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A photograph of a group of firefighters in a forest. They are wearing yellow and orange protective gear, including helmets and jackets. Some are wearing blue hard hats. They are gathered in a circle, looking towards the center. The background shows tall trees and a hazy atmosphere, possibly from smoke or mist.

Three Block Community Support: An Australian Defence Force Capability

Chris Field

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Introduction

During humanitarian and disaster relief responses, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) may be required to work on several different levels at once.¹ In one moment in time, our ADF members support communities, volunteers, emergency responders and their leaders. In the next moment, they provide teams for evacuation, clean-up, clearance and repair tasks. Finally, they utilise their core skills, such as sea, land and air mobility, logistics, communications, medical and engineering—all on the same day and all within three city blocks. This can be described as ‘three block community support’, a notion adapted from the concept of ‘three block war’ introduced by General Charles Krulak of the United States Marine Corps (USMC). In ‘The three block war: Fighting in urban areas’ (1997) and ‘The strategic corporal: Leadership in the three block war’ (1999),² General Krulak asserted that, given the complexity of many situations that Marines face, they may have to operate on three different levels—full-scale military action, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid—within the space of three city blocks:

*In one moment in time, our service members will be feeding and clothing displaced refugees, providing humanitarian assistance. In the next moment, they will be holding two warring tribes apart—conducting peacekeeping operations—and, finally, they will be fighting a highly lethal mid-intensity battle—all on the same day ... all within three city blocks. It will be what we call ‘the Three Block War’.*³

General Krulak emphasised that Marines must be trained to operate in all three conditions simultaneously. In particular, his ideas encouraged in the USMC ‘a solid developmental philosophy to create junior leaders capable of operating in complex environments and maximising the use of mission command’.⁴

This paper proposes that three block community support be used as a current and future capability for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions, including Defence Assistance to the Civil Community⁵ (DACO). It describes how three block community support was used during Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020 and proposes tactical, operational and strategic ideas for enhancing the ADF’s future three block community support through procedural, organisational and cultural change.

Three Block Community Support Capability

Mission command operates best through team-based collaborative leadership along with the purposeful orchestration, interaction and harmonisation of seven principles: competence, mutual trust, shared understanding, commander's intent, mission orders, disciplined initiative, and risk acceptance.⁶

Three block community support capability applies these seven principles:

1. **Competence** is applied through domestic reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSO&I).
2. **Mutual trust** is applied by measuring three block community support.
3. **Shared understanding** is applied by establishing operational boundaries.
4. **Commander's intent** is applied by enabling compulsory Call Out and/or voluntary Call For, of the ADF Reserve.
5. **Mission orders** are applied by employing doctrine in mounting operations.
6. **Disciplined initiative** is applied by nurturing three block community support relationships.
7. **Risk acceptance** is applied by employing the leadership, training and operational experience of the ADF Reserve.

ADF operations require a values-based mission command approach. This approach empowers ADF leaders and people to develop the best teams and live the ADF's six values: professionalism, loyalty, integrity, courage, innovation, and teamwork.⁷

People in teams are the ADF's competitive edge.⁸ Teams give ADF people the opportunity to realise their personal, professional and cultural potential.⁹ We maintain our competence as leaders and optimise our performance by maximising the potential of our people and our teams.¹⁰ As people in teams creating three block community support capabilities, we use mission command to achieve our tasks, purpose and objectives. We are resilient and potent military professionals who train and practise our skills deliberately and safely.

Three Block Community Support in Operation Bushfire Assist

In 2019–2020 the Australian bushfire crisis caused the deaths of 33 people and more than 1 billion animals. More than 10,000 homes and other buildings were destroyed, and 12.6 million hectares burned. In addition, over 430 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, representing 75 per cent of Australia's annual carbon emissions, were released into the atmosphere. Approximately 57 per cent of the Australian adult population, or 11.3 million people, were smoke affected.¹¹

Between 6 September 2019 and 26 March 2020, Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020 mobilised and deployed more than 6,600 members of the ADF, including around 3,000 ADF Reserve personnel, to deliver ADF three block community support capabilities to Australian communities, volunteers, emergency responders and their leaders.¹² ADF and partner capabilities were deployed across 50 per cent of Australia—in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

The ADF used people-to-people, team-to-team and community-to-community partnerships to assist communities, volunteers, emergency responders and their leaders in providing community-empowered and community-led bushfire response, recovery and reconstruction. During Operation Bushfire Assist, ADF three block community support activities included:

- supporting communities, volunteers, emergency responders and their leaders
- providing teams for evacuation, clean-up, clearance and repair tasks
- utilising core skills such as sea, land and air mobility; logistics; communications; medical; and engineering.

