

Land Warfare Studies Centre

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From Deakin to Dobb

**The Army and the Making of Australian
Strategy in the 20th Century**

by

Michael Evans

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the place of the Army in the making of Australian strategy in the 20th century. It argues that, over the past one hundred years, Australian peacetime strategic planning has been characterised by a schism between the requirements of local territorial defence and the needs of security defined on the basis of upholding vital international and overseas interests. The major consequence of this schism in Australian defence philosophy was that, for long periods during the past century, the Australian Army was of minimal strategic value to the nation.

Between 1901 and 2001, the inclination of a majority of Australian strategists was to develop defence policy to protect national territory rather than national interests. Accordingly, naval forces, and later naval and air forces, were elevated to primacy, with land forces relegated to a passive role in continental defence. This strategic approach was particularly marked during the era of Empire from 1901 to 1939 and, again, during the era of Defence of Australia from 1972 to 1997. Yet the Army was consistently required to defend Australian interests in offshore operations in conjunction with allies throughout the century. Australian land forces served overseas in both the World Wars, and during the security crises of the first half of the Cold War from 1950 to 1972, as well as more recently in the early post-Cold War period from 1991 to 2000.

The study contends that Australia's 20th-century defence planning represents a striking paradox between peacetime strategic theory and actual operational practice in times of war and crisis. The practical result of this paradox was that the land force often suffered from a critical lack of resources and

readiness. The paper then examines the debate that developed in defence circles between 1997 and 2000 over the growing strategic irrelevance of the Army caused by years devoted to continental defence without adequate resources. The impact of events such as the outbreak of the 1999 East Timor crisis and the publication of the 2000 Defence White Paper on the role of land forces in strategy are analysed. The essay concludes by suggesting that, in the security conditions prevalent in the new century, Australia requires a more balanced and realistic approach to strategy than in the past. Upholding Australia's vital interests now requires a well-equipped, medium-weight Army that is capable of conducting comprehensive operations in a joint maritime strategy. Without versatile land forces, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is unlikely to be able to meet the full range of the country's 21st-century security requirements.

FROM DEAKIN TO DIBB: THE ARMY AND THE MAKING OF AUSTRALIAN STRATEGY IN THE 20TH CENTURY¹

Australia . . . no nation acquits itself so valiantly in war, no nation takes so little pains in peace-time.

The Times of London, 18 April 1954

On 30 June 1911 Colonel James Whiteside McCay, Director of Intelligence in the Citizen Military Force (CMF) and a former Minister for Defence in the 1904–5 Reid–McLean Government, delivered an important address to the Victorian United Services Institute in Melbourne on the subject of ‘The True Principles of Australian Defence’.² In the years between Federation in 1901 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Colonel McCay was regarded as a leading military expert and one of Australia’s best-educated citizen soldiers. This high standing was reflected by his later service in World War I as Inspector General of the 1st Australian Imperial Force

¹ This paper is based on presentations by the author to the Chief of Army’s Military History Conference on 8 March 2001 at the National Convention Centre, Canberra, and to the Force Development Group, Australian Army Combined Arms, Training and Development Centre (CATDC), Puckapunyal, Vic., on 26 March 2001.

² Colonel The Honourable J. W. McCay, VD, Director of Intelligence, CMF, ‘The True Principles of Australia’s Defence’, *Commonwealth Military Journal*, August 1911, pp. 395–402. I am grateful to Major Russell Parkin, Research Fellow at the Land Warfare Studies Centre, for bringing this article to my attention.

(1st AIF) and as commander of the First Infantry Brigade at Gallipoli and of the Fifth Division on the Western Front.³

McCay's 1911 United Services address represents one of the best expositions of the enduring dilemmas that successive generations of Australian strategists have faced since Federation. He identified two major philosophical problems that were beginning to develop in the strategic thought of the ten-year-old Australian Commonwealth. The first problem was the growing schism between defence for local and national needs, and defence for overseas and Imperial needs. A second, related issue was the tendency of many Australians to view the Royal Navy as the nation's front-line force, while relegating land forces to a passive role of territorial defence. 'The picture in the mind's eye of the public', lamented McCay, 'is [of] one huge ditch around the Australian coast with soldiers in khaki at regular intervals peering over its edge, and gripping rifles with tense hands'.⁴

McCay compared the desire of the public to prepare an army for only local territorial defence with that of a man who designs his house to protect against solitary burglars while refusing to participate in measures to secure his neighbourhood against the depredations of organised brigands.⁵ He warned his United Services audience against trying to develop land forces to defend only the vast expanse of Australian territory. For McCay, the capacity to defend Australian interests *anywhere* rather than Australian territory *everywhere* was the key to the proper use of land forces. As he put it:

³ McCay was knighted in 1918 and retired from the Army in 1926 with the rank of lieutenant general.

⁴ McCay, 'The True Principles of Australia's Defence', p. 400.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

Our field army must be in the highest degree mobile, ready to concentrate anywhere, march anywhere and fight anywhere—not everywhere . . . It is better to invade than be invaded; better to carry the war into the enemy's country than to wait for the war to come to you; better to attack than defend, and better to go to the firing line than to be a reserve which waits for the enemy's firing line to come to it.⁶

The issues outlined by Colonel McCay in 1911—local versus overseas defence; naval defence versus military defence; and whether Australia should have an army designed to protect Australian territory everywhere or a force capable of upholding Australian interests anywhere—were to dominate the 20th century. They are still present today, as even a cursory glance at recent official defence publications will reveal.⁷ The language of Australian strategy may change; particulars may differ; protagonists may come and go; but the essence of the defence debate remains unchanged. The dichotomy between local and overseas defence, between 'everywhere and anywhere', has perhaps been the key factor in shaping the historical character and strategic outlook of the Australian Army in the century since Federation. To extend McCay's

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 401. McCay did not deny a role for the Army in local territorial defence. As he put it, land forces might have to fight 'at Cambridge Gulf as at Geelong', but his clear preference was for an army 'best suited to help in the protection of the Empire as a whole', *ibid.*, pp. 400; 401–2.

⁷ In recent years the 'local–overseas dichotomy' has manifested itself as a tension between the needs of defending Australian territory and regional security cooperation. See Department of Defence, *Australia's Strategic Policy*, Directorate of Publishing and Visual Communications, Canberra, 1997, chaps 4–6 and *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Canberra, Defence Publishing Service, 2000, chaps 3–6.

metaphor, in peacetime there has been a constant tendency to view the Army as a local constabulary designed to deal with random burglars rather than as an expeditionary force designed to meet organised brigands overseas.

Yet, in pursuing the objective of an army designed largely for national territorial defence, Australian strategists have often been trapped between the contending forces of strategic theory and strategic reality. The peacetime defence programs whose intellectual foundations have been associated with Alfred Deakin in the first decade of Federation and with Paul Dibb during the last decade and a half of the 20th century are cases in point. In both instances, defence schemes that sought to focus the Army on local geographic defence were abandoned because the pressure of international events proved to be more important to the nation than the protection offered from an immutable strategic geography.

In the century framed at beginning and end by the ideas associated with the names of Deakin and Dibb, Australian strategists usually sought to emphasise the primacy of naval and later sea–air forces over land forces—only to find that, in times of war or security crisis, the need has been mainly for soldiers. This situation was true of the World Wars; of the limited wars in Korea and Malaya; of *Konfrontasi* in Borneo and the conflict in Vietnam; and of the peace operations in Somalia and, more recently, in East Timor. Because Australian strategic theory in peacetime has usually failed to anticipate the reality of military crisis, the Army has often been unprepared, underfunded and undermanned for operations in the field. It is, then, this striking paradox between irrelevance and neglect in peacetime defence policy and frenetic importance in times of

military crisis that lies at the heart of the Australian Army's history in the 20th century.

This paper seeks to provide a thematic overview of the place of the Army in the making of Australian strategy over the past century. Four areas are addressed. First, the ambiguous place of the Army in Australian strategic thinking in the era of Empire from Federation in 1901 to the outbreak of World War II in 1939 is examined. It is argued that, for much of the first half of the 20th century, there was a striking paradox between the theory of Australia's peacetime strategic planning and the reality of its operational practice in times of war and crisis. In the Empire era, Australia neglected its peacetime land forces in favour of naval forces only to confront the reality that, in both world wars, a volunteer field force rather than a fleet proved to be the dominant instrument of national strategy.

Second, the paper explores the firm relationship between Australian strategy and the use of land forces, as reflected by the development of a Regular Army in the first half of the Cold War. The two decades between commitment in Korea in 1950 and military withdrawal in Vietnam in 1972—the Forward Defence era—represent the only time in the 20th century outside of the world wars when Australia's strategy, threat perception and the role of the Army reached a situation of approximate equilibrium. Third, a snapshot of the long Defence of Australia era from 1972 to 1997 is provided. During this period, the Army's profile in Australian strategy declined to a level not seen since the days of the 1930s. Fourth, the contours and future implications of the Army's post-1997 resurgence in Australian strategy are outlined and analysed.

The Army and Australian Strategy in the Era of Empire, 1901–39

The first decade of Federation confronted Australia with the enduring problem of reconciling national self-defence with Imperial strategic commitment. In 1907 Alfred Deakin could voice his belief in the need for a national defence effort ‘of the people, for the people and by the people’.⁸ In practice, however, as Deakin and other Federation politicians such as Andrew Fisher and Joseph Cook soon came to realise, a self-reliant defence policy was insufficient. Self-reliance was simply no guarantee of Australian security against the rise of a great power such as Japan. As Deakin put it in August 1905, ‘what Australians have to remember is that when we are attacked it will not be with kid gloves, or after convenient notice, but it will be when and where we least desire it, and with remorseless fury’.⁹

Deakin and his successors therefore sought a solution through the creation of a balance between the demands of national and imperial defence.¹⁰ In May 1906 the Committee of Imperial

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, vol. XLII, pp. 7534–5.

