Defence White Paper: Responses to Consultation

Crafting Peace as a Positive Defence Strategy

Executive Summary

This paper addresses two of the questions nominated as part of the consultation process. The responses with respect to future security (not specifically Defence) thinking are from the perspective of the overarching challenge facing Australia as a nation today and in the future. That challenge being:

“how can successive Australian governments work with other governments and other instrumentalities towards crafting a more peaceful world rather than simply lurching from one crisis to the next? Specifically to predicate ‘defence’ strategic thinking and action on the gradual movement away from conflict/war towards crafting the capabilities to resolve conflicts in peaceful and just ways.

The two questions to be addressed are:

- What are the main threats to, and opportunities for, Australia’s security?
- How should Defence invest in its people, and how should it continue to enhance its culture?

The paper also provides an historical context for the thinking that has shaped this response.

Response to question 1: What are the main threats to, and opportunities for, Australia’s security?

I see the main threats, current and potential, as being the entrenchment of fears thereby creating a ‘siege’ mentality which is not conducive to the non-violent resolution of tensions. The negative impact of siege (threat) mentality is now widely recognised in Neuropsychology research with that research attesting to the likely impairment of a person’s capacity to accurately assess threat levels.

Another significant threat is the formation/maintenance of defence and strategic alliances which may require Australia’s participation in a war which does not directly impact on our national interests but which we are obliged to join because of those alliances.

Other significant threats include the increasing polarisation of our population around religious, political and racial divides thereby undermining our proud history of multiculturalism.

Strategies which could promote the achievement of non-violent resolution to conflict (opportunities):

Strategy 1.1: The use of language which challenges/condemns the behaviours whilst respecting the person (a core Christian principle) and the language of peace.

Strategy 1.2: The formation of alliances needs to have the dual purpose of pursuing strategic objectives VIA the active exploration of how that objective can be achieved without being seen as compromising the national security and integrity of other nations/groups not part of the alliance.
Strategy 1.3: Engagement of speech writers with training in ‘peace journalism’ as a strategy to promote, via media outlets, non-violent attitudes towards conflict resolution.

Strategy 1.4: Inclusion of people on any security forum/ongoing advisory body with a background in non-violent conflict resolution and/or knowledge of neuro-psychology – specifically managing reactions to threats.

Strategy 1.5: The establishment of proactive community engagement initiatives designed to promote in young Muslim men and women a sense of connection and commitment to the wider Australian community as being ‘their’ country and community.

Strategy 1.6: Nation-building strategies become pivotal to any defence strategy thereby reducing the risk of feelings of alienation by disadvantaged/disenfranchised people.

Response to question: How should Defence invest in its people, and how should it continue to enhance its culture?

Responding to this question is difficult as it is now recognised that there are many elements of Defence culture which are far from healthy and in some instances has resulted in the tacit denial/overlooking of criminal acts either in the ranks or at the ADFA. Several reports attest to this assertion the most recent being the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce’s report into HMAS Leeuwin (naval base) released June 2014 which documents widespread abuses of cadets as being commonplace before the base was decommissioned.

Strategy 2.1: The use of new knowledge/insights into psycho- neurological functioning to guide/underpin training programs, especially where ADF personnel in combat roles where they will experience threat/danger.

Strategy 2.2: Post deployment that programs be developed by non-Defence organisations to provide individuals, couples and families, with information on the common psycho/social impact of exposure to threat/danger. The programs could also provide psycho/social coaching on how to manage any stress/trauma reactions and when to seek professional assistance should the symptoms persist. They could also teach ‘psycho-social reconnections strategies.

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28th October 2014
Background to this submission and a vision for the future:

I turned sixty seven in September this year which means I was born into a world of post WWII turmoil and Holocaust horror. My childhood was peppered with parental and national anxieties about other wars, Korean, Malay insurgency and international crises such as Suez, fear of Communism (the “Red Peril”), Cold War. Father served in North Australia and was in Darwin, where I now live, during the bombing. Mother served in the signals core. Our family friends were men who served in El Alamein, the Kokoda Trail and imprisoned in Changi. The Dutchman who built my childhood home, on land from a war service grant to my father, was a new arrival who was in the Dutch Resistance. My uncle served in the Korean War and, when demobbed, along with his friend, returned to live with us for a short while. He soon left however the friend stayed for several years. In that time he repeatedly sexually abused my older sister and me.

