

CHIEF OF ARMY SPEECH

ARMY AFTER AFGHANISTAN

**SPEECH TO THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE BY THE
CHIEF OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY LIEUTENANT
GENERAL DAVID MORRISON, FEBRUARY 2012**

LIEUTENANT GENERAL DAVID MORRISON, AO

It is an honour to address the Sydney Institute. Over more than two decades Gerard and Anne have cemented the reputation of the Sydney Institute as the premier forum in this city for the serious discussion of public policy as well as the arts and culture. Theirs is a considerable achievement, and I am grateful for the opportunity to deliver my first address to an audience outside Defence as the Chief of the Army at this Institute. My topic today is the ‘Army After Afghanistan.’

Having named my topic, I would like to make two points at the outset. Firstly, I have no greater priority than making certain that Army’s soldiers are as fully prepared for their role in Afghanistan, and in other operational areas where they are deployed, as is possible. The title of this address is not intended to convey any impression that we are moving on from the operational challenges that face our men and women deployed in dangerous environments across the world today. However, my job as Army’s Chief is to also look forward, to the outer years of this decade and beyond, and to ensure that Australia has an army that is as relevant and robust as is affordable.

Secondly, while I will speak almost entirely about my Service, my primary consideration is ensuring that Army can function as part of a joint force, in concert with

Navy and Air Force, and other Government Departments, and indeed with coalition partners. While it is not given the credence I think it deserves, Australia has a Defence Department that is very collegiate and strategic in its focus. Australia needs its ADF more than it needs its navy, its army or its air force if it is to possess robust military options now and in the future. Its about being a joint force and Army knows that.

I have assumed command of the Australian Army at a challenging time. We are an Army with a real operational focus. The war in Afghanistan is now the longest ever waged by Australians. The men and women of the Australian Defence Force are in dire peril on a daily basis, engaged in combat operations against a determined, ruthless and tenacious enemy. All three services are performing splendidly but this war is demanding the greatest focus, commitment and, indeed, sacrifices from the Army.

Nor should we forget that we continue to sustain significant deployments in Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands as well as a range of smaller operations all over the world. My number one priority, as I have said, is the support and sustainment of our troops on those operations.

Yet those demands cannot divert us from the continuous process of modernisation and adaptation which is essential to keeping the Army abreast of changes in technology and the character of war itself. Our force planners refer to these twin obligations in the convenient short hand of fighting 'the war' while developing forces capable of fighting 'the next war.' In other words we must continue to deploy potent forces capable of prevailing on the contemporary battlefield, as exemplified by the war in Afghanistan, while continuing to modernise the Army in conformity with the strategic guidance from the Government of Australia contained in the White Paper of 2009.

Over the past decade we, the Army, have also substantially enhanced our firepower, combat mobility and levels of protection. This has reversed what I believe was a long term, albeit gradual, decline in the fighting power of the Army, which took place in the period from the end of the Vietnam War until the strategic shock of the Timor crisis of 1999. The goal that I have set myself as the current Chief is to lay the foundations for the Army of the third decade of this Century. It is vital that we do not succumb to the sort of thinking that justified a serious reduction in the strength and capability of the Army that we experienced in the wake of withdrawal from Vietnam.

I am well aware of the many competing demands on Government revenue that exist currently and in the timeframe that I am speaking about. It is on me to look at these matters objectively, to plan prudently, to be fiscally responsible and to use sound and logical arguments to put that case forward. I have been Chief for over 8 months and I have been very conscious of the great support from the Government in terms of changes to our force structure and to capability enhancement within my Service.

Nonetheless, I believe that so called 'peace dividends' seldom, if ever accrue. It would be a serious error to conclude that in the wake of our draw-down in

Afghanistan that the Army will never again need to deploy overseas. Such implicit assumptions were made from 1976–1999. They were sustained in the face of evidence to the contrary such as significant deployments to Cambodia, Somalia, Namibia, Rwanda and Bougainville. This divergence between our declared strategic preferences and practices has been described by the respected scholar Mike Evans as the ‘Tyranny of Dissonance.’ History has clearly demonstrated that ‘peace dividends’ invariably become ‘peace liabilities’ when the military must restore its capabilities when the next threat arrives.