⁹ ‘The Defence of Australia: Statement by The Honourable Alfred Deakin, MP, 31 August 1905’, published in Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Papers*, The Senate, 1905 Session, vol. 5, p. 3. Deakin’s approach to defence is examined in A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography*, Angus & Robertson Publishers, Sydney, 1979, chap. 23.

¹⁰ For an analysis of defence issues between 1901 and 1914 see Neville Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1976; John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation: A History of Australian Military Developments, 1880–1914*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992; Jeffrey Grey, ‘Defending the

Defence (CID) advised Deakin: ‘it is evident that so long as British naval strength is calculated and maintained . . . attacks upon the Australian littoral against which land defence is required will be limited to raids hastily carried out by single vessels or small squadrons which have temporarily evaded our Naval Forces’.¹¹

By 1911 Australia had largely adopted this appreciation as the basis of its strategic thinking, and it was an approach that was to last until 1939. Australia undertook a commitment to assist British imperial naval power by creating a Royal Australian Navy (RAN). For its part, an Australian Army based on a large Citizen Militia Force (CMF) and a small permanent force would ensure local territorial defence—mainly viewed as repelling raids and defending garrisons and coastal defences. Since the 1903 Defence Act restricted military service to Australian soil, the capacity to field an expeditionary force for overseas service was dependent, first, on the outbreak of an actual crisis and, second, on the recruitment of volunteers.¹² It was, then, this curious blend of external navalism and internal military self-reliance that characterised Australian strategy in the era of Empire between 1901 and 1939.

Dominion, 1901–18’, in Carl Bridge and Bernard Attard (eds), *Between Empire and Nation: Australia’s External Relations from Federation to the Second World War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 20–34 and Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army: The Oxford Centenary History of Defence, vol. 1*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, chap. 1.

¹¹ Commonwealth of Australia, ‘Report of the Committee of Imperial Defence on a General Scheme of Defence for Australia’, 26 May 1906, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1906 Session, vol. II, paras 5–6.

¹² See Grey, ‘Defending the Dominion, 1901–18’, pp. 20–6.

Few in the Army's Permanent Force during the Federation era contested the importance that Deakin attached to blue-water sea power. Australia was, after all, an island continent. Nonetheless, some of the leading soldiers of the day, such as Major General Sir Edward Hutton and the future generals W. T. Bridges and C. B. Brudenell White, questioned the passive strategic role afforded to the Army. Hutton was the main intellectual architect of the Army's claim to a broader and more significant role in Australian strategy. He was not deterred by the emphasis in Australian strategy on naval power. As he noted in his famous April 1902 *Minute upon the Defence of Australia*, it was precisely because Australia was an island-nation that its land forces could not be confined to a 'purely passive' territorial strategy.¹³

Australia had to be prepared to defend not only its own landmass, but 'the vast interests beyond her shores upon the maintenance of which her present existence and her future prosperity must so largely depend'.¹⁴ In short, Hutton believed that Australia's maritime interests and her cultural affinity with the core values of Western civilisation would always mean that her soldiers would have to fight overseas for causes that transcended local geography.

Hutton was right. For all the emphasis on sea power in Australian strategy and defence policy from 1901 until 1914, Australia's naval contribution was of marginal importance during World War I. In contrast the 1st AIF on the Western

¹³ Commonwealth of Australia, 'Military Forces of the Commonwealth: Minute upon the Defence of Australia by Major General Hutton, Commandant, 7 April 1902', *Parliamentary Papers*, House of Representatives, 1901–2 Session, vol. II, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Front played a central role in the vital battles of 1918.¹⁵ When Prime Minister Billy Hughes went to the Paris peace talks in 1919 to represent Australia, he went as ‘the little Digger’ who justified his seat at the conference with the famous words, ‘I represent 60 000 dead’.¹⁶ It was the first, and perhaps the most graphic, example of peacetime strategic theory failing to match wartime reality.

The pre-eminent role that the Army played between 1915 and 1918 was not reflected in Australian strategy during the inter-war years. As it had done before World War I, Australia quickly reverted to the primacy of naval defence—this time in the form of the Singapore strategy.¹⁷ The Army’s official position on inter-war Australian defence strategy emerged as

¹⁵ For the role of the 1st AIF on the Western Front in 1918 see Peter Pedersen, ‘The AIF on the Western Front: The Role of Training and Command’, in M. McKernan and M. Browne (eds), *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1988, pp. 167–93 and E. M. Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations during World War 1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 143–64.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Bolton, ‘William Morris Hughes’, in Michelle Grattan (ed.), *Australian Prime Ministers*, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2000, p. 117.

¹⁷ For Australian strategic planning in the inter-war period see John McCarthy, *Australia and Imperial Defence 1918–1939: A Study in Air and Sea Power*, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, 1976; David Horner, ‘Australian Strategic Planning Between the Wars’, in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *Serving Vital Interests: Australia’s Strategic Planning in Peace and War*, University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, 1996, pp. 75–101; David Horner, *Defence Supremo: Sir Frederick Shedden and the Making of Australian Defence Policy*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, chaps 2–3; and Malcolm Murfett, ‘The Singapore Strategy’, in Bridge and Attard, *Between Empire and Nation*, pp. 230–50.

early as February 1920 in the *Report on the Military Defence of Australia*. The report, drawn up by a Conference of Senior Officers chaired by Lieutenant General Sir Harry Chauvel, identified Japan as Australia's 'only potential and probable enemy'.¹⁸ In order to meet a Japanese invasion, Chauvel and his colleagues sought to provide a land force of 180 000 troops based on seven infantry and cavalry divisions.¹⁹ In August 1928 a Defence Committee appreciation reaffirmed the main thrust of the Army's argument in the 1920 Chauvel Report. The appreciation stated that Japan could embark and maintain three army divisions, and thus 'invasion of Australia, but only on a limited scale, is within the bounds of possibility and not so improbable as to allow it being definitely ruled out'.²⁰

Any opportunity that the Army might have had to implement counter-invasion strategy was dispelled by the combined impact of the Washington Disarmament Conference of 1922 and the adoption of the Singapore strategy in 1923, and by the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. These three events reinforced Australia's preference for seeking security under the umbrella of the Royal Navy. Between 1929 and 1932, the Army was cut to the bone; compulsory service was suspended and militia strength dropped from over 46 000 in February 1929 to fewer than 26 000 by early 1930.²¹ In April 1930, Chauvel was moved to warn the Defence Committee that a possible Japanese invasion represented 'a vital danger' to

¹⁸ Australian War Memorial (henceforth cited as AWM) 1 (Pre-Federation and Commonwealth records, 1920), item 20/7, Report on the Military Defence of Australia, 6 February 1920.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Australian Archives (henceforth cited as AA) MP 1185/8, Item 1846/4/363, 'Appreciation: War in the Pacific, 9 August 1928', p. 3.

²¹ Grey, *The Australian Army*, p. 87.

Australia. To meet such a national crisis, Australia needed to maintain adequate land forces and shore-based air forces in peacetime.²² The Royal Australian Navy did not agree with Chauvel's assessment, and the Chief of Naval Staff, Rear Admiral W. Munro Kerr, remained 'strongly of the opinion that the naval strength of the Empire is a sufficient insurance against invasion'.²³

In the Depression conditions of the 1930s, the corollary of a navalist approach to defence was the official abandonment of anti-invasion strategic planning on land. In 1932, echoing the 1906 recommendation of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Lyons Government decided 'that it would be better to provide efficient protection against raids rather than inefficient measures against invasion'.²⁴ Counter-invasion planning was reduced to theoretical attention in staff–militia exercises, and by 1938 the Australian Army was little more than a hollow shell—poorly manned and inadequately equipped.²⁵

The Chiefs of the General Staff during most of the 1930s, Major Generals Julius Bruche and John Lavarack, did not accept the straitjacket of fiscal decline and the raids strategy without protest. Bruche described planning for sporadic raids on land as 'definitely unsound and insupportable'; Lavarack never ceased to warn of the danger that Australian strategy would fall under the spell of navalist theory spun by 'wizards

²² AA MP 1185/8, Item 1846/4/363, 'Appreciation: War in the Pacific: Addendum (extract from the Minutes of the Defence Committee, 11 April 1930)', p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Horner, 'Australian Army Strategic Planning Between the Wars', p. 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–91.

in Whitehall'.²⁶ In March 1930, while Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, Lavarack expressed the Army's central objection to a navalist strategy when he wrote, 'the issue is simple. Command in the Atlantic is of vital importance to the British people, command in the Far East is not'.²⁷

A bitter Navy–Army clash over the ownership of strategy soon divided the Australian Chiefs of Staff—a clash exacerbated by the rising influence in the inter-war Department of Defence of Frederick Shedden, Australia's arch-advocate of blue-water navalism.²⁸ The Royal Australian Navy's attitude was summed up by the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir George Hyde's April 1935 statement: 'a million trained men armed to the teeth won't stop the Japanese fuelling their ships in a hundred inaccessible anchorages around our coast'.²⁹ The Army's approach to strategic policy was reflected in Lavarack's emphatic view that 'over-expenditure on the Naval forces is gradually throttling the Land forces, and is preventing the proper development of the Air forces'.³⁰

The Lyons Government adhered to Admiral Hyde's view. As John McCarthy has written, 'the Singapore concept had the easy attraction of simplicity and for the United Australia Party the utility of a political slogan. Both the attraction and the utility appeared to preclude the application of serious critical

²⁶ See AWM 113, Committee of Imperial Defence: Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee—The Defence of Australia, Item MH 1/43, 'Note by Chief of the General Staff, 5 August 1933'; Brett Lodge, *Lavarack: Rival General*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1998, pp. 41; 15.