By the time I started university – studying Social Work, Australia was heavily involved in the Vietnam War with conscription hanging like a dreadful cloud over the heads of Australia’s young men. There were frequent demonstrations, some of which were quite ugly against the ‘call up’ and war. Today we have a generation of Australian men who continue to bear the scars of that War. Their post war efforts succeeded in having war trauma formally recognised within the mental health field. They set up the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service which today provides assistance to veterans and their families of other wars, and peace keeping missions. I am now one of another ‘army’: of counsellors who are contracted to provide counselling to help address their mental health issues and disruption to family life as a result of their ADF service. I sit where I am now sitting and listen to the emotional pain of men and women who have served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Rwanda and Timor Leste as they struggle to make sense of their experiences and to rebuild their lives and relationships: systematically sifting through the rubble of their post-deployment lives. And too, we have the recently established Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, set up to specifically address abuses within Australia’s defence forces.

At university some of my friends and classmates were the children of the Holocaust survivors. I saw the tattoos of Auschwitz and other camps on their arms and in some cases listened to their stories of survival and escape. I sat with them as they, anxiously listened to the news during the 1967 Six Day War.

In other roles I have worked with refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Iraq (Kurds) and in 1999 was part of the Darwin response contingent providing support to evacuees from Timor Leste. In 2011 I travelled to Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo) where, even then the evidence of war, siege and trauma pervaded the very spirit of its weary people with many of the building still showing the deadly signs of the conflict. I stood on the very spot where Arch Duke Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated: the final trigger for WWI – the war that was supposed to end all wars!

It is understood that the purpose of this White Paper is to provide the way forward for Australia’s defence and security for the next twenty – twenty five years by which time I will be in my dotage. The following comments and strategies are offered in an attempt to help craft a global environment in which we and our leaders are not driven by fear or anxiety pertaining to international tensions.
A world where: vast amounts of resources do not need to be spent on ‘defence’ rather than peace
pursuits, and where generation after generation of citizens and families are not reeling
from psychological trauma and moral injury;

A world where: the political will and energy is on fostering peace and the equitable, non-violent
resolution of conflicts over access to resources, recognition of different peoples’
aspirations and their right to a secure place in this world.

A world where: young men and women are not radicalised by the taint of dispossession, political
alienation and powerlessness, and brutal injustices

A world where: fewer members of our defence forces die of their own hand than have been killed in
battle.

A world where” I can visit a country and not be harangued by the Immigration official because I
choose not to have their entry visa stamped in my passport because it could impede
my capacity to visit other nations. This occurred in June 2013 when my husband and I
visited Israel to attend an international conference.

And most of all a world where: the simple act of turning on the television does not bring turmoil,
brutality and human rapacity right into our living rooms and where our children and
their children can grow up not plagued by fear of difference – racial, religious and
political.

If we are to achieve that world we need to have the courage to meet the challenges of finding new,
peaceful solutions to world tensions rather than building more and more alliances and bigger defence
forces all of which risks escalating the tensions turning them into open conflicts thereby causing more
turmoil and human suffering. In short we need a few Noah’s to craft philosophical and political
vessels in which we can chart the waters towards finding world peace, equity and harmony in
diversity.

Response to question 1 of the consultation document: What are the main threats to, and
opportunities for, Australia’s security?

I see the main threats, current and potential as being the entrenchment of fears thereby creating a
‘siege’ mentality which is not conducive to the non-violent resolution of tensions. The negative
impact of siege (threat) mentality is now widely recognised in Neuropsychology research with that
research attesting to the likely impairment of a person’s capacity to accurately assess threat levels.
When evidenced in our leaders and fuelled by social media there is the very real risk of a nationwide
heightened sense of threat with the possibility of panic reactions. From a non-defence perspective this
has the potential to create lasting psychological dysfunction negatively impacting on our individual
and collective capacity to lead healthy and productive lives.