Ultimately, the deployment of INTERFET marked a strategic watershed for Australia. For the Army it brought to an end the benign era known colloquially as the ‘Long Peace.’ Our strategic policy makers had been very reluctant, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, to see Australia commit troops to a foreign war.

We would rely instead on astute middle power diplomacy, the primacy of our closest ally the United States, and the stability of the Suharto regime to posture our forces to defend Australia from behind the sea-air gap. As we achieved deeper engagement with our Asian neighbours, the era of ‘forward defence’ came to be viewed as an anachronism. There is a broad consensus now that Australia seeks security ‘in Asia’ rather than ‘from Asia,’ a consensus perhaps inspired by the realisation that the so-called ‘sea-air’ gap is, in fact, a ‘sea-air-land’ gap.

Throughout much of my career as a junior and middle ranking officer we trained for operations to defeat small raids and incursions across Northern Australia. Many in Army were critical of these scenarios and the force structures that they supported. But the Army was also, in part, a contributor to this particular approach.

We were, perhaps, too insular in the wake of our withdrawal from Vietnam and possibly somewhat slow to adapt to the changing military and strategic paradigm of the times. Notwithstanding the extraordinary valour shown by our soldiers in that long war, the Service after Vietnam was not immune to the age old problem of armies: that of being more comfortable looking back with pride, rather than looking forward with focus. The broader developments in combined arms warfare in the wake of events such as the Yom Kippur war of 1973, the growth in the use of technology to enhance intelligence and surveillance capabilities, and the exponential increase in both lethality and precision of available weapons systems did not pass us by rather it left us interested but not too much changed.

Over time the Army evolved into a force of single capabilities. We became too light, too dependent on wheeled vehicles and our organisations hollowed out. Operations in East Timor in 1999–2000 exposed serious deficiencies in our land forces. Much of the work of my predecessors as Chief of Army has been focused on remediating the shortcomings that we identified in East Timor. While a lot has been achieved a great deal remains to be done.

The operations of the past decade have informed much of our force development. Unlike some, who continue to suggest that our deployment of forces to East Timor the Solomon Islands, Iraq and Afghanistan have been an aberration, I am convinced they are symptomatic of the changing character of war. Moreover, they provide an indication of what can be expected of the medium term future.

Australia is one of the world's oldest continuously functioning democracies. We are an advanced, wealthy trading nation deeply enmeshed in the global system of free markets. We are also an ally of the United States and a committed and active member of the United Nations. For that reason we have always had a vital national interest in supporting the global equilibrium provided by our major ally—originally Britain and since the Second World War—the United States.

That global system is in a state of flux. We are still coming to grips with a number of meta-trends, the full implications of which will only become apparent long after my military career ends. But warfare, as Clausewitz so wisely observed is inextricably linked to politics and indelibly bears the imprint of the era in which it is waged.

Since the end of the Cold War, dynamic and disruptive forces have undermined the stability and predictability of the bi polar balance of power. While rumours of the demise of the state have proven to be premature, the period since 1990 has been characterised by the proliferation of non state security actors. Ethnic, religious and tribal politics have been the major source of war since the end of the Cold War. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union civil, ethnic and tribal wars have been more prevalent than state on state conflict. Indeed, hybrid wars, to employ a term that I find useful, have become the predominant form of war.

In Afghanistan we are confronted by a range of irregular forces, ranging from religious extremists and tribal militias through to potent criminal organisations. However, the increasingly widespread availability of modern technology and weaponry is blurring the distinction between regular and irregular forces and rendering theoretical differences between conventional and guerrilla war to the almost meaningless.

The level of tactical lethality available to irregular forces today means that armies such as ours must deploy highly protected, agile and flexible combined arms teams across the entire spectrum of conflict. The era when combined arms warfare was only synonymous with conventional state on state conflict has gone forever. And the professional and scholarly consensus is that state on state warfare is less likely than hybrid war in the next couple of decades. Indeed conventional war has become steadily less frequent since Waterloo, although when it has occurred it has been increasingly intense and lethal.