The three block community support achievements of Operation Bushfire Assist included (in approximate measures):

- 10 million litres of purified water produced and integrated into existing community water infrastructure
- 5.5 million litres of packaged water distributed
- 1.4 million kilograms of fodder distributed
- 77,000 meals provided to emergency services personnel and evacuees
- 75,000 litres of fuel distributed
- 5,000 kilometres of roads cleared
- 1,300 kilometres of fences cleared/repaired
- 250 kilometres of firebreaks cleared.

Three block community support was applied using the seven principles of mission command, as described below.

1. Competence in three block community support

Tactically and technically competent leaders, people and teams, performing assigned tasks to standard, are the basis of effective mission command. Competence is achieved through continuous self-development, training, education, testing, diverse postings and professional experience.¹³

During Operation Bushfire Assist the ADF created ad hoc combined RSO&I teams by co-locating personnel and logistics staff functions from each Joint Task Force (JTF) Headquarters, Army Headquarters, 2nd Division and 17th Sustainment Brigade. These combined RSO&I teams quickly developed administrative efficiencies to enable three block community support. In particular, they were able to accelerate full-time service for ADF Reserve personnel who were compulsorily called out or voluntarily called for at short notice.¹⁴

ADF three block community support in Australia, or domestic operations, is a key element of government policy. The 2020 Force Structure Plan articulates the requirement to develop a 'Defence mobilisation plan to increase the ADF's ability to support a range of scenarios, including in response to future large-scale domestic natural disasters and national emergencies'.¹⁵

There are 11 references to 'domestic' in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the 2020 Force Structure Plan, involving security, grey-zone¹⁶ challenges, information and communications networks, industry and supply chains, and disaster relief.¹⁷ In addition, there are 12 references to 'domestic' in the 2016 Defence White Paper, involving counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, border security, future security and the prosperity of our country.¹⁸

This intense policy focus shows that, in domestic operations, ad hoc combined RSO&I teams are an unlikely long-term solution for ADF and whole-of-government preparations. A permanent RSO&I unit may need to be established.

Army's 2nd Division, with brigades and the Regional Force Surveillance Group (RFSG) in each state and territory, seems the logical formation to lead RSO&I enabling ADF domestic deployments. One option is to establish a domestic deployments RSO&I unit in 2nd Division, modelled on 1st Division's 39th Operational Support Battalion, which conducts RSO&I for overseas deployments. A domestic deployments RSO&I unit could formalise, replicate, enhance and make scalable the three block community support practices, processes and procedures developed by ad hoc RSO&I teams during Operation Bushfire Assist.

To take advantage of existing key strengths in 2nd Division, a domestic deployments RSO&I unit would:

- measure and monitor 2nd Division readiness requirements
- maintain continuous connections to RSO&I cells in each state and territory based ADF Reserve brigade and the RFSG
- on order, augment state and territory based RSO&I cells
- enable rapid mobilisation and be prepared to assist with and augment connections between state and territory based RSO&I cells and regional Defence establishments.¹⁹

Early in an operation, a dedicated domestic deployments RSO&I unit would focus thinking on the operational end state. This would include preparing deployed force demounting and reverse-RSO&I. Through training and enhanced competence, a 2nd Division domestic deployments RSO&I unit would continue the professionalisation of personnel support for future ADF domestic operations.

2. Mutual trust in three block community support

Trust between leaders, their people, partners and teams is developed through a shared confidence that they are competent in performing assigned tasks. Trust is given by leaders and their people and built over time based on common shared experiences and habitual relationships.²⁰ Trust is hard to win and easily lost. It is accelerated by exercising consistent, considered leadership, demonstrating by personal example and upholding the ADF's six values of professionalism.²¹

Three block community support is enabled through mutual trust. Open communications, including shared understanding and clear intent, assist the ADF in providing three block community support. Open communications enable mutual trust among key stakeholders and the development of pragmatic assessments regarding when DACC support will increase or decrease and ultimately end.