Another significant threat is the formation/maintenance of defence and strategic alliances which may
require Australia’s participation in a war which does not directly impact on our national interests but
which we are obliged to join because of those alliances. In making this assertion I have referred to
our involvement in both World Wars and recent examples (War on Terrorism – following 9/11 attacks
on the US) which saw Australian’s participation in two conflict zones. It is of concern that our former
Prime Minister, John Howard, has recently acknowledged (21 Sept 2014) that he was wrong with
respect to ‘weapons of mass destruction’ which ‘justified’ the invasion of Iraq, resulting in the loss of many lives, military and civilian and which is considered to have triggered the current crisis with respect to the Islamic State.

And too by forming alliances one, by implication, creates another dynamic in which other nation states/political interests are overlooked or deemed hostile. This dynamic has the potential to create tensions, even aggressive action, especially if those alliances are seen as being a threat to the legitimate aspirations of the non-aligned countries/groups. Whilst I have not heavily researched this matter one could suggest that such alliances, and particularly any subsequent actions could cause some parties to become radicalised thereby upping the threat level to Australia’s security.

Other significant threats include the increasing polarisation of our population around religious, political and racial divides thereby undermining our proud history of multiculturalism. Recent examples of attacks on mosques, Muslims and the temporary embargo on wearing Islamic headdress in Parliament House being examples of this shift in some aspects of the national psyche.

Timor Leste: Australia has a history of positive engagement with the people of Timor Leste. It is envisaged that this bond may be weakened in years to come, even fractured, whereby men and women are radicalised as a result of Australia’s current policies and actions with respect to the dispute over access to oil reserves in the surrounding seas. If Australia does not give recognition and respect to the aspirations of the East Timorese Government to achieve economic viability to assist this country in its infancy then there is the potential for some members to consider Australia as a hostile neighbour. This could present a real and close threat to our national security.

**Strategy 1.1: The use of language which challenges/condemns the behaviours whilst respecting the person (a core Christian principle) and the language of peace.**

Our political and other leaders need to learn what I call the ‘language of peace’. That language does not serve to heighten tensions or seek ascendency over another. It is language which honours everyone’s humanity. Thus statements, such as we have heard too often in recent weeks, especially in response to outrageous atrocities need to condemn the atrocity not the person. By condemning the person one runs the risk of unwittingly re-enforcing the very behaviour we found so abhorrent because it further disconnects the perpetrator from our shared humanity. The more we bluster about the perpetrators’ inhumanity the greater is the risk of them repeating or, dreadful as may be, upping the ante in subsequent actions. People like Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King. Dalai Lama and many others from all walks of life have demonstrated the practical wisdom of choosing a non-violent path, including the use non-violent language. Thus we could have the ‘struggle’ against terrorism which implies the need for courage, determined effort and overt absence of reference to aggressive responses. It is possible that with this use of language media headlines could be less dramatic which might, just might, result in more tempered reporting of crises.

**Strategy 1.2: The formation of alliances needs to have the dual purpose of pursuing strategic objectives VIA the active exploration of how that objective can be achieved without being seen as compromising the national security and integrity of other nations/groups not part of the alliance.**

By building this perspective into any formal alliance it reminds all members of the need to consider other views and aspirations and in so doing to work collaboratively to resolve any conflicting issues/objectives in peaceful (equitable) ways. In so doing this has the potential to reduce the risk of radicalised persons acting in ways which could spiral into open conflict or deepen rather than make
room for respectful philosophical differences. Whilst this strategy might seem to be pie in the sky it has the basis for peace building by providing opportunities to identify and discuss differences instead of simply polarising strategic thinking underpinning the alliances thereby making them blinkered to other, equally valid considerations and hence less willing/able to negotiate: A tragic example being the establishment of Israel without consideration for the needs of Palestinians. In practical terms this may reduce the risk of whole countries/groups deciding to act unilaterally, as in Timor Leste with respect to the quest of autonomy from Indonesia. In short we need to be constantly looking for opportunities to bridge the gaps as a preventative strategy to avert regional turmoil which could impact on Australia. It is not sufficient that Australia opens its doors to people or provides a peace keeping presence in the wake of turmoil which this nation’s leaders may have failed to avert.

