise structured arguments that lead to logical conclusions or recommendations that can help posture Army for future land warfare challenges in the short, medium and long term. The AARC is particularly interested in papers that:

- deliver analysis based on tactical or operational level experience
- provide a perspective on issues that challenge orthodox views
- place the lessons of historical experience in a contemporary context.

Process

Authors work with the AARC's editorial team in a process of iterative review. Initially, submissions are assessed for suitability by the AARC Academic Research team, with selected manuscripts subjected to review by an academic and a subject matter expert. The Director General, Future Land Warfare is the ultimate publication authority for all AARC Occasional Papers.

Please note that the AARC cannot accept articles that have been published elsewhere or are currently under consideration for publication in other formats.

Word length (including endnotes)

Occasional Paper submissions can be between 10,000 and up to 20,000+ words in length.

Author biography

A 100-word (approx.) biography should be included, that outlines a summary of your educational history and professional experience.

Paper abstract

A paper abstract should be included. The purpose of the abstract is to summarise the major aspects of a paper. A good abstract will also encourage a reader to read the entire piece. For this reason it should be an engagingly written piece of prose between 200 and 500 words that is not simply a rewrite of the introduction in shorter form.

Deadline

The AARC accepts Occasional Paper submissions throughout the year.

Formatting and Style

Guidance on formatting and style is available in the Submission Guidelines for AARC Publications (https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/about-us/contribute/editorial-advice-contributors).

Please make your submission using the AARC's Contribute page (https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/about-us/contribute/contribute-article-paper-or-publication).

/ ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY RESEARCH CENTRE

The Australian Army Research Centre (AARC) was established in mid-2016 in accordance with the wishes of the then Chief of Army Lieutenant General Angus Campbell. It is the successor to the Land Warfare Studies Centre, and sits as a Directorate within the Army's Future Land Warfare Branch in the Land Capability Division of Army Headquarters.

Role

The AARC conducts strategic studies, research and analysis, fosters debate and advocates the value of the joint land force to Government, academia and the public.

Charter

The AARC is dedicated to improving the Army's understanding of the State of the Australian Army Profession. Its purpose is to promote the contribution of the land force to integrated operations in peace and war. The AARC conducts applied research on the employment and modernisation of Army with particular reference to Australia's circumstances and interests. It raises the level of professional debate on war and its challenges within the Army, the nation and international audiences. The AARC enhances the professionalism, leadership and ethical awareness of Australian soldiers and officers.

To disseminate ideas and to promote debate, the AARC maintains a vibrant publication program. The AARC's flagship publication is the *Australian Army Journal*, now over 70 years old, on its website: https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/library/australian-army-journal. The AARC also publishes Occasional Papers, Reading Lists, the Land Power Forum and other shorter works on its website.

The AARC contributes to Army's understanding of the future character of war and the advancement of land power through a number of initiatives. These include:

- contributing to the development of strategic concepts, strategies, and force structure options
- publishing intellectual debate through the *Australian Army Journal*, Occasional Papers, and the Land Power Forum
- managing the Keogh Chair and the Staff Ride Programs
- managing the Army Research Scheme
- mentoring the work of CA Scholars and CA Honours Students.





researchcentre.army.gov.au