2015 Defence White Paper Consultation

Defence for our future: proposals from the next generation of strategic thinkers

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Introduction

Defence White Papers are intended to provide the blueprint for Australia’s future defence policy. While it is important to listen to established defence authorities, the 2015 Defence White Paper should also take account of new ideas from the next generation of strategic thinkers. We are part of that next generation and are able to offer fresh thinking, since we are the generation that will see the choices made in this Defence White Paper come to fruition.

Our submission covers four issues:

- Australian defence force reform – pages 3-4
- Cyber: an increasing security challenge – page 5-6
- Indonesia: a moment of opportunity – page 7
- Communicating Australia’s defence policy – page 8
Australian Defence Force Reform

What should be the service priorities?

Refocus toward Navy and Air Force: the Australian Defence Force (ADF) should review its service priorities according to Australia's strategic interests. The defence of Australia is best achieved by defending Australia's air-sea gap, which requires prioritising funding to the Navy and Air Force. An extension of amphibious capabilities will help to achieve this goal and assist with securing the South Pacific and Timor-Leste. The Army, with reduced funding, should concentrate on developing its capabilities for humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, and assisting the military operations of our international partners, thereby fulfilling Australia's commitment to a stable Indo-Pacific and global order. Additional funding required to outfit the Navy and Air Force can be found by reducing the total size of the Army, in line with a smaller force concentrated on achieving strategic interests.

How should Australia redefine domestic theatres of operation?

Investing in long-range engagement capabilities: the ADF should invest in long-range engagement air and naval capabilities, as well as ground-launched munitions. While recent purchases such as the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) mark important upgrades to ADF equipment, they lack the capacity for long-range defensive engagements over ocean. As part of a refocus towards air and naval defence, Australia should invest in combat vessels, aircraft, and munitions with extended projection ranges and loiter times.

‘Air-Sea Gap’ (sea denial): the ADF should reconsider how it approaches the defence of Australia. As an island nation, preventing an attack on Australia is best achieved by preventing an opponent gaining access to the Australian mainland. Therefore, we recommend that the Navy and the Air Force develop a sea denial strategy capable of preventing an opponent from controlling the air-sea gap.

Assisting close neighbours: strong neighbours, including Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and the South Pacific states, would facilitate defence of Australia's air-sea gap. The Australian government should continue assisting the development of regional defence forces as an extension of the defence of Australia.

How should training be reformed?

Specialists: the ADF has operated in a variety of capacities in the 21st century, ranging from humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, to assisting the military campaigns of our international partners. However, each deployment has utilised a small core of the Army for the majority of combat operations, namely the Special Forces. The Army would benefit from expanding its similar special operations capabilities. This can be achieved by reducing the total size of the Army with the objective of creating a small, highly professional force.

Why should Australia develop paramedical-rescue capabilities?

There is no specialised aerial paramedical rescue capability within the ADF to support Special Operations domestically and abroad. The ADF should consider developing a Paramedical Rescue Operations Unit as a Special Forces unit to support the high-risk work of the SAS and Commandos. Such a unit would be heavily based on United States Air Force Pararescue Units and operate in specialist aeromedical, rescue, and combat support roles. Initial training could be conducted in conjunction with the US Air Force. Initial operational requirements would include a minimum of three custom fitted rotary-wing aircraft (e.g. Sikorsky HH-60) with full combat paramedical fit outs, support staff, and command and control structures.
What role should women play in the ADF?

The ADF must strive to be an employer of choice for women. Women seeking to enter the ADF should not have worry about being abused, mistreated, disadvantaged or excluded as a result of their gender. The findings of the 2012 Australian Human Rights Commission's Review into the Treatment of Women in the ADF remain damning. Women continue to be underrepresented in the ADF and reports of abuse and sexual violence against women have appeared in the Australian media. Such instances of abuse and mistreatment are unacceptable and the ADF cannot be seen to be reacting slowly or softly. Transforming the role of women in the ADF must be among the highest priorities of the organisation. To this end, lifting the restrictions on women in combat roles is a positive step. The ADF could also seriously consider the idea of raising a female-centric infantry battalion, as suggested by LTCOL Caroll in the Australian Army Journal, Volume XI, Number 1, 2014.
Cyber: an increasing security challenge

Why consider cyber security now?