This author is of the opinion that the granting of non-member observer status within the United Nations to Palestine is a tragic example of the failure of powerful alliances to serve to protect and preserve member nations AND to work towards formal acknowledgment of other nations impacted on by that alliance. Sixty four years after Israel as a nation from land occupied and owned by Palestinians they, Palestinians, have only now become recognised as a ‘nation’, albeit homeless, on the world stage and hence have the potential to have their voice heard!!! Can we in all conscience consider our strategic interests are justified in abstaining from the vote by offering the following as the reason?

“Australia’s representative said that its decision to abstain in the vote balanced its support for the right of the Palestinian people to have a State with its concern for the need for a negotiated two-State solution. The resolution would confer the status of a non-Member Observer State on Palestine, not that of a Member State. He was concerned the resolution might make a negotiated solution more difficult. He urged both parties to return to negotiations, and said that it was important that neither side take actions now that would jeopardize that goal”. (UN press releases)

The above is an example of double-speak, put colloquially: ‘having a foot in both camps’ which failed to recognise and acknowledge the huge political, economic and philosophical power differential between Israel and the Palestinians. In short it lacked moral courage so aptly displayed by so many other nations. It is perhaps not a co-incidence that many of the nations who spoke in favour of the motion have themselves felt the pain and struggle to attain recognition and status on the world stage Or did they simply belong to other alliances?? This is an example of ‘missed opportunities’ to demonstrate to Australians with Palestinian connections that we as a nation are interested in pursuing international justice and to let Jewish Australians know we are interested in pursuing peace for all peoples and in so doing to urge them to join with our leaders in achieving this.

**Strategy 1.3: Engagement of speech writers with training in ‘peace journalism’ as a strategy to promote, via media outlets, non-violent attitudes towards conflict resolution.**

Peace Journalism is growing in international significance within journalism circles. Whilst it has its critics, mostly vis a vis the realities and constraints of publishing, having someone trained in this field working within Defence/Government would serve to provide material which general media outlets can use so that: “editors and reporters [can] make choices – about what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict.” [www.transcend.org/...peace-journalism](http://www.transcend.org/...peace-journalism)
The Sydney Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies’ current Director and Head of Academic studies is Associate Professor Jake Lynch who has a background in peace journalism.

**Strategy 1.4: Inclusion of people on security forums/ongoing advisory bodies with a background in non-violent conflict resolution and/or knowledge of neuro-psychology – specifically managing reactions to threats.**

By having people on Defence/Security advisory bodies from professional backgrounds which do not have a ‘defence/strategic thinking’ focus the Government will have access to other perspectives/thinking which focus on non-violent conflict resolution strategies and the management of emotional reactions to overt threats/acts of aggression (Bali Bombing). The management of one’s emotional reactions to threat (mostly triggered at a pre-conscious level) is pivotal to the person’s capacity to engage in rational thinking and planning to ensure one responds rather than simply reacts to the threat. This aspect of human psychological functioning especially with regard to managing trauma reactions and to assist perpetrators of violence to learn to step back from their ‘default’ position and in so doing begin to learn and practice non-violent strategies to achieve conflict resolution.

It also underpins the principles of ‘containing’ panic as our (human) neurological receptors of threat can easily trigger a similar reaction in others thereby risking the fuelling of generalised panic/anxiety which impedes individual and collective capacity to think through the issues.

**Strategy 1.5: The establishment of proactive community engagement initiatives designed to promote in young Muslim men and women a sense of connection and commitment to the wider Australian community as being ‘their’ country and community.**

Much has been written in national and international media on the growing threat to national security from ‘home grown’ terrorists. Commentators speak of a sense of disconnection by certain young people from Muslim communities to the wider community, with the possibility of family dysfunction contributing to their radicalisation. These two elements are seen as leading to those young people becoming susceptible to ‘radicalized hype’ through social media which promises a sense of connection and purpose by joining in fighting in places such as Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. It is interesting to note that of all the veterans, including officers, whom I have counselled have histories of family dysfunction with that dysfunction being a key element of their decision to enlist in the ADF. By enlisting they are offered many positive things which they may be unable to achieve on their own in the general community. The inducements, some formally highlighted in ADF recruitment programs include:

- a sense of camaraderie and purpose through involvement in something which is highly regarded by the government and general community physically evidenced by the wearing of a uniform;
- a structured emotional and social environment which has clear lines of communication and authority (something often missing in dysfunctional families);
- a good job and opportunities for advancement
- financial security – as evidenced through accommodation, existing options for training and purchase of own home.
- A valued sense of self.
History teaches us that, through the ages, men, and some women, responding to this motivation, have formed the backbone of many an army/defence force unless of course they have been conscripted.