²⁷ Lodge, *Lavarack*, pp. 21–2.

²⁸ For Shedden's rising influence see Horner, *Defence Supremo*, chap. 2.

²⁹ Quoted in Lodge, *Lavarack*, p. 47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

thought'.³¹ Under Lavarack's stormy tenure as Chief of the General Staff from 1935 to 1939, attempts to shift political opinion in favour of a greater strategic role for the Army only caused civil–military acrimony. The outspoken views of senior officers such as Lavarack and Colonel Henry Wynter, the Director of Mobilisation, on what they regarded as Australia's unbalanced and unsound defence policy, cost the Army the confidence of many politicians in the Lyons Government.³²

Lavarack proved tenacious in pressing the Government for funds to create a stronger field force at the expense of fortifying coastal defences. His views were unwelcome because, as the Minister for Defence, Sir Archdale Parkhill, put it, they involved 'implications of a highly political nature'.³³ For his part, Wynter told the Melbourne United Services Institute in August 1935 that reliance on the Singapore strategy amounted to asking Australians to 'immolate ourselves upon the lofty Imperial [defence] altar'.³⁴ He went on to attribute the Army's lack of influence on Australian strategy to 'pundits . . . mainly of the Blue Water school who, in a misplaced enthusiasm for their own arm, will not permit themselves to see any point which may detract from their fixed idea that the Navy is the be-all and the end-all of defence'.³⁵

³¹ John McCarthy, 'Singapore and Australian Defence 1921–1942', *Australian Outlook*, August 1971, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 180.

³² The best study of Australian civil–military relations in the 1930s is contained in Lodge, *Lavarack*, chaps 3–6.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁴ Colonel H. D. Wynter, 'Defence of Australia & its Relation to Imperial Defence', speech to the United Services Institute, August 1935, reprinted in *Australian Army Journal*, December 1975, no. 319, pp. 17–35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Inevitably, the dissenting views of Lavarack and Wynter soon leaked into the public domain. The Army's discontent became politicised as both the press and opposition members of parliament employed various statements to embarrass the Lyons Government. When, in November 1936, various anti-Singapore arguments—attributed by Parkhill as emanating from Army Headquarters—were used in Parliament by John Curtin, the Leader of the Opposition, the Lyons Government took the opportunity to relieve Wynter of his duties.³⁶ Parkhill warned Lavarack and the Military Board that 'the Government will not tolerate propaganda by Service officers on the political aspect of Defence Policy'.³⁷ By the end of 1936 Parkhill seems to have become convinced that Lavarack's headquarters was infested, and possibly even controlled, by strategic schismatics whom Shedden called a 'radical "Young Turk" group' determined to try to change defence policy.³⁸

Shedden's view was exaggerated and self-serving. It is nonetheless true that the Army's approach to strategy during the inter-war years was characterised by professional polarisation from the RAN and by a general philosophical alienation from official defence policy. Denied a significant strategic role based on invasion, denuded of adequate resources and convinced, as McCay had once put it, that 'the worst of raids would do infinitely less harm to our continent than the mildest of droughts', the Army was reduced to impotence and

³⁶ See AA CRS A5954, Box 886 (Papers of F. G. Shedden), 'The Case of Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary and Brevet Colonel) H. D. Wynter, CMG, DSO, Australian Staff Corps', Cabinet submission, 8 February 1937.

³⁷ Lodge, *Lavarack*, p. 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

frustration.³⁹ In February 1920, Chauvel had echoed the views of both Hutton and McCay, when he wrote:

The advantages, moral and material, of fighting in the enemy's country are so enormous that it is folly to await the enemy's attack on our own soil . . . The AIF had an opportunity to fight abroad and defend Australia so effectively that Australia hardly realised that it was defence and not offence, her troops had undertaken . . . The community must therefore make up its mind, however unwillingly, that all preparations for the defence of Australia, thorough and complete as they may be, may break down absolutely, if, at a final and decisive moment, the weapon of defence cannot be transferred beyond our territorial waters.⁴⁰

The major weakness of the Army's strategic position under Lavarack was its inability to suggest any role for land forces beyond that of continental counter-invasion. This posture was of increasingly negative value because it pitted the Army against the Singapore strategy, which had been endorsed by successive governments since the early 1920s. Perhaps, as John McCarthy has suggested, a more constructive approach might have been for the General Staff to present the Singapore strategy as posing 'a problem of forward defence' rather than one of invasion.⁴¹

Such an approach would have allowed the General Staff to exploit the strategic focus on the Singapore naval base to argue for a smaller but well-equipped and more-mobile field force that could provide the nucleus for expeditionary service on the Malay Peninsula or at Singapore itself. On the other hand, it

³⁹ McCay, 'The True Principles of Australia's Defence', p. 396.

⁴⁰ Report on the Military Defence of Australia, 6 February 1920, p. 29.

⁴¹ See McCarthy, 'Singapore and Australian Defence 1921–1942', p. 166–70.

has to be recognised that the constraints of the 1903 Defence Act, the bitter legacy of the 1916–17 conscription debates and the lack of funds reduced planning for expeditionary warfare to a purely theoretical exercise in peacetime. Nonetheless, when World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, it was an expeditionary plan, Plan 401—originally drawn up in 1922 during the Chanak crisis—that provided the basis for raising the 2nd AIF.⁴²

Ultimately, for all the inter-war controversy over navalism versus territorial defence, in World War II as in World War I, it was once again a volunteer infantry force that came to represent the main focus of the Australian war effort. Furthermore, when the Pacific War with Japan broke out in December 1941, it was not, as might have been expected, the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Guy Royle, who played the decisive advisory role in the desperate weeks of crisis between Pearl Harbour and the fall of Singapore. It was instead the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee, who had to make sense of the immediate wreckage caused by two decades of inadequate and misguided defence strategy.⁴³

Between December 1941 and March 1942—that is, prior to the forming of the Allied military leadership team in the South-

⁴² Ian Gow, ‘Australian Army Strategic Planning, 1919–39’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, August 1977, vol. XXIII, no. 2, pp. 170–1.

⁴³ For Sturdee’s role see David Horner, *High Command: Australia’s Struggle for an Independent War Strategy, 1939–45*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, chap. 7, and ‘Lieutenant General Sir Vernon Sturdee: The Chief of the General Staff as Commander’, in David Horner (ed.), *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, pp. 147–57.

West Pacific of General Douglas MacArthur and General Sir Thomas Blamey—Sturdee assumed the role of *de facto* Australian commander-in-chief and principal adviser to the Curtin Government. The War Cabinet found itself with little to defend Australia beyond infantry formations. This situation made the advice of Sturdee, the only Australian-born Chief of Staff, critical to the resolution of such vital strategic issues as the deployment of troops in the northern islands and the return of the 1st Australian Corps to Australia.⁴⁴ In World War II it was once again Australia's land warfare effort, in the form of the provision of some 25 per cent of all Allied troops in the South-West Pacific, that proved to be the most decisive aspect of the nation's contribution to victory in the Pacific.⁴⁵ In 1945, as in 1918, Australian prewar strategic theory bore little relationship to the reality of wartime conditions.

The Army and the Reorientation of Australian Strategy, 1945–72

Between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, there was a philosophical reorientation in Australian defence strategy away from Empire and British Commonwealth security concerns centred on the Middle East towards the United States and a preoccupation with South-East Asian security. The development

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* and Michael Evans, *Developing Australia's Maritime Concept of Strategy: Lessons from the Ambon Disaster of 1942*, Study Paper No. 303, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, July 2000, pp. 26–57.

⁴⁵ Eric Bergerud, *Touched With Fire: The Land War in the South Pacific*, Penguin Books, New York, 1997, pp. 231–68 and David Horner, 'Defending Australia in 1942', *War & Society*, May 1993, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1–20.

of an Australian Regular Army that could help uphold Australian interests was at the centre of this strategic reorientation.⁴⁶

Unlike the era of Empire, when the citizen militia dominated the peacetime Army, a standing land force became essential for Australia to meet the different strategic challenges of limited war and insurgency in the Cold War. The enemy was no longer the Japanese *samurai* moving by sea but the Communist insurgent moving on land—an opponent that could best be countered by deploying specialised ground forces. As Sir Philip McBride, the Minister for Defence, put it in February 1952, the new emphasis in Australian strategy on regular troops who could defend vital Australian interests anywhere represented ‘a radical departure from traditional Army policy’.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For the development of Australian strategy from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s see T. B. Millar, ‘Australian Defence, 1945–1965’, in Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper (eds), *Australia in World Affairs, 1945–1965*, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, chap. 5; David Lee, ‘The National Security Planning and Defence Preparations of the Menzies Government, 1950–1953’, *War & Society*, October 1992, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 119–38; ‘Australia and Allied Strategy in the Far East, 1952–1957’, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, December 1993, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 511–38; ‘Britain and Australia’s Defence Policy, 1945–1949’, *War & Society*, May 1995, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 61–80; and *Search for Security: The Political Economy of Australia’s Postwar Foreign and Defence Policy*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, chaps 3–4. The role of the Army in the transformation of Australian strategy is well summarised by Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950–1966*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1993, chap. 1.