Be assured I am not endorsing some modern variant of Norman Angell's thesis, published as *The Great Illusion* in 1913, which predicted an era of uninterrupted peace. Soldiers are naturally realists with a disposition to pessimism. Our fundamental force development principle is that military operations against a credible,

technologically enabled opponent, possessing war fighting capabilities similar to our own, must remain the foundation of all planning. Mastery of foundation war fighting skills is the core competency that the Government demands of Army. That immutable precept will inform Army's modernisation program out to 2030. An army that can fight, manoeuvre and defeat a credible enemy, can adapt to less demanding contingencies. The converse is not true. Australia's soldiers, must be confident and capable when facing an array of environments and threats, including an adversary as well equipped and trained as they are.

Army does not plan and implement modernisation in a vacuum. We constantly analyse the changing character of war—both through our own experience and through our sharing of doctrine and technology with our allies. And we must maintain fidelity to the strategic guidance contained in definitive policy statements, notably the White Paper of 2009 and any additional Ministerial guidance. The current White Paper allocates tasks to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) according to a scale of priorities.

All of these tasks make heavy demands on the Army. The thread binding all these tasks together is the direction that ADF implement a maritime strategy in the Defence of Australia. In order to execute this strategy the ADF requires comprehensive understanding of, and an ability to conduct decisive operations within, the archipelagic approaches to Australia. This renders as naive the notion of defending the sea-air gap through the exclusive use of sea and air power.

The relatively small size of the Army at times encourages an almost tactical level thinking about its employment when, in reality, Australian statecraft has made frequent and diverse use of land forces over the past century. For a middle power like Australia, the use of strategic land power is not so much related to size and mass, but rather to effect and objective. When judged against these criteria, it is clear that Australian policy has, since 1942, used elements of land power for strategic purposes more frequently than any other military instrument—particularly in Asia.

Indeed, since the White Paper of 2000, the prevailing trend in strategic guidance and force structuring has been the enhancement of joint ADF capabilities to support the simultaneous deployment within our Primary Operational Environment of a brigade on sustained rotation, while a battalion group conducts a less demanding contingency. The Army in which I served for the first half of my career could never have achieved this. The second Timor crisis in 2006 demonstrated that we have made enormous progress towards achieving that.

Just as important as structuring forces to be able to implement strategic guidance is developing relevant and robust doctrine. In this regard I believe Army has kept abreast of our allies in grasping the character of war. The intellectual conceptualisation of war from which our Future Land Operating Concept is derived is sound, and generates a common joint and inter-agency framework and cohesiveness across the Army.

Indeed, I believe that the Australian Army has developed insights into the character of contemporary conflict which have subsequently been emulated by other nations. The respected US analyst Frank Hoffman, who has pioneered the concept of hybrid war for the United States Marine Corps, credits the Australian Army with commendable foresight in identifying and responding to this convergence in modes of conflict over the past decade. Our doctrine and force structures permit us to respond appropriately to a range of contingencies from humanitarian support and disaster relief to medium intensity war fighting using the same force packages with modest adaptation. This is essential in the era of hybrid war, or war among the people as Sir Rupert Smith memorably defined it.

And so it is essential that Army continues to evolve and develop a robust and efficient structure in order to generate forces for sustained operations. And yet we currently have a mechanised brigade split between Darwin and Adelaide, a light infantry brigade in Townsville and a motorised brigade in Brisbane. These three organisations differ somewhat radically from one another in composition and culture.

The effects of this have cascaded through our career management, training and posting systems. And the ultimate effect on overall capability output has been detrimental. A sound system of collective training, force generation and operational rotation must be built on a standard brigade structure in all three locations. Under Plan BEERSHEEBA, which the Government announced in December of 2011, Army will achieve this vital structural reform. This is one of the most important reforms since the end of the Vietnam War.

In simple terms, it involves the development of Multi-role Combat Brigades (MCB), based on the 1st, 3rd and 7th Brigades which are essentially 'alike' to enable well prepared forces capable of sustained operations.

Plan BEERSHEEBA describes a phased program to adjust Army's force structure to ensure a more optimal capability can be generated to conform to strategic guidance and meet contemporary threats.

It has, at its core, a view of Army's place in the ADF, and within a Whole-of-Government and Coalition framework; and a thorough appreciation that our Regular and Reserve Forces must be fully complementary if future capability is to be delivered in a timely and affordable way.

Underpinning this organisational reform is the most significant re-equipment program for the Army since the Vietnam War. Under the guise of the LAND 400 project we are introducing a coherent and integrated Combined Arms Fighting System. This will support our efforts at standardising the basic building brick of the force—the multi-role combat brigade—and provide combined arms teams with greater protected mobility, firepower and communications.