Given that this appears to be a major motivating force in response to an unmet psycho-social need the creation of engagement programs could set the scene to attract people away from the promise of radicalised groups and in so doing strengthen our sense of ‘community in diversity’. No doubt any number of key Muslim leaders would welcome and assist in the development of such a program. That, combined with less ‘blustering’ language towards some Muslim groups, might help to build bridges rather than create social schisms.

**Strategy 1.6: Nation-building strategies become pivotal to any defence strategy thereby reducing the risk of feelings of alienation by disadvantaged/disenfranchised or marginalised people.**

It is acknowledged that the implementation of this strategy, perhaps more than the others, is problematic as all action must be predicated on respecting other countries’ sovereignty. If done under the aegis of established forums such as the United Nations, but not specifically as a UN project, prosperous countries such as Australia could lead the way in assisting disenfranchised/dispossessed people to seek non-violent strategies to achieve their aspirations. To be credible those strategies would need to be transparent in having no political agenda’s (for Australia’s benefit) other than the will to promote global peace.

**Response to question 2: How should Defence invest in its people, and how should it continue to enhance its culture?**

Responding to this question is difficult as it is now recognised that there are many elements of Defence culture which are far from healthy and in some instances has resulted in the tacit denial/overlooking of criminal acts either in the ranks or at the ADFA. Several reports attest to this assertion the most recent being the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce’s report into HMAS Leeuwin (naval base) released June 2014 which documents widespread abuses of cadets as being commonplace before the base was shut down.

As a counsellor I have had several clients who reported systematic bullying and harassment, in training and while on deployment. One veteran commenting that, whilst on deployment in Afghanistan the veteran often prayed to be blown up by the Taliban as that would mean removal of the necessity to endure the abuse from an officer. Another veteran was so bullied in training (army) he lost all interest in sexual intimacy which seriously threatened his previously happy marriage and his emotional welfare.

The establishment of the Defense Abuse Task Force itself acknowledges that great harm and infringement of human rights has taken place within successive generations of Defence establishment. It is understood that already the Taskforce has paid out in excess of $29,000,000 as reparations with the additional costs of counselling and restorative facilitation conferences.

This response seeks to provide some ways forward which attempts to confront the challenges of preparing men and women to be effective in combat roles whilst at the same time ensuring
they are provided with the social and emotional skills to reconnect with self and others on return from deployment/training.

**Strategy 2.1: The use of new knowledge/insights into psycho- neurological functioning to guide/underpin training programs, especially where ADF personnel in combat roles are likely to be exposed to threat or danger.**

The above strategy is likely to require a major overhaul of training rationale and philosophies necessitating the retraining of key staff. Its benefits, whilst likely to be evidenced in the longer term could result in fewer instances of physical and mental breakdown, lasting psychological and moral harm and prevent the breakdown of marriages and family life. It also has the real potential to reduce the number of veterans who suicide on return from deployment or engage in family violence and other forms of antisocial behaviours. Most of all it would ‘normalise’ the need for each veteran to engage in psycho/social activities designed to reduce the negative impact of training and combat related pressures/stressors.

**Strategy 2.2: Post deployment that programs be developed by non-Defence organisations to provide individuals, couples and families, with information on the common psycho/social impact of exposure to threat/danger. The programs could also provide psycho/social coaching on how to manage any stress/trauma reactions and when to seek professional assistance should the symptoms persist. They could also teach ‘psycho-social reconnections strategies.’**

The use of non-Defence organisations is proposed as anecdotal evidence suggests ADF personnel are reluctant to seek assistance for psychological issues from ADF resources as there is the requirement for the information to be formally recorded. Similarly they are potentially more likely to speak openly about experiences and concerns to civilian facilitators especially if those facilitators have a good grasp of the ADF structure and culture.

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