⁴⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *The Defence Programme: Statement to Parliament by the Hon. P. A. McBride, MP, Minister for Defence, 21 February 1952*, Government Printer, Melbourne, February 1952, p. 4.

Indeed, the development of the Regular Army throughout the 1950s signified a major change in Australia's conception of the use of land forces in national strategy. For the first time during peacetime, Australian strategy gave precedence not to a numerically large citizen militia but to the maintenance of a well-equipped, highly trained and self-contained force-in-being for rapid deployment overseas. In short, a regular army became central to what Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies called a 'modern conception of Australian defence', in which professional soldiers would 'enlist as in other countries, for service anywhere, and not merely for service in Australia'.⁴⁸ The result was a transformation in the ability of Australian land forces to serve the nation's political–strategic ends. In the twenty years from the Korean War in the early 1950s to the withdrawal of military forces from South Vietnam in the early 1970s, the Regular Army became a major component of Australian statecraft.⁴⁹

Under the Menzies Government's concept of Forward Defence, official planners considered that Australia's interests required the 'close co-ordination of political, economic and military activities'.⁵⁰ Forward Defence fused diplomacy and

⁴⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, *The Defence Call to the Nation. National Broadcasts by the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon. R. G. Menzies, KC, MP, 20, 22 and 25 September 1950*, Government Printer, Melbourne, September 1950, pp. 3; 11–12.

⁴⁹ See T. B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations since 1788*, Maxwell Macmillan, 1978, Part 4, and David Horner, 'The Security Dimension of Australian Foreign Policy', in F. A. Mediansky (ed.), *Security in a Changing World*, Maxwell Macmillan, Sydney, 1992, chap. 5.

⁵⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, *Key Elements in the Triennial Reviews*

strategy together in order to provide a framework of security in which, as David Horner has observed, the aim was to keep military operations as far away as possible from Australia's shores.⁵¹ The Army undertook continuous campaigning in Asia, in operations that perhaps came closest to fulfilling the Hutton–McCay vision of Australia using land forces to defend its interests anywhere they were threatened.

The strategic rationale for the Regular Army owed much to the post–World War II leadership and the influence of two Chiefs of the General Staff, Lieutenant Generals Sir Vernon Sturdee and Sir Sydney Rowell. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, both men were determined to try to integrate the Army's peacetime preparation with realistic threat perception and so avoid the strategic irrelevance of land forces that had marked the 1920s and 1930s. They believed that modern warfare made local defence, strategic isolation and, above all, long mobilisation time virtually obsolete notions.⁵²

Sturdee played a key part in drawing up the important February 1946 Chiefs of Staff *Appreciation of the Strategical*

of Strategic Guidance since 1945, Official Hansard Report, Canberra, February 1987, p. 7. See also Sir Garfield Barwick, 'Australia's Foreign Relations', in Australian Institute of Political Science, *Australia's Defence and Foreign Policy*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964, chap. 1.

⁵¹ Horner, 'The Security Dimension of Australian Foreign Policy', pp. 88–93. See also Sir Robert Menzies, *The Measure of the Years*, Cassell, London, 1970, p. 77–8.

⁵² See Grey, *The Australian Army*, chap. 6; S. F. Rowell, 'General Sturdee and the Australian Army', *Australian Army Journal*, no. 207, August 1966, pp. 9–10 and *Full Circle*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1974, pp. 162–8.

Position of Australia, which recommended mobile, well-equipped land forces designed for overseas or coalition operations rather than local or continental defence.⁵³ In their Appreciation, the Chiefs of Staff described continental defence as a strategy of ‘last resort’ and declared: ‘the concept of strategical isolation is irreconcilable with the realities of modern war’.⁵⁴ In March 1946 Rowell, then Vice Chief of the General Staff, warned against developing a postwar Army based on the traditional Australian notion of basing peacetime land defence on militia forces. He stated:

The peacetime army organisation of 1939 and earlier years affords no real basis for consideration of what is needed today. It was based on a conception of local defence against raids on, or invasion of, our country and carried no commitment, expressed or implied, in a wider strategical sphere. Even for its limited outlook, it was woefully inadequate for its primary tasks, as events were subsequently to prove.⁵⁵

Although Sturdee and Rowell were often hampered by fiscal restraints and political ambivalence, they never ceased to argue that peacetime land forces had to include regular and readily deployable units directly related to the commitments that Australia might be expected to meet in a military crisis.⁵⁶

⁵³ AA CRS A 5954/69 (Papers of F. G. Shedden), item 1645/9, ‘An Appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff of the Strategical Position of Australia, February 1946’, pp. 6–8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ AA CRS A816, 52/301/245, ‘The Post War Army: Policy Paper No. 1’ and 14/301/383, ‘A Note on the Objectives of Australian Strategic Planning’, no date but circa 1949.

⁵⁶ Grey, *The Australian Army*, pp. 167–8.

The influence of Sturdee and Rowell was evident in the framework of the Australian Regular Army that was laid down by the Chifley Government in June 1947. The Minister for Defence, John Dedman, announced a philosophical hierarchy of four roles for the new postwar land force. First, the Army was to be in a position to provide forces for potential commitments under the United Nations, including regional arrangements in the Asia-Pacific. Second, the land force needed to be capable of cooperating in Empire defence. Third, the Army would be expected to provide an expansion base in times of war. Fourth, and finally, land forces were to be provided for the local defence of mainland Australia.⁵⁷ These roles ensured that the postwar Regular Army would be very different in character from its inter-war predecessor. Dedman was careful to emphasise how important it was for Australia to possess an effective army as an active instrument of strategy. He stated in Parliament:

While control of sea communications and air superiority is an essential foundation [of Australia's defence strategy], comprehensive land operations, in which land and air forces must be combined against a resolute and well-armed enemy are the means by which victory is ultimately won.⁵⁸

It was, however, the Menzies Government between 1949 and 1966 that shaped the Regular Army to play a positive role in Australian defence policy. After the mid-1950s, Australia's strategic priorities shifted decisively from preparations for conventional war in the Middle East to limited war and counter-revolutionary operations in South-East Asia. As a result, the Army often became the most significant form of

⁵⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, vol. 192, 4 June 1947, p. 3340.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

usable Australian military power to support collective defence commitments under the Australia, New Zealand, Malaya (ANZAM); Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS); and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) treaties.⁵⁹ By 1957, the emphasis in defence policy was on the development of well-trained and readily available forces capable of meeting a range of South-East Asian security contingencies.⁶⁰

Between 1957 and 1959, the development of a modern land force received close attention in the Menzies Government. In February 1957, the cabinet gave ‘absolute priority’ to the creation of an Army force-in-being, which was to consist of an infantry battalion group and a new independent infantry brigade group.⁶¹ As Ian McNeill has observed :

The [February 1957] decision was a milestone in the development of the standing army, reflecting Australia’s new defence posture and strategic outlook. For the first time in peace, precedence would be given to the maintenance of a well-equipped, highly trained and self-contained force for rapid deployment overseas. The emphasis in defence planning [became] . . . the maintenance of a force-in-being that could be

⁵⁹ McNeill, *To Long Tan*, chap. 1. For a thorough analysis of diplomacy and defence see Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia’s Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1965*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992.

⁶⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, The Hon. Sir Philip McBride, KCMG, MP, *Australian Defence: Extract from Speech in the House of Representatives, 2 May 1957*, Government Printer, Melbourne, May 1957, p. 2.

⁶¹ McNeill, *To Long Tan*, p. 9.

sustained over a long period. Large manpower numbers gave way to modern equipment, mobility, and firepower.⁶²

By the mid-1960s, the Regular Army had not only supplanted the CMF in importance but had weathered various organisational disruptions such as the impact of the 1950s national service scheme and the Pentropic experiment of the early 1960s.⁶³ Furthermore, as Australia's military commitment to South Vietnam escalated between 1962 and 1965, the Army consolidated its role as the predominant instrument of Australian strategy.

The Forward Defence era, highlighted by Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, has elicited a range of views. For some writers the era represents the culmination of a style of 20th-century military operations in which overseas commitments served as 'the Australian way of war'.⁶⁴ Others have judged Forward Defence more harshly, with one leading strategic analyst declaring the approach to be 'a product of crude strategic thinking'.⁶⁵ What is beyond serious dispute, however, is that the conflicts of this period gave the Australian Regular Army valuable combat experience and established its

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ For a detailed discussion see Grey, *The Australian Army*, chaps 6–7.

⁶⁴ This assertion was made by political writer Paul Kelly on 3 April 2001, in an ABC television analysis of Australia's 20th-century foreign and defence policy entitled 'Farewell Great and Powerful Friends'. See also Paul Kelly, *100 Years: The Australian Story*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001, chap. 5.

⁶⁵ Desmond Ball, 'Strategic Planning for the Defence of Australia in 2015', in Desmond Ball (ed.), *Maintaining the Strategic Edge: The Defence of Australia in 2015*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 133, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1999, p. 23.

international reputation for professional skill. In 1972, when the battle-hardened Australian Army emerged from the Vietnam War, it was 45 000-strong and unrecognisable as an organisation descended from the minuscule Permanent Forces of the Empire era.⁶⁶ In his 1976 memoirs, the American commander in Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, described an expert Australian task-force led by ‘a succession of able administrators . . . and gifted field commanders’.⁶⁷ He went on to write:

Aside from American soldiers, the Australians were the most thoroughly professional foreign force serving in Vietnam. Small in numbers and well trained, particularly in antiguerrilla warfare, the Australian Army was much like the post-Versailles German Army in which even men in the ranks might have been leaders in some less capable force.⁶⁸

The Army and Strategy during the Defence of Australia Era, 1972–97

In the quarter of a century after withdrawal from Vietnam, under both Coalition and Labor governments, Australian strategy was dominated by the doctrine of Defence of Australia. Between 1972 and 1997 force structure priorities were determined on the basis of Australia’s enduring strategic geography, while the development of the concept of self-reliance meant that the ADF was to be primarily designed for

⁶⁶ This number included national servicemen selected by ballot. At the end of the Vietnam commitment, the Regular Army’s strength was 31 151. See Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence Report 1973*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1973, p. 18.