DACC 1 (localised, short-term emergency responses) and DACC 2 (large-scale and/or non-localised emergency responses) are, by definition, measurable. For example, DACC policy enables 'emergency assistance for *specific task(s)* to save human life, alleviate suffering, prevent extensive loss of animal life or prevent widespread loss/damage to property *when State or Territory resources are inadequate*'.²²

Therefore, during three block community support, as the ADF builds relationships and mutual trust with supported state and territory authorities and local organisations, we must simultaneously assess our specified tasks alongside the capacity of the host state/territory and local resources. We must also prioritise tasks to 'provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people'.²³ These assessments are developed through measures of our effectiveness (MOEs) and measures of our performance (MOPs) against tactical, operational and strategic DACC objectives.

Simply defined, MOEs question *are we doing the right things to create the effects or conditions we seek?* MOPs, as components or subsets of MOEs, assess *are we completing tasks to standard?*²⁴ MOEs and MOPs are derived from requirements or the concept of operations. MOEs and MOPs should be selected based on their ability to assess good, neutral and poor performance.

More formally, in assessing task achievement, MOEs employ multiple observations as ‘indicators to help measure a current system against change’. The data used to measure the effect (mission accomplishment) comes from using the system in its expected environment. The MOE can be expressed either as a question or as a declarative statement.²⁵

One of several possible ways to measure how well a system’s tasks are accomplished is by analysis of MOPs, as subsets of MOEs. MOPs are indicators used to ‘assess our own actions against task accomplishment’. MOPs can be accumulated to assess an MOE that is not directly measurable. Several MOPs may be related to the achievement of a single MOE.²⁶

ADF leaders also owe mutual trust to the ADF and the Australian Government. ADF strategic leaders have a reasonable implied expectation that, from the beginning of an operation, our tactical and operational commanders will continuously work on defining MOEs and MOPs to support strategic clarity and decision-making.

In three block community support, ADF tasks are:

- supporting communities, volunteers, emergency responders and their leaders
- providing teams for evacuation, clean-up, clearance and repair tasks
- utilising core ADF skills.

During Operation Bushfire Assist the relevant system comprised the three multinational TFs, involving people from Australia, Canada, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore and the United States combined with naval, air and rotary-wing task groups serving in five Australian states and the Australian Capital Territory.

By forming three multinational JTFs with intimate and continuous connections to state and territory authorities and local organisations, the ADF created a system that empowered mutual trust. Once established, this system enabled us to achieve three block community support alongside the collaborative development of appropriate MOEs.

During Operation Bushfire Assist many affected communities were under stress, uncertain of their futures and below their optimal operating capability. Therefore, to ensure continuous mutual trust in three block community

support, JTF leaders at all levels led with empathy, consideration and respect while completing their mission and measuring their tasks.

The three block community support environment was unpredictable and evolving. In that situation it was a challenge for the three multinational JTFs to collect data, develop common operating pictures and define MOPs. Ultimately, in addition to bushfire recovery metrics such as water produced, logistics distributed and roads cleared, mutual trust between JTFs enabled MOPs to be agreed between the ADF and state/territory and local authorities, including MOPs for cooperation, collaboration, community safety and wellbeing.²⁷



3. Shared understanding in three block community support

Leaders, people and teams must create a shared understanding of a three block community support operating environment by defining an operation's purpose, challenges and approaches to solving problems. This is a critical challenge. Shared operational understanding, along with personal connections and the flow of information to our frontline troops, leads to unity of effort, which enables initiative from our people and teams.²⁸

Three block community support requires a shared understanding of operational boundaries. In this context, an operational boundary is 'a line that delineates surface areas for the purpose of facilitating coordination and deconfliction of operations between adjacent units, formations, or areas'.²⁹ Boundaries assist commanders to visualise a logical arrangement of operations, allocate resources, and assign tasks to appropriate commands. In addition, boundaries delineate requirements for critical infrastructures to be operated, as well as the conduct of commerce and governance operations.³⁰

Shared understanding and deliberately coordinated, tested and rehearsed boundaries ensure effective command and control, sustainment, force protection and mutual support.³¹ Clearly understood and acknowledged boundaries facilitate three block community support mission accomplishment within the capabilities of assigned, attached and supporting military forces and whole-of-government entities.³²

During Operation Bushfire Assist, JTFs worked within state and territory boundaries and served closely with state and territory organisations and authorities, including local government agencies, to define and align boundaries for intrastate and intra-territory areas of operation.