The cyber domain represents a security challenge to Australian citizens, Australian businesses and the Australian nation. As reliance on technology to perform critical functions increases, so too will the risks to the Australian military, society and economy. Cyber-attacks, cyber-crime and cyber-espionage can be perpetrated by governments, 'hacktivists', criminals, cyber-terrorists and industrial spies. Potential motivations encompass ideological, political, financial, or military objectives. Cyber security, unlike traditional security, does not follow ordinary rules and practices. Identities of belligerents can be hard, if not impossible, to ascertain and offensive capabilities can be difficult to assess and counter.

Why does cyber security matter to Australia's defence?

**Cyber-attacks** have the capacity to shut down military and civilian infrastructure, with potential outcomes running from mild inconvenience to mass-casualty events. Cyber-attack may also affect the Australian economy by disrupting private bank accounts, currency and share markets. Given Australia's geostrategic location, cyber-attack is a higher relative threat to Australia than physical attack. Indeed, cyber-attack can threaten the physical and economic safety of ordinary people. In 2007 Estonia's two largest banks were compromised by a cyber-attack, and in 2010 a computer virus caused major structural damage to Iranian uranium enrichment plants.

**Cyber-espionage** erodes the ability of Australia and its allies to maintain a military and informational advantage. The alleged compromise of the anti-radar capabilities of the new multi-billion-dollar Joint Strike Fighter Jet represents just one aspect of this ever-evolving threat. This stolen technology has now been incorporated into foreign military systems, and in the process Australia has lost a technological edge in which we have heavily invested.

**Cyber-crime** has targeted Australian businesses, with many becoming the victims of intellectual property theft. Although larger businesses may have access to resources and expertise to mitigate these threats, small and medium businesses are especially vulnerable. The resulting loss of a competitive edge by Australian businesses in the global marketplace will negatively affect the Australian economy.

Recommendations

*Australia's cyber defence capabilities*, must extend to protect all Australian citizens, businesses and interests. The Australian government should maintain its large role in preventing all cyber offences.

Cyber was considered in 2013 White Paper as highly important. With the Australian Cyber Security Operations Centre coming online in late 2014, the 2015 Defence White Paper should retain this emphasis. Although by its nature the cyber-security domain is highly secretive, it is important to dedicate resources towards raising the awareness of cyber security issues and to educate those who are most at risk. Education, in particular, is essential to combating the theft of intellectual property.

While acknowledging that the elements discussed above largely fall outside the typical responsibilities of Defence, the ADF has and will continue to play a central role in cyber-security. Therefore, it is important that Defence remains at the leading edge of the development and implementation of cyber solutions, both defensive and offensive, in a whole of government security environment.
It is clear that Australia must further its cyber capabilities to counter cyber-attack, cyber-espionage, and cyber-crime. Due to the different dynamics of cyber defence, the 2015 White Paper should promote a unique legislative framework in which cyber institutions and operations should be encompassed. This legislation should incorporate more independent procedures within which Australia's cyber offensive and defence capabilities should operate.
Indonesia: a moment of opportunity

Why consider Indonesia now?

Indonesia is at a turning point and can either emerge as a source of peace and security, or a source of potential threat, for Australia. If Australia is to remain influential as a middle power in the Indo-Pacific it should take advantage of Indonesia’s economic and strategic potential. Australia needs to assert its intention to continue supporting and cooperating with Indonesia as it transitions to a stronger democracy and becomes a leader in the Southeast Asian region.

Why does Indonesia matter to Australia’s defence?

Indonesia is central to Australia’s defence. Geographically, Indonesia lies across Australia’s air and sea approaches. Therefore, Indonesia can either act as Australia’s security blanket or as a potential launch pad for attacks on Australia. The relationship with Indonesia is important for Defence for the following reasons: it has a population of over 249 million people; an increasing economic influence, which will soon surpass Australia’s; it is a founding member of ASEAN; it is Australia’s gateway to the Southeast Asian region; it is undergoing a large-scale modernisation of its defence force; and it remains the largest recipient of Australia’s development and assistance aid. By investing in Indonesia’s future Australia can contribute to a strong and stable Indonesia, and ensure Australia’s security.