⁶⁷ General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1976, p. 258.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

operations in defence of Australia and not for operations in distant theatres.⁶⁹

The imperatives of the Defence of Australia strategy emphasised the importance of the capabilities of strike and interdiction based on naval and air forces rather than land forces. In terms of expenditure and strategic influence, the Army was gradually reduced in status to the least significant of the three Services. By the early 1990s, the land force was largely committed to a single strategic scenario: the territorial defence of northern Australia. As a result, the Australian Army came to look less like Westmoreland's antipodean *Reichswehr* and more like a smaller version of the 1930s French Army deployed behind a coastal version of the Maginot Line, stretching from Cairns to Carnarvon.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ The literature on the Defence of Australia era is extensive. Essential studies include Robert O'Neill (ed.), *The Defence of Australia—Fundamental New Aspects*, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1977; Ross Babbage, *Rethinking Australia's Defence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1980 and *A Coast Too Long: Defending Australia beyond the 1990s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990; Robert O'Neill and D. M. Horner (eds), *Australian Defence Policy for the 1980s*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1982; David Horner (ed.), *Reshaping the Australian Army: Challenges for the 1990s*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 77, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1991; and Paul Dibb, *The Conceptual Basis of Australia's Defence Planning and Force Structure Development*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 88, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1992.

⁷⁰ See Michael Evans, 'From Defence to Security: Continuity and Change in Australian Strategic Planning in the Twentieth Century', in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds), *Serving Vital Interests: Australia's Strategic Planning in Peace and War*, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, 1996, pp. 130–6.

The trend in Australian strategic thinking towards a self-reliant defence of the Australian continent began in the 1970s. The 1971 Strategic Basis Paper recommended that Australia pay more attention to ‘the continuing fundamental obligation of continental defence’.⁷¹ The 1972 *Australian Defence Review* further proposed that the concept of self-reliance become a ‘central feature in the future development of Australia’s defence policy’.⁷² By 1976 the Fraser Government’s Defence White Paper had begun the complicated process of translating the concept of self-reliance into a policy based on a form of continental defence.⁷³ Six years later, in 1982, D. J. Killen, the Minister for Defence, described the strategic imperatives emerging from Australia’s attempts to fashion greater self-reliance as constituting a ‘revolution in our defence position’.⁷⁴

Despite these developments, the conceptual approach that came to underpin the notion of a geographical and self-reliant defence of Australia was not fully refined or properly formalised until the mid-1980s. In 1986, the important strands of Defence of Australia thinking—the notion of self-reliance and the planning imperatives of continental defence—were

⁷¹ Sir Arthur Tange, ‘Defence Policy Making in Australia’, *Australian Army Journal*, April 1976, no. 323, p. 8.

⁷² Department of Defence, *1972 Defence Review*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, March 1972, p. 11.

⁷³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Defence: Presented to Parliament by the Minister for Defence the Hon. D. J. Killen*, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976, chap. 3; Hugh Smith, ‘Defence Policy’, in P. J. Boyce and J. R. Angel (eds), *Independence and Alliance: Australia in World Affairs 1976–80*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 41–58.

⁷⁴ D. J. Killen, ‘The Government’s View’, in O’Neill and Horner, *Australian Defence Policy for the 1980s*, pp. 21–2.

codified by Paul Dobb in his seminal *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*.⁷⁵ Dobb, a geographer by background, was a skilled strategist who was influenced by the geopolitical theories of Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman and Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁷⁶ His review established the intellectual parameters for Defence of Australia and became the philosophical basis for official Australian defence thinking for over a decade.

Dobb's preference for a geo-strategic approach to reshaping Australia's defence was evident when he wrote that he had consciously sought 'to narrow the options [for Australian strategy] . . . by focusing on the unchanging nature of our geographic circumstances and the levels of threat we might realistically expect'.⁷⁷ Dobb sought to rebalance Australia's defence-planning imperatives to take much greater account of the requirements of direct continental defence. His methodology fused together the key concepts of strategic geography and limitations in regional military capabilities and

⁷⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities: Report to the Minister for Defence by Mr Paul Dobb*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, March 1986.

⁷⁶ For these influences see Paul Dobb, *The Soviet Union: The Incomplete Superpower*, Macmillan in association with the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Basingstoke, 1986; *The Remaking of Asia's Geopolitics*, Working Paper No. 324, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, August 1988; and Coral Bell, 'Australians and Strategic Inquiry', in Coral Bell (ed.), *Nation, Region and Context: Studies in Peace and War in Honour of Professor T. B. Millar*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 112, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1995, pp. 69–70.

⁷⁷ *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, p. 17. See also Paul Dobb, 'The Evolution and Future of Australian Defence Policy', in Bell, *Nation, Region and Context*, pp. 34–7.

potentialities with other constructs—notably the ideas of warning time, credible levels of threat and the role of the expansion base.⁷⁸

Dibb argued that the centrepiece of Australia's strategic effort, and its most important defence-planning concern, was the need to deny the northern maritime approaches—described as 'the sea and air gap'—to an enemy.⁷⁹ The Hawke and Keating Government White Papers of 1987 and 1994 reflected Dibb's geo-strategic philosophy. Both documents employed 'the abiding nature of our geographical environment' as a conceptual device to discipline strategy and to align it tightly with force structure, capability development and defence expenditure.⁸⁰

Four features of the Defence of Australia strategy had an adverse impact on the Army between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. First, the strong geographical focus of this strategy saw key capability areas shifted towards naval and air forces at the expense of land forces. Like the Singapore naval strategy before it, the result of this approach was to return the Army to the *cul-de-sac* of inter-war-style continental defence. Second, in a related development, the anti-raid philosophy of the 1901–39 Empire era was revived—this time under Defence of Australia's modern guise of a layered defence-in-depth. Since the Royal

⁷⁸ *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, Parts 1–4; 7; Dibb, 'The Evolution and Future of Australian Defence Policy', pp. 34–7.

⁷⁹ *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, *The Defence of Australia 1987: Presented to Parliament by the Minister for Defence the Honourable Kim C. Beazley, MP, March 1987*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1987, chaps 2–3; *Defending Australia: Defence White Paper 1994*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994, chap. 4.

Australian Navy and the Royal Australian Air Force comprised the front-line defence layers in Australia's maritime approaches, the only credible contingencies facing the Army were declared to be low-level operations or short-warning conflicts on Australian soil. In July 1986, in a minute that could have easily been penned by the Military Board in 1936, the Chief of the General Staff's Advisory Committee (CGSAC) noted, 'the priority demands on our ground forces are for the protection of military and infrastructure assets . . . in the north of Australia from a protracted campaign of dispersed raids'.⁸¹

Third, the designation of the maritime approaches as a sea-air gap by the architects of Defence of Australia effectively narrowed Australia's strategic planning to conform to the demands of a layered defence-in-depth. The notion of a sea-air gap critically affected the influence of the Army in defence planning. With the strategic emphasis fixed overwhelmingly on a naval and air defence of the northern approaches, there was little opportunity for Army planners to argue for a more comprehensive and balanced strategy. There appeared to be no place for a broader strategy based on an appreciation that the maritime approaches embrace two northern archipelagos and represent, in truth, a sea-air-land gap.⁸² The experience of World War II, in which Australian operations in the northern approaches had required a joint maritime strategy with a

⁸¹ Australian Army, 'General Concept for the Development of the Army', CGS Advisory Committee Submission No. 22/1986, CGSAC Minute No. 31/86, 4 July 1986, p. 1. Document in author's possession.

⁸² See Michael Evans, *The Role of the Australian Army in a Maritime Concept of Strategy*, Working Paper No. 101, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Duntroon, 1998.

proactive role for land forces, was largely overlooked in defence planning between 1987 and 1997.⁸³

Not surprisingly, given the nature of the strategic climate, the Army's intellectual influence in the official defence debate appeared to be marginal between 1972 and 1997. Successive Chiefs of the General Staff, from General Sir Francis Hassett in the 1970s to Lieutenant General John Sanderson in the 1990s, found most of their energies absorbed less by the nuances of contributing to strategy and more by the enormous challenge of having to restructure land force organisation and doctrine for continental defence.⁸⁴ An army optimised for tropical warfare in South-East Asia was, over two decades, transformed into a force designed for dispersed low-level operations in northern Australian conditions. This transformation was not made any easier by having to be accomplished against an ever-shrinking Army resource base—

⁸³ See the emphasis in Dibb, *The Conceptual Basis of Australia's Defence Planning and Force Structure Development* and 'Australia's Defence Policies in the Post-Cold War Era, in James Cotton and John Ravenhill (eds), *Seeking Asian Engagement: Australia in World Affairs, 1991-95*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, chap. 5; The Hon. Kim C. Beazley, 'The Development of Australian Maritime Strategy, 26 November 1987', in Commonwealth of Australia, *Selected Speeches 1985-1989 by the Hon. Kim C. Beazley, MP, Minister for Defence*, Directorate of Departmental Publications, Canberra, February 1989, pp. 179-85; and Senator the Hon. Robert Ray, Minister for Defence, 'The Strategic Imperative of the Move to the North', in David Horner (ed.), *The Army and the Future: Land Forces in Australia and South-East Asia*, Directorate of Departmental Publications, Canberra, 1993, pp. 229-38.