Across and within all JTF areas of operation, there were significant local variations in three block community support needs and requirements based on demographics, previous disasters, home and small business losses, economic conditions, governance, and service and community capacity.³³ In New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania, JTF 1110 and JTF 1111 mostly aligned areas of operation with local government boundaries. In Victoria, JTF 646 aligned areas of operation with state incident control centre boundaries.

Given the intricacies, frictions, requirements and challenges of three block community support, in future ADF domestic operations the ADF and state and territory authorities should consider agreeing on a shared understanding of boundaries. This shared understand would save time and accelerate coordination of the ADF's support for state and territory partners, ensuring effective command and control, sustainment, force protection and mutual support during the operation.

During Operation Bushfire Assist the Ready Battalion Group was commanded from Headquarters Joint Operations Command for operations along the New South Wales – Victoria border. This innovation, led by Major General Jake Ellwood, ADF National Support Coordinator Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020, enabled the two state-based JTFs to maintain their relationships with state authorities within state boundaries while the Commonwealth-based Ready Battalion Group moved flexibly across state boundaries as the emergency developed. This flexibility at the limits of state jurisdictions covered any potential gaps in ADF three block community support. This innovation should be codified.

There is potential for the ADF, in partnership with state and territory authorities, to establish a dual-boundary system, based on both physical features and government borders, for alignment during DACC tasks, especially where flooding is involved. Floods do not respect political boundaries. The Australian continent has 245 large river basins and 12 major drainage divisions.³⁴ These basins and drainage divisions are intersected by Australia's six state, two territory and 537 local government boundaries.³⁵

The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has an organisational structure built around dual-boundary requirements:

*The primary role of [USACE's] eight civil works divisions, which were established generally according to watershed boundaries, is to coordinate their districts' civil works projects [according to] congressional boundaries.*³⁶

USACE district civil works projects are usually military installations built primarily for congressional reasons independent of watershed boundaries.

The ADF and state/territory and local authorities could agree on a USACE-style dual-boundary system for DAAC responses to flood events, based on basins and drainage divisions, and other domestic disasters such as bushfires. This would enhance shared understanding and facilitate three block community support.

4. Commander's intent in three block community support

Commander's intent is a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state. It provides focus for the staff and helps leaders to act to achieve their commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.³⁷

In Brisbane from 28 November to 7 December 2019 the ADF conducted a limited compulsory Call Out of 23 ADF Reserve personnel for Operation Civil Assist 2019.³⁸ This turned out to be an excellent rehearsal for Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020.

Given the use of Call Out and Call For in both Operation Civil Assist 2019 and Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020, we can assume that our government and, by extension, our ADF leadership intend to consider compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For for the ADF Reserve workforce in the future. This means we need to take the time now to refine and enhance policy so we can simplify and streamline the procedures that enable compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For of ADF Reserve personnel.

The key to compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For policy and procedures is the inherent flexibility of the ADF Reserve workforce. Members of the ADF Reserve must be flexible to employ and, at the same time, must have flexibility in their lives. Both in policy and in practice, to maintain this balance of flexibilities, there must be continuous negotiation, cooperation and shared understanding between the ADF Reserve workforce, other ADF staff and ADF commanders.

At times of national crisis requiring three block community support, such as during Operation Bushfire Assist, the ADF Reserve workforce will need to manage unexpected complexities in their lives. Many ADF Reserve personnel are also first responders in professions such as law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency response, health and emergency care, and critical utilities such as water and power. Other ADF Reserve personnel are small business operators, farmers, single parents and home-based carers. Clearly these complexities need to be carefully considered in compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For policies.