As Indonesia looks to become the most powerful nation in the Southeast Asian region, Australia should support Indonesia’s growth so it positively influences Australia’s security. Joko Widodo has recently been elected as the Indonesian President. This transition provides Australia with an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with Indonesia. However, there are various challenges associated with the Australia-Indonesia relationship. By recent polls, it is evident that Australians’ view of Indonesia is one-sided and ill-informed, as many consider Indonesia either a threat or a state that Australia can ignore. This is neither a holistic nor accurate representation of Indonesia. A considerable number (40%) of those polled by the Lowy Institute in 2014 believe the relationship is deteriorating; the relationship has been marred by issues arising from asylum seekers, territorial violations, espionage, and the live-export trade from Australia. Our biggest concern is that in the current political environment Australia will miss its opportunity to foster the relationship with our increasingly powerful neighbour.

Recommendations

We recommend that the 2015 Defence White Paper address Australians’ general lack of understanding of Indonesia and its significance in the Indo-Pacific. Australia has a great foundation in the Australian-Indonesian Defence Relationship and this should be developed further, with increased bilateral and multilateral defence exchanges between Australia, Indonesia and other ASEAN member states, as well as their associated plus mechanisms. On a micro-level, defence students’ education could incorporate compulsory learning of an Asian language such as Indonesian to enable active engagement in the Southeast Asian region. Australia should also focus on more nuanced education for our leaders and politicians, for example, via study tours. A clear and holistic understanding by Australia’s politicians will ensure a clear message is communicated to the media and by extension to Australians. By fostering a strong understanding and relationship, the Australian government can promote peace and stability in the broader Southeast Asian region.
Communicating Australia's regional defence policy

Why consider Australia's international relationships now?

The international order is changing. As students of strategic and defence studies, we are interested in what that means for Australia's national strategy and what role our defence force will play in our relationships in Northeast Asia and our immediate neighbourhood. Decision-making during this period of uncertainty should be communicated to the Australian people regularly. We also believe that Defence is uniquely placed to promote vital trust about Australian defence policy by communicating that policy to our rapidly changing region.

Recommendations

As it is currently communicated, defence policy is ambiguous. The Australian government and the Department of Defence should make clear the direction in which Australian defence policy is going through consultation and interaction with the Australian public. In particular, Australia's defence relationships with our neighbours and our region should be clearly articulated in the Defence White Paper. The Australian public also lacks an understanding of ADF capabilities, and there is a gap between uniformed personnel and the general civilian population. We believe that this may be remedied through more opportunities for interaction between ADF personnel and the Australian public. We also recommend that measures be taken to enhance defence's relationships abroad. Possibilities would involve greater communication about our defence policy and greater interaction between the ADF and other Australian Defence personnel, and militaries and defence personnel in our region.

Northeast Asia

The Australian government has made efforts to foster Australia's relations in Northeast Asia. Given the ongoing tensions in the region, including nuclear posturing and territorial disputes, the Australian government should seek to improve the Australian public's understanding about the broader implications of its relationships in Northeast Asia. The Australian government should make a concerted effort to be transparent and clear-cut concerning its strategic intentions. While the development of Free Trade Agreements with Japan, South Korea and China are integral to Australia's role in the region, more must be done to explain the link between economics and security. The government should also engage the public in understanding the possible role for Australia in the event of a regional conflict. ADF personnel are well positioned to facilitate public discourse both within Australia and the region on these matters.

The near neighbourhood

It is in Australia's best interest to increase engagement with our immediate neighbours and to actively inform the Australian public on these issues. However, as it currently stands, Australia's defence policy is communicated largely through the Defence White Paper and statements made by Australian politicians. The Defence White Paper signals the direction of Australia's defence policy but rarely reaches the Australia public. This leaves politicians to inform the Australian public of Australia's defence policy; but political jousting produces mixed messages. We recommend that Defence attempt to remedy this issue. As previously mentioned, Defence can take the lead in informing the public about Australia's defence policy. In addition, the Australian government may consider releasing a condensed version of the Defence White Paper, or even an entirely separate document, for public consumption.