⁸⁴ Michael Evans, *Forward from the Past: The Development of Australian Army Doctrine 1972-Present*, Study Paper No. 301, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, August 1999, pp. 21-36.

as symbolised by the decline in Regular Army strength from 29 000 in the late 1970s to fewer than 24 000 in the late 1990s.⁸⁵

The various concepts adopted by Army Headquarters to prepare it for a role in a continental defence strategy reached their climax with the 1995 Army in the 21st Century (A21) Review and the 1997 Restructuring of the Army (RTA) scheme. Both of these initiatives followed strategic guidance laid down in the 1994 Defence White Paper.⁸⁶ The aim of A21 and the RTA scheme was to reconcile the needs of rapid deployment with those of combat power in wide-area concurrent operations across northern Australia.⁸⁷ The Army sought to define ‘an appropriate force structure to satisfy the demands of defence of Australia in short-warning conflict’.⁸⁸ The key assumption behind both the A21 review and the RTA scheme was that ‘the most likely adversary scenario, which the Land Force would be required to deal with, would be concurrent operations by a number of Special Forces teams

⁸⁵ In 1999 the size of the Regular Army was 23 906. See Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence Annual Report 1998–99*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, 1999, p. 162. In 1974 a Senate Inquiry recommended that a Regular Army of 38 000 was required to meet Australia’s defence interests. See Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *The Australian Army: Report from the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974, p. 114.

⁸⁶ *Defending Australia*, pp. 48–9.

⁸⁷ See Major General John C. Hartley, ‘An Australian Army for the 21st Century’, in Mohan Malik (ed.), *The Future Battlefield*, Deakin University Press in association with the Directorate of Army Research and Analysis, Canberra, 1997, chap. 12; Australian Army, *Restructuring the Australian Army*, Department of Defence, Directorate of Publishing and Visual Communications, Canberra, 1997.

⁸⁸ *Restructuring the Australian Army*, p. 11.

across northern Australia, possibly supported by terrorist actions in other areas'.⁸⁹ Yet at the very time the Army was finalising its new force structure to meet the extraordinary geo-strategic complexities of Defence of Australia, the changing security environment of the 1990s suggested that such a single-scenario strategy had ceased to have credibility.

The Post-Dibb Era: The Army and Strategy since 1997

Between 1997 and 2000, five factors transformed the place of the Army in Australian strategy. The first factor was the growing evidence that, under post–Cold War international conditions, the imperatives of Defence of Australia risked making the Army strategically irrelevant. It became clear that a restrictive land-force structure served to reduce rather than enhance Australia's strategic response options. The second factor was the publication of the Howard Government's *Australia's Strategic Policy* (ASP 97) in December 1997—a publication that began the process of revising the strategic role of the Army. The third factor was the operational impact of the East Timor security crisis of September 1999. Fourth, there was the release, in August 2000, of the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) into the Army entitled *From Phantom to Force*.⁹⁰ The fifth and final factor was the publication of the Defence White Paper in December 2000.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹⁰ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *From Phantom to Force: Towards a More Efficient and Effective Army*, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Canberra, August 2000.

The Growing Strategic Irrelevance of the Army

In 1992 Paul Dobb appealed to the Australian defence-planning community that, since it had taken twenty years of intense effort to develop the conceptual propositions of self-reliance, ‘we should resist the temptation . . . to move away from the tight intellectual reasoning that reflects Australia’s unique strategic circumstances and the geography of the continent and its sea and air approaches’.⁹¹ Dobb’s position was an understandable one, reflecting the concerns of a pioneer generation of planners who had confronted the rigorous intellectual challenge of remaking Australia’s defence policy in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

Unfortunately, in terms of land force development, the corollary of Dobb’s ‘tight intellectual reasoning’ was defence planning that marginalised the role of the Army. After the mid-1990s, in the face of the information technology revolution and increasing insecurity in the Asia-Pacific region, observers both inside and outside the Australian Army were critical of the narrow strategic focus of the land force. For some of these observers, a self-reliant geo-strategy represented an increasingly untenable and unhealthy intellectual consensus in official Australian defence thinking—a consensus that seemed to amount to an Australian strategic-studies version of Herbert Butterfield’s Whig interpretation of history.⁹²

⁹¹ Dobb, *The Conceptual Basis of Australia’s Defence Planning*, p. 69.

⁹² For a critique of the rigidity of Defence of Australia planning and an analysis of the rise of alternative views see Evans, ‘From Defence to Security: Continuity and Change in Australian Strategic Planning in the Twentieth Century’, pp. 116–21.

In February 1997 Brigadier (now Major General) Jim Molan—the Commander of the 1st Brigade, which was the formation responsible for implementing the concepts flowing from the A21 review and RTA scheme—expressed serious reservations about the impact of the Defence of Australia strategy on the Army. Molan noted that, in post–Cold War strategic conditions, coalition operations with allies were far more likely than a low-level Defence of the North scenario.⁹³ He warned that restructuring Army formations for low-level operations in a specific geographical location was ‘to strike at the very heart of interoperability and credibility’.⁹⁴ To Molan, short-warning conflict on Australian soil threatened to erode the Australian Army’s ability to participate in future coalition operations.⁹⁵

In August 1997, the defence analyst Michael O’Connor argued that a geographically optimised Army would have grave difficulty in adjusting to the growing likelihood of Australian participation in regional security operations.⁹⁶ O’Connor argued that the relationship between the A21–RTA restructuring scheme and the imperatives of geographic self-reliance had given Australia ‘an Army without a strategy and a

⁹³ American, British, Canadian, Australian Armies, *ABCA Exercise Cascade Peak: Post Exercise Report*, ABCA, Primary Standardisation Office, Washington DC, January 1997, pp. 17–19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

⁹⁵ For an analysis of Brigadier Molan’s views see Evans, *The Role of the Australian Army in a Maritime Concept of Strategy*, pp. 30–2.

⁹⁶ Michael O’Connor, *The Implications of a Regional Security Strategy*, Working Paper No. 45, Australian Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1997, pp. 3–12; ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes: Restructuring the Australian Army’, *Defender: The National Journal of the Australian Defence Association*, Spring 1997, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 25.

strategy without an Army'.⁹⁷ He succinctly outlined the growing dilemma:

The Army remains the problem [in Australian strategy]. The whole focus of Army 21 . . . is on an ability to operate in Australia . . . Because the potential for future conflicts involving Australian interests is so extensive, so narrow a concept of operations for the Army possesses within itself the seeds of future crisis. Even if one accepts the strategic notion of the sea–air gap, the reality is that much of Indonesia and all of Papua New Guinea lie within that sea–air gap. Who could confidently say, for example, that the Australian Army will never again be required, perhaps at short notice, for combat in Papua New Guinea?⁹⁸

Molan and O'Connor were not alone in their concerns. Other Australian security analysts such as Robyn Lim and A. D. McLennan pointed to the Army's difficulty in projecting force beyond Australian soil and its potential to reduce Australia's strategic credibility as a post–Cold War coalition partner.⁹⁹

Leading American scholars also pointed to the potential cost of Australia's lack of military strength for force projection. In an

⁹⁷ Michael O'Connor, 'Australia Defending Asia: Challenge for the 21st Century', *United Service: The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution of New South Wales*, August 1997, vol. 50, no. 3, p. 11.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also Evans, 'From Defence to Security: Continuity and Change in Australian Strategic Planning in the Twentieth Century', pp. 116–40.

⁹⁹ Robyn Lim and A. D. McLennan, 'Self-Reliance as Panacea: Muddling Strategic Thinking in Australia', *Agenda*, 1996, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 269–70; Robyn Lim, 'Australian Security after the Cold War', *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, Winter 1998, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 91–103; Robyn Lim, 'Alliances: Two-Way Streets', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 143, July/August 2000, pp. 43–4.

important survey of US–Asian alliances, Robert A. Blackwill argued, ‘Australia’s weak military capability and limited geographic preoccupation run the risk of producing, in the worst case, a strategic myopia in Canberra regarding developments in the rest of the Asia-Pacific region’.¹⁰⁰ In a similar vein, Thomas-Durell Young argued that the gap between the strategic theory of Defence of Australia and the actual use of the ADF in overseas deployments—particularly its land force elements—had grown so wide as to suggest that ‘Australian strategic thinkers are in a state of profound stasis’.¹⁰¹ He stated:

The problem with the policy of self-reliance has been that it has almost become a doctrine of faith in the defense liturgy of Australia. As a result, Australian strategic culture now practically accepts as ‘a given’ that such a policy can be achieved and should not be reviewed for factual accuracy . . . What is remarkable about the Australian strategic community is that such a vibrant and intellectually solid community has been unwilling to accept that ‘self-reliance’ has many serious weaknesses.¹⁰²

Young suggested that the narrowness inherent in Defence of Australia planning had spawned ‘atavistic aspects and

¹⁰⁰ Robert D. Blackwill, ‘An Action Agenda to Strengthen America’s Alliances in the Asia-Pacific Region’, in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb (eds), *America’s Asian Alliances*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000, p. 118.