To recognise and maintain the flexibility in employment and life that is required of our ADF Reserve workforce, and to align with our commander's intent, we must review compulsory Call Out / voluntary Call For conditions of service and decision-making delegations. For example, during Operation Bushfire Assist, some policy and procedural uncertainties surrounded compulsory Call Out / voluntary Call For. These uncertainties related to people:

- called out and exempted from ADF Reserve service because of employment or other circumstances
- called out and exempted from ADF Reserve service but released by their employer
- called out and entitled to continuous full-time service but seeking only part-time service
- called for part-time service
- called for and exempted from ADF Reserve service but released by their employer
- called for part-time service but seeking continuous full-time service.

Further, the rapid compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For of ADF Reserve personnel is hampered by policies that were not designed for national emergencies—for example, the policy covering the ADF's limited ability to access national medical records of ADF Reserve personnel through the Australian Digital Health Agency's My Health Record system.³⁹

If ADF medical officers had access to My Health Record, they could rapidly obtain accurate, comprehensive health information on ADF Reserve personnel that are deployed through compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For. This policy change would save time and ensure that our medical resources are prioritised to prepare the ADF Reserve workforce for service, especially during national emergencies requiring three block community support.

Another complication is that operational records or operational logs for deployed personnel are not compiled by unit or JTF administrative staff. This task is generally centralised at the mounting authority, Headquarters Joint Operations Command to ensure consistent input of operational records. It works well for known and established operations such as the ADF deployments to the Middle East. However, Operation Bushfire Assist was unexpected. It involved the unprecedented compulsory Call Out of around 3,000 ADF Reserve personnel, who served alongside approximately 3,600 full-time ADF personnel. An additional complication was that around 600 ADF

personnel were deployed between September 2019 and 31 December 2020, which was before Operation Bushfire Assist was a declared operation.

In complex, changing and dynamic environments such as Operation Bushfire Assist, the volume of operational records or operational logs from deployed personnel can overwhelm a mounting authority. For example, Commander 4th Brigade, Victoria, informed the author that as late as December 2019 he was rectifying inaccurate operational records from Operation Victoria Fires Assist 2009. Therefore, to avoid missed or inaccurate recording of operational records and to speed up processing, the ADF should consider delegating the creation of operational records for three block community support deployed personnel to, as a minimum, the JTF level.

As ADF Reserve service income is tax free, Reserve members are not required to include their tax file number on their personnel management profile. If a Reserve member becomes a full-time member during compulsory Call Out or voluntary Call For, their salary becomes taxable and their tax file number is required. However, as became clear during the Operation Bushfire Assist, few Australians commit their tax file number to memory. The need for members to locate their tax file numbers can cause additional administrative delay in finalising compulsory Call Out and voluntary Call For processing and a delay in future salary payments for mobilised ADF Reserve personnel. It is therefore recommended that Reserve members, despite their usual tax-free service, are required to include their tax file number on their personnel management profile.

5. Mission orders in three block community support

Mission orders are directives to people and teams that set out the results to be attained but not how they are to be achieved. Mission orders enable people and teams to understand the situation, their commander's mission and intent, and their own purpose and tasks. The commander's intent and concept of operations set guidelines that provide unity of effort while allowing the commander's people and teams to exercise initiative in planning, preparing and executing their operations.⁴⁰

Mission orders—mounting operations

A fundamental way to ensure that mission orders unify and simplify efforts is understanding and employment of doctrine. This enables action and initiative by people and teams during three block community support.

A key doctrine for three block community support is Australian Defence Force Publication 3.0.3, *Mounting Operations* (ADFP 3.0.3). ADFP 3.0.3 designates four key tasks to support the commencement, continuity and conclusion of an operation and/or campaign: mounting authority, mounting headquarters, mounting unit, and mount base.⁴¹ Importantly, the ADF has practised this doctrine for domestic, regional and global deployments since the first decade of this century.