But solving the force generation and rotation dilemma is only half the battle. The ability to deploy credible amphibious forces within our Primary Operating

Environment will require Army to continue to develop an expeditionary mindset. The cultural and training challenge involved in being able to embark a battle group on amphibious platforms and mount an operation offshore is very significant.

These amphibious platforms, known to us as 'Landing Helicopter Docks' (LHDs) are not water taxis- they are systems which enable Army to generate an effect on land. Lord Edward Grey once eloquently argued that the British Army needed to be 'a projectile fired by the Navy'. I am very fond of that quote as it provides an aiming mark for me and my force developers as we seek to create the land component of the joint amphibious capability. The weapon system of the new LHD is in fact the embarked force, and the true capability is the joint effect delivered through Army, Navy and Air force within the Amphibious Task Group.

It is a capability we have not been able to field since the end of the Second World War. The training involved in permitting soldiers to even travel on such platforms is significant. Given the highly specialised nature of amphibious operations my intent is to initially nest this capability within a battalion group of the 3rd Brigade in Townsville.

Moreover, we also need to develop a much better understanding of that Primary Operating Environment, at a cultural and social level. The shifting geo-political dynamic in South East Asia and the Pacific provides challenges, and opportunities, for the nations and armies of the region. My first bi-lateral visit as Chief of the Army was to Indonesia. Developing robust links to the land forces of all of our South East Asian, and Pacific, allies is one of my main priorities. These links support our overall national strategy in the immediate neighbourhood. Land Forces occupy a central place in both the security policies and national identities of our key neighbours.

Finally, I wish to make some points about Army's culture and the role of women and our reserve component. I am immensely proud of the Army and I am confident that sentiment is widely shared in the community. We have a strong culture built on values of Courage, Initiative and Teamwork. Moreover, our performance on operations over the past decades demonstrate that our soldiers are worthy custodians of the ANZAC legend.

There was perhaps no more poignant example of the relationship between the Army and the nation than the spontaneous affection shown to our soldiers during the series of natural disasters that occurred on the East Coast last year. We were able to mobilise thousands of troops whose own summer vacations were disrupted at very short notice in order to help their fellow Australians.

At the core of our identity is a strong combat culture. We must preserve this as it is vital to our success. But we must concede that this culture has tended to exclude women and some ethnic groups who are under-represented in our ranks. This will prove unsustainable with demographic change over the next few decades.

I am passionately committed to expanding the opportunities for women within the Army. You are no doubt aware the Government has directed the Army to remove

the few remaining restrictions on the employment of women in combat units. We can do this without detriment to our exacting standards in combat units. And the Government and community expect no less from us. Harnessing the full potential of our workforce is a capability issue rather than a diversity issue for me and I want to remove any artificial impediments to the best use of all of our people.

In the complex battle-space of the 21st Century, distinctions between combat and non-combat tend to be arbitrary if not meaningless. A large number of ADF women have already been in harm's way during the operations of the past decade and they have performed splendidly. Removing the few formal impediments to their employment within the Army will not undermine our performance. Exactly how I make a quantitative impact on the numbers of women serving in the Army and secure their advancement to the senior ranks is one of my major priorities.

Likewise, we have expanded the opportunities available to our Reserve component. The Reserve is already significantly engaged in operations abroad, essentially providing our force elements in the Solomons and Timor Leste. The new force generation model is designed to efficiently link the Reserve to our Regular combat brigades to sponsor the generation of a reserve combat team available at short notice to each brigade. This is a significant improvement and will allow us to continue to deploy reserve forces to a range of military operations. We will at last be 'One Army.'

Finally I want to make one very clear commitment to all of our men and women wounded on operations. To some extent they have been invisible casualties of war except inside the Army. All of us are moved by the genuine expressions of national sympathy and support each time we farewell one of our fallen. But the wounded do not receive the same level of recognition. And many of them have been seriously injured—either physically and obviously through loss of limbs, blindness and blast injuries or less apparent, but just as debilitating, by psychological scarring and longer term damage. I have made a pledge to our wounded personnel, and their families, that, we will find continuing employment within the Army for every one, in a way that meets the needs of the Service and the individual. And should it prove not to be possible, for health or safety reasons, then all of