¹⁰¹ Thomas-Durell Young, *Australia’s Security and Defense Posture: Implications for Affecting Greater Cooperation*, Working Paper, Japan Information Access Project, Washington DC, July 2000, p. 8.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

concepts'. It was time for Australia to put a premium on improved power-projection and sustainment capabilities.¹⁰³

Australia's Strategic Policy 1997

The growing critique of the irrelevance of the Army under Defence of Australia contributed to changes in Australian strategic policy. At the beginning of 1998, Hugh White, Australia's Deputy Secretary for Strategy in the Department of Defence, conceded that the policy of self-reliance might have had an adverse effect on the role of the Army. In an address to the United Services Institute he stated, 'it could be an unpleasant irony if we finally develop an Army to support the policy of 1987 just at the time we realised it is the wrong policy'.¹⁰⁴

The Deputy Secretary made these remarks during an address on the implications of the second major factor in the revival of the Army's strategic role—the publication of *Australia's Strategic Policy* in December 1997. The new review had been preceded by several official statements to the effect that Australian strategy could not continue to be the servant of an unchanging geography. Such an approach risked neglecting important linkages between defence strategy, foreign policy and the demands of regional engagement in a new post-Cold War international order.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Thomas-Durell Young, 'Information Capabilities: An Unofficial American View', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 143, July/August 2000, pp. 58–9.

¹⁰⁴ Hugh White, 'The Strategic Review: What's New', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia*, December 1998, vol. 19, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ House of Representatives, Ministerial Statement, 'Defence Policy', by the Hon. Ian McLachlan, AO, MP, Minister for Defence, 15 October 1996, pp. 1–4; The Hon. Ian McLachlan, AO, MP,

ASP 97 attempted to align Australian strategy with the rapid international changes of the 1990s. The new review was important in that it reflected a relative decline of the doctrine of immutable strategic geography that had dominated Defence of Australia planning for over a decade. In order to meet the uncertain conditions of post-Cold War security, the review introduced a new emphasis in Australian strategy on preparedness that required the Army to be able to conduct offshore regional operations, either unilaterally or as part of a coalition.¹⁰⁶ This new strategic posture effectively rendered obsolete much of the Army's A21-RTA scheme for operations on Australian soil.

In October 1998, the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Hickling, responded to ASP 97 by calling on the land force to seize the moment through a 'reassertion of Army's intellectual leadership of defence processes' based on fresh ideas and concepts.¹⁰⁷ During 1999 Lieutenant General Hickling declared the A21-RTA scheme to be a 'passive, defensive strategy' imposed on the Army by a system of strategic guidance that viewed land defence from the perspective of the

'Australia's Post-Cold War Defence Planning', *RUSI Journal*, February 1997, vol. 142, no. 1. pp. 9-13; 'Keynote Address' in Hugh Smith (ed.), *Preparing Future Leaders: Officer Education and Training for the Twenty-First Century*, Australian Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1998, pp. ix-xiv.

¹⁰⁶ *Australia's Strategic Policy 1997*, pp. 44-6; 65.

¹⁰⁷ Lieutenant General Frank Hickling, AO, CSC, Chief of Army, 'Address to Senior Officers', Chief of Army's Exercise, Brisbane, 22 October 1998. Notes taken by author.

narrow theory of the sea–air gap.¹⁰⁸ In a speech in 2000, the Chief of Army described the impact of the Defence of Australia philosophy on the land force:

[Under pre-1997 strategic guidance] A21 was based on a continental strategic role for the Army. This was characterised as chasing small phantom groups around the remote north of Australia, while the Navy and the Air Force fought imaginary armadas in the sea approaches. Someone described this as the ‘blue-water Maginot line’ theory; and it was.¹⁰⁹

In late 1998, the Chief of Army formally replaced the A21–RTA program with a maritime strategy aimed at producing ‘highly deployable, potent, medium-weight land forces for the conduct of manoeuvre operations in the littoral environment’.¹¹⁰

The 1999 Crisis in East Timor

The third factor in the transformation of the Army’s place in Australian strategy was the crisis in East Timor in September 1999. Stabilising East Timor involved the largest single deployment by Australian forces since 1945 and led in November 1999 to a much needed increase of 3000 troops for

¹⁰⁸ Lieutenant General Frank Hickling, AO, CSC, Chief of Army, ‘Address to the Command and Staff College’, Fort Queenscliff, Vic., 11 March 1999, pp. 2–3.

¹⁰⁹ Lieutenant General Frank Hickling, AO, CSC, Chief of Army, ‘Our Army: Past, Present and Future’, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia*, June 2000, vol. 21, p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Australian Army, Directorate of Future Land Warfare, ‘Concept for Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment’ (draft dated 16 December 1999), pp. 7–8. For background see Evans, *The Role of the Australian Army in a Maritime Concept of Strategy*, pp. 35–45.

the Army.¹¹¹ The Army's central role in East Timor again highlighted the striking contrast between the low priority assigned to the land force in peacetime Australian defence strategy in comparison with its actual role in times of military crisis. As a former Land Commander has noted, East Timor drove home the reality that, of twenty-two operations undertaken by the Australian Defence Force in the decade since the end of the Cold War, land forces predominated in twenty of them.¹¹²

In the wake of the operation in East Timor, several leading defence analysts began to ponder publicly the pressing need for more emphasis on land forces in Australian strategy. Paul Dibb conceded that, in post-Cold War strategic conditions, the self-reliant defence of Australia and regional security demands had merged to become 'one force structure problem'.¹¹³ He identified 'an arc of instability' extending to Australia's north and east, and encompassing a fragile post-Suharto Indonesia, a weak Papua New Guinea, armed secessionism in Bougainville and the rise of insecurity in the South Pacific islands.¹¹⁴ Dibb declared that the development of regional uncertainty meant

¹¹¹ See Alan Ryan, 'Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks': *Australian Defence Force Participation in the International Force East Timor*, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Study Paper No. 304, Duntroon, November 2000.

¹¹² These figures are drawn from Major General John Hartley (Rtd), 'A Review of the White Paper', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, February 2001, p. 29. Major General Hartley was Deputy Chief of Army from 1995 to 1998 and Land Commander from 1998 to 2000.

¹¹³ Paul Dibb, 'Transforming the ADF's Force Structure for the 21st Century', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 143, July/August 2000, pp. 27–8.

¹¹⁴ Paul Dibb, 'The Strategic Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region', in Blackwill and Dibb, *America's Asian Alliances*, pp. 12–13.

that a 21st-century ADF clearly required a capacity for fielding ‘limited expeditionary forces’, including ‘a larger and more mobile Army supported by greater air and sealift and armed reconnaissance helicopters’.¹¹⁵

In June 2000, during a public debate on strategic issues, the Deputy Secretary for Strategy, Hugh White, reflected on the paradox between the theory and practice of using Australia’s land forces. In an extension of the views he had expressed at the beginning of 1998, White noted that, within the ADF, the Army had been the service most strongly shaped by the ‘tight focus on defence of Australia’. He observed candidly:

For a long time, Army strove . . . to reshape itself around a very particular operational scenario [low-level contingencies in Defence of Australia] . . . I think historians will judge that [as] restructuring the Army, building on the Army 21 study . . . brought to a new state of perfection our planning for that particular scenario, we started realising that the Army might need . . . to deploy offshore to undertake operations like the ones we undertook in East Timor.¹¹⁶

The Deputy Secretary went on to say that, in the wake of East Timor, a key objective of future Australian strategy was clarity of purpose. In particular, there was a ‘need to give Army a better idea of what it is that we want it to do’.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Dibb, ‘Transforming the ADF’s Force Structure for the 21st Century’, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Transcript: Defence Strategy Debate*, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Official Hansard Report, 30 June 2000, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

The Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee Report on the Army, August 2000

The fourth factor that highlighted the need for the Army to be accorded greater priority in Australian strategy was the August 2000 Joint Standing Committee Report into the state of the land force entitled *From Phantom to Force*. This report, perhaps the most significant written on the Australian Army in a quarter of a century, directed urgent political attention to the fate of the land force under the impact of Defence of Australia conditions.

The report described force development priorities in defence policy since the 1987 White Paper as having ‘bolted the Army to the territorial defence of Australia’.¹¹⁸ Strategic guidance under Defence of Australia strategy had driven the land force into the thankless process of continuous reorganisation without adequate resources. The result had been ‘death by a thousand cuts’ in a systematic degrading of Army capabilities, leading to almost perpetual force hollowness and phantom formations.¹¹⁹

The report expressed the view that the Army’s strategic role had, in fact, ‘broken down under the pressure of contemporary events. Defence strategy has become increasingly irrelevant to the real world forces driving the Army’s operational commitments’.¹²⁰ Noting that the Army’s commitments in 2000 were higher than at any time since the Vietnam War, the Joint Standing Committee called for an end to the long fiscal neglect of the land force. In a *cri de coeur* rare for an official document, the report stated, ‘for the sake of the soldiers and for the defence

¹¹⁸ *From Phantom to Force*, p. 57.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–5; chap. 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–2.

of the nation, this approach must stop'.¹²¹ The Joint Standing Committee further warned that national and regional security issues were not mutually exclusive but synonymous since Australia could not be secure in an insecure region. Accordingly, the land force-in-being needed to consist of an independent brigade and a deployable battalion group—optimised for warfighting operations—in what the Committee's report defined as Australia's Area of Critical Security Interest (ACSI), stretching from Fiji to the Cocos Islands.¹²²

The December 2000 Defence White Paper

The fifth and most recent factor in the resuscitation of the Army's strategic role has been the publication of the White Paper, *Defence 2000*. This ambitious document seeks to resolve the historic tension between a desire to limit force structure and expenditure to the self-reliant bedrock of Defence of Australia and simultaneously to meet a broadened security agenda beyond Australia's shores. *Defence 2000* attempts to resolve the dichotomy that General Hutton and Colonel McCay first recognised between protecting Australian territory and defending Australian interests, that is, between 'everywhere and anywhere'.