By early, accurate and resolute designation of these four key tasks, commanders ensure organisational alignment to mission, intent, purpose and objectives. From 31 December 2019, during Operation Bushfire Assist, the Chief of Joint Operations Command ordered the following mounting designations:

- *Mounting authority*: Headquarters Joint Operations Command was responsible to the operational commander, Chief of Joint Operations, for setting the policy, direction and standards required to meet the operational commander's readiness requirements for the deploying force. Headquarters Joint Operations Command certified that the deploying force was competent to complete their role within Operation Bushfire Assist.⁴²
- *Mounting headquarters*: The mounting authority appointed Headquarters Forces Command as the mounting headquarters for the three multinational JTFs to ensure they were equipped, trained and prepared in all respects to the specified level of capability and operational readiness for the conduct of Operation Bushfire Assist.

It is very important that 'the mounting headquarters should not be a headquarters or element of the deploying force which will be required to undertake its own preparation'—this was a key lesson learnt when 3rd Brigade self-mounted for East Timor operations in 1999.⁴³

- *Mounting unit*: During Operation Bushfire Assist, in addition to naval, air and rotary-wing task groups, the three key mounting units were JTF 646 (Victoria), JTF 1110 (New South Wales / Australian Capital Territory) and JTF 1111 (South Australia / Tasmania). ADFP 3.0.3 is silent on 'mounting units', but it does acknowledge that appointing a mounting authority and mounting headquarters 'removes the burden of individual and collective training and administration from the deploying force [also known as the mounting unit] enabling the supported commander to focus on the operational task'.⁴⁴

One JTF commander from Operation Bushfire Assist emphasised the flexibility of the ADF workforce, both full-time and ADF Reserve personnel, when assigned to a mounting unit. From his experience, ADFFP 3.0.3 enabled disparate units and teams to rapidly group and re-group while working collectively and sharing the same systems and platforms—all within time-sensitive and pressured environments without organisational friction. In mounting and executing operations, this JTF commander appreciated the support, cooperation and familiarity of the combined full-time and ADF Reserve workforces.⁴⁵

- *Mounting base:* Doctrinally, the mounting base is generally located within the National Support Base (NSB). The NSB acts as the focal point for the mounting and sustainment of a deploying force.

The NSB is defined as ‘encompassing the full range of organisations, systems and arrangements (both formal and informal) that own, control or influence ADF access to, and the use of capability. In geographical terms, the NSB refers to the Australian nation’.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, it is difficult for a mounting unit to appreciate this large and difficult concept when the unit is under time, people and resource pressure.

During Operation Bushfire Assist, each JTF formed a mounting base at their geographic headquarters in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. The mounting base was generally a logistics unit organic to their JTF. In turn, these mounting bases, supported by the JTF / mounting unit, mounting headquarters and mounting authority, coordinated three block community support with key ADF enablers including:

- Joint Logistics Command
- Defence People Group
- Defence Community Organisation
- Defence Reserves Support
- Chief Information Operations Group
- Estate and Infrastructure Group
- Joint Health Command
- Defence Security and Vetting Service
- Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group
- Defence Science and Technology
- Defence Housing Australia.⁴⁷

Doctrine worked successfully. Mounting authority, mounting headquarters, mounting unit and mounting base coordination, supported by excellent work by ADF enablers, effectively employed mission orders that allowed for the rapid three block community support mounting, and later de-mounting, of forces supporting Operation Bushfire Assist.

6. Disciplined initiative in three block community support

Disciplined initiative is the duty of people and teams to exercise initiative within the constraints of the commander's intent to achieve the desired results, end state or accepted enduring conditions. Simply put, disciplined initiative is when people and teams have the discipline to follow their orders and adhere to the plan until they realise their orders and the plan are no longer suitable for the situation in which they find themselves.⁴⁸

Disciplined initiative—three block community support relationships

For the ADF, disciplined initiative includes careful mission planning, consideration, testing and assessment. One aspect of disciplined initiative is defining, establishing and maintaining two types of relationships: command relationships and support relationships.

For the ADF, 'command relationships define command responsibility and authority while support relationships define the desired purpose, scope, and effect when one capability supports another'.⁴⁹ During Operation Bushfire Assist, the three multinational JTFs that were ensuring the primacy of three block community support were mindful of the responsibilities of command, authority and support and were disciplined in establishing flexible tactical, operational and strategic relationships.

Given that tasks were spread over 50 per cent of the Australian continent, and JTF commanders were simultaneously delivering national and international tactical, operational and strategic effects, disciplined initiative was vital for success. Beyond doctrinal ADF command and control structures, the JTFs quickly developed a diverse assortment of relationships with stakeholders and then incorporated them into their organisational frameworks. For example, between January and March 2020, 64 ADF units were incorporated into JTF 1111 for operations on Kangaroo Island, South Australia.⁵⁰

Led by Major General Jake Ellwood, ADF National Support Coordinator Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020, the three multinational JTFs employed disciplined initiative in practising his vision of command relations and relationships—namely, that a hierarchy of command includes three levels of relationships requiring conscious, nuanced and deliberate review, application and adjustment by commanders and staff. This hierarchy of command is as follows:

- *Tactical—command and control relationships:* JTF commanders employ clear, precise and deliberate command and control doctrine at the tactical level. This includes the key command and control relationships of operational control and tactical control for ADF elements within each JTF. These ADF elements, regardless of parent organisation, are trained, rehearsed and practised for disciplined cooperation under this formal command and control framework.⁵¹
- *Operational—supporting and supported relationships:* Supporting and supported relationships are established when ‘when one organisation should aid, protect, complement, or sustain another force’. For JTF commanders at the operational or campaign level, supporting and supported relationships are the best way to achieve accepted and enduring three block community support. This is especially the case when they are serving alongside state, territory, local government, non-government, business and joint partners.

Disciplined designation of supporting relationships conveys priorities to commanders and staffs for planning and executing operations. A support relationship does not provide authority to organise and employ supported elements, nor does it include authoritative direction for administrative and logistic support.⁵²

- *Strategic—coordinating authority relationships:* During Operation Bushfire Assist, the three multinational JTF commanders were able to establish strategic relationships by coordinating regional and international assistance to Australia from eight nations. In addition, JTF commanders worked strategically when interacting with Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

A coordinating authority is a commander or individual who has the authority to request and enable cooperation, by capabilities or functions, of two or more organisations. Authority is not necessarily permission—this makes coordinating authority responsibilities simultaneously powerful yet fragile.

A coordinating authority does not have the authority to compel agreement. If agreement cannot be obtained, the matter is referred to the appointing authority. During Operation Bushfire Assist, at the strategic level, appointing authorities were international, national, state and territory governments.⁵³

During Operation Bushfire Assist, Major General Ellwood's command guidance was distributed to more than 6,600 ADF personnel through multiple means, including YouTube. This innovative approach set the conditions for disciplined initiative in defining, establishing and maintaining command and support relationships.⁵⁴ The ADF should capture best-practice command and support relationship examples like this to ensure our force retains this knowledge for future three block community support domestic and international operations.



7. Risk acceptance in three block community support

When considering how much risk to accept with a course of action, leaders, people and teams consider risk to the force and risk to the mission against the perceived benefit. We apply judgment about the importance of an objective, time available, and anticipated cost.

In enabling shared understanding between leaders and people, we must define who holds, or 'owns', the risk and for how long the risk is held.

Leaders, people and teams need to balance the tension between protecting the force while accepting and managing risks that must be taken to accomplish their mission.⁵⁵

Risk acceptance—leadership, training and operational experience of the ADF Reserve

In Operation Bushfire Assist, ADF Reserve was able to respond robustly, at short notice, because of high-quality training, leadership and operational experience within that organisation. Cumulative planning, experience, resourcing and leadership enables the ADF Reserve to identify and mitigate risk to force and risk to mission while defining who owns the risk and for how long risk is held.

For the Australian Army, the ADF Reserve is largely, but not exclusively, commanded by the 2nd Division. Therefore, when measured by Call Out, Call For, RSO&I, mission employment and redeployment of personnel, success during Operation Bushfire Assist is predominately to the credit of 2nd Division, supported by three multinational JTFs, and naval, air and rotary-wing task groups.

As Army's senior ADF Reserve Headquarters, 2nd Division accepted risk to force and risk to mission for the three multinational JTFs achieving their three block community support tasks. Enabling risk acceptance in three block community support is an iterative process. This process, developed during the 21st century by the Australian Army, is based on the following 2nd Division strengths in risk acceptance. It involves:

- *setting clear goals*, including by generating a Reinforcing Battle Group each year for the Ready Combat Brigade as well as Rifle Company Butterworth, Malaysia and, through the 8th Brigade (Training), enabling regional achievement of individual soldier training competencies and skills development⁵⁶
- *enabling a triad of domestic support capabilities* from 2nd Division:
 - DACC Categories 1 to 6 and Defence Aid to the Civil Power (DACP)⁵⁷
 - Operation Resolute—the ADF's contribution to the whole-of-government effort to protect Australia's borders and offshore maritime interests

- Regional Force Surveillance Group operations providing surveillance and reconnaissance capability in Australia's north to support whole-of-government efforts maintaining national sovereignty and border security
- *understanding and applying variables* and temporal requirements for ADF Reserve policy, procedures and culture, especially in leadership, pay, medical and training support
- *retaining trust at all levels and over-communicating* with the ADF Reserve workforce, via the three JTFs and their units, to ensure the workforce remains simultaneously flexible to employ while maintaining flexibility in their lives
- *warning and alerting* the ADF Reserve workforce to expect iterations and flexible employment options, especially as understanding of compulsory Call Out / voluntary Call For conditions of service and decision-making delegations evolved during Operation Bushfire Assist.

As a mounting unit, when considering three block community support risk acceptance, 2nd Division had four options:⁵⁸

- First, tolerate the risk, which is common for large external risks—for example, if the 3,000 Operation Bushfire Assist Called Out ADF Reserve personnel could not deploy as planned.
- Second, transfer the risk to a higher headquarters—for example, asking the mounting headquarters, Headquarters Forces Command, to request:
 - Headquarters Joint Operations Command, as the mounting authority, raise operational records, and
 - Army Headquarters provide RSO&I administrative support.
- Third, treat the risk by taking action to reduce the chance of the risk occurring and containing the risk to an acceptable level—for example, leading, resourcing and empowering the three JTFs to succeed in their three block community support missions.
- Fourth, terminate the risk by doing things differently, thus removing the risk where it is feasible to do so—for example, when the Ready Battalion Group was commanded from Headquarters Joint Operations Command for operations along the New South Wales – Victoria border, which removed risk from JTF 646 (Victoria) and JTF 1110 (New South Wales).

As risk acceptance in three block community support is considered in the future, rapidly assembled JTFs could be supplemented by a more deliberate structure. This structure would have three parts:

- JTFs would be established in each Australian state and territory, based on existing ADF Reserve Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Regional Force Surveillance Group, for Australia's high-risk weather season each year. For Operation Bushfire Assist the high-risk weather season occurred from September 2019 to March 2020.
- The ADF usually designates the high-risk weather season to coincide with the annual cyclone season, which is 1 November to 30 April, but cyclonic events have been known to occur outside this period. In addition, for bushfires 'the dry summer months [December to February] are the danger time for southern Australia, while northern Australia is at risk during winter [June to August]'.⁵⁹
- In each state and territory, a triple-hatted authority would be appointed to be responsible for:
 - emergency management
 - homeland security
 - DACC.

This authority would be tasked with state/territory comprehensive emergency management to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters caused by all natural, technological or human cause hazards. This authority would be empowered to coordinate resources between all three areas, helping to reduce bureaucratic friction.⁶⁰

- National resilience hubs, or resilience centres of excellence, would be established in each state and territory. At these hubs, ADF Reserve and state/territory first responders, such as volunteer firefighters and emergency services, could regularly combine planning, resources, training and education to prepare for, and support, three block community support requirements.

Once developed, future national resilience hubs could include multi-user facilities that are integrated throughout Australian communities. These facilities, built to empower our local populations, would reduce risk to mission by harmonising ADF Reserve and state/territory first response capabilities, ensuring that three block community support is practised, integrated and available when required.

Conclusion

This paper proposes the concept of ‘three block community support’ as an ADF capability employed in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions, including DACC. It describes the ADF’s application of three block community support during Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020 and proposes procedural, organisational and cultural changes to enhance this capability.

The success of the ADF’s collaborative leadership during Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–2020 was demonstrated by enduring people-to-people, team-to-team and community-to-community partnerships that enabled the ADF to provide three block community support that enabled community-empowered and community-led bushfire response, recovery and reconstruction.

Endnotes

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