In this endeavour the White Paper does not succeed. This lack of success is largely because the means to reconcile these contending imperatives—a 21st-century maritime strategy based on an embrace of joint littoral operations—continues to remain subordinate to the post-Vietnam emphasis on a naval—

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 57–63; 183–4.

air defence of the sea–air gap.¹²³ Thus Air Marshal Errol McCormack, the Chief of Air Force, has argued ‘the White Paper does not signal a major change in strategic direction or intent’.¹²⁴ Similarly, the leading Australian political analyst, Paul Kelly, has argued that the White Paper remains at heart a ‘conservative 1980s document’ that seeks to graft a ‘neighbourhood role’ for the ADF onto the master template of Defence of Australia.¹²⁵ In 21st-century international conditions, however, it seems far more likely that ‘a neighbourhood role’—requiring compact but effective joint maritime forces rather than simply air–land platforms for Defence of Australia missions—will need to predominate if the ADF is to be an effective instrument of statecraft.

Although the century-old tension between self-reliance based on geography and defending Australia’s broader interests remains unresolved in the White Paper, the document represents a considerable advance on its predecessors. Unlike the 1976, 1987 and 1994 documents, *Defence 2000* seeks to create a more realistic balance of, and integration between, local and regional defence needs, and between self-reliance

¹²³ *Defence 2000*, pp. xi, 29–31; 46–54. See also Commodore Sam Bateman’s critique of the White Paper’s ‘incomplete maritime strategy’ in Commodore Sam Bateman AM, RAN (Rtd), ‘Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force: “The End of Round One?”’, *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 147, March–April 2001, pp. 17–19.

¹²⁴ Air Marshal Errol McCormack, ‘Defence 2000—Our Future Defence Force and the RAAF’, *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 147, March/April 2001, p. 11.

¹²⁵ Address by Paul Kelly at the Australian Defence Studies Centre Seminar, ‘Defence White Paper: New Policy for New Times’, Rydges Hotel, Canberra, 12 December 2000. Notes taken by author.

and a maritime strategy.¹²⁶ It was perhaps for this reason that a former Chief of the Defence Force, General John Baker, was moved to declare that, as a strategic blueprint, the 2000 White Paper was ‘the best in living memory’.¹²⁷

At the centre of this long-overdue rebalancing and reintegration of strategic priorities is the Australian Army. In a key statement the White Paper admits, ‘the development of our land forces needs to reflect a new balance between the demands of operations on Australian territory and the demands of deployments offshore, especially in our immediate neighbourhood’.¹²⁸ Accordingly the White Paper seeks to provide ready Frontline Forces composed of a brigade and a battalion group, along with new equipment to the tune of 3.6 billion dollars.¹²⁹

Indeed, in terms of land forces—and despite a different historical context—*Defence 2000* is reminiscent of the 1957–59 defence program, which, coincidentally, was also launched to deal with an upsurge of instability in the Asia-Pacific region. Like the late 1950s defence program before it, the 2000 White Paper’s land force proposals seek to structure the Army in order to enable it to deploy a brigade group for extended periods while simultaneously maintaining at least a battalion group for operations elsewhere.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *Defence 2000*, chap. 6.

¹²⁷ Address by General John Baker (Rtd), at the Australian Defence Studies Centre Seminar, ‘Defence White Paper: New Policy for New Times’, Rydges Hotel, Canberra, 12 December 2000. Notes taken by author.

¹²⁸ *Defence 2000*, p. 79.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–4.

Moreover, despite upholding the theoretical primacy of the naval–air defence of the sea–air gap, *Defence 2000* confirms in practical terms the decline of the Dibb doctrine of ‘narrow strategic options’ based on enduring geography. As Thomas-Durell Young has observed, the White Paper represents more than a simple evolution of strategic policy dating from 1987. He notes, ‘whilst *Defence 2000* may not constitute a sea change in Australian defence policy, it certainly does signal a move away from the previous long-standing tenets of Defence of Australia . . . and the Defence of Australia orientation’.¹³¹

Unlike the tight geographical focus of the 1987 and 1994 documents, the 2000 White Paper clearly emphasises the existence of broad security interests involving ‘the need to balance the Australian interest at stake with the human, financial, political and diplomatic, and wider costs of committing military forces’.¹³² Thus, while it remains true that *Defence 2000* continues to uphold a priority commitment to defend Australia’s geography, the document also heralds a major shift in strategic thinking when it emphatically states:

Nothing can remove the element of the unexpected from our military affairs . . . *So our defence planning should not leave us with a set of capabilities that is too narrowly focussed on specific scenarios.* Our aim is to provide Australia with a set of capabilities that will be *flexible enough to provide governments with a range of military options across a spectrum of credible situations.*¹³³

¹³¹ Thomas-Durell Young, ‘Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force—An Unofficial American View’, *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 147, March–April 2001, p. 46.

¹³² *Defence 2000*, p. 30.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 54. Emphases added.

The practical need for a range of military options helps explain the greater attention that the White Paper pays to improving both land capabilities and the nexus between defence planning and broader national-security interests. Indeed, the relationship between defence policy and broader national interests—including both diplomatic and economic factors—is arguably more closely linked in *Defence 2000* than in any major security-planning document since the strategic basis papers of the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹³⁴ Paradoxically, in seeking to uphold the basic template of Defence of Australia thinking, the White Paper appears to have broken the main conceptual mode that has conditioned national strategy over the past quarter of a century: the imperative of geography.

As the 2000 White Paper puts it, ‘our armed forces need to be able to do more than simply defend our coastline. We have strategic interests and objectives at the global and regional levels. Australia is an outward-looking country’.¹³⁵ The White Paper’s focus on reviving the role of the Army to meet a broader strategy of options is a clear reaction to the more complex security demands of the 21st century. It seems unlikely that the growing emphasis on regional security in Australian defence thinking will be reversed in the foreseeable future. Indeed, over the next decade, responding to regional security contingencies will probably take precedence over the geographical imperatives of Defence of Australia planning.

¹³⁴ See *Key Elements in the Triennial Review of Strategic Guidance since 1945*, pp. 6–7.

¹³⁵ *Defence 2000*, p. 29.

Conclusion

In 1976, in perhaps an unconscious echo of McCay's 1911 'everywhere and anywhere' formulation, Sir Arthur Tange, the Secretary of Defence, stated that the foundation of Australian security was primarily based on securing and balancing the requirements of 'two freedoms'. The first freedom was that of preserving local territory from interference, and the second freedom resided in the ability to pursue national and international policies without pressure or duress from a militarily superior power.¹³⁶ The difficulty often experienced by Australian governments in balancing local and overseas defence demands—McCay's 'everywhere and anywhere' and Tange's 'two freedoms'—has often been due to neglect of the country's land forces.

Over the course of the last century, from the time Alfred Deakin laid the foundations for a system of territorial defence in 1907 to Paul Dibb's codification in 1986 of a modern geo-strategy of continental defence, the Australian Army's effectiveness has largely been conditioned by the dichotomy between local and overseas defence. For much of the past one hundred years, the Army has laboured under the striking paradox that, while peacetime planning has usually wanted to confine the Digger to defend home soil, wartime and crisis have always seen him serving in a decisive role overseas.

In the first half of the 20th century, the result of this paradox between strategic theory and military practice was that the Army's peacetime organisation was of minimal strategic value to the nation. In the second half of the 20th century, Australia

¹³⁶ Tange, 'Defence Policy Making in Australia', pp. 7–8.

did succeed in developing a Regular Army that could be employed more widely. Yet, with the exception of the years between the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s, peacetime defence strategy has consistently failed to anticipate the kind of conflict that the Army might realistically expect to confront. For reasons of finance, politics or ideology, Australian defence policy-makers have usually favoured a strategy based on the primacy of naval–air forces over a strategy of balanced, joint forces.

In the 21st century, Australia must recognise that its historic reliance on land forces in military crisis has never rested simply on the natural individual dash of a mythic, volunteer Digger. Whether in peace, crisis or war, Australian planners must recognise that only a properly maintained professional army can provide military institutional skills. In uncertain strategic conditions, Australia cannot afford to have its land forces impaired by inadequate funding or operationally restricted to single-scenario planning. A key challenge, then, for both future Coalition and Labor governments, will be to ensure that the Army is developed in the context of a rigorous joint maritime strategy, with land force elements viewed as an integral and agile part of any ADF task force. In this respect, policy makers of the future should be guided by John Dedman’s original vision of an Australian Army capable of conducting ‘comprehensive land operations’.

Above all, the Australian Defence Force of the 21st century must seek to maximise the potential of all three services in a manner that represents a balanced conception of the role of armed force in upholding national interests. Balance is the element that has been, more often than not, missing from Australian strategy over the past one hundred years. Finally, it

is worth recalling Sir Robert Menzies' September 1950 public reminder to Australians that, even in the age of jet aircraft, missiles and 'push button war', it remained necessary for the nation to maintain an effective Army. In words that are as relevant in the high-technology information age of today as they were half a century ago, Menzies said: 'give up discounting the Army. To allow it to become the Cinderella of the Services is to be blind to stern realities and forgetful of a splendid Australian tradition. In modern war, men need science . . . but science cannot win without men'.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Menzies in *The Defence Call to the Nation*, 22 September 1950, p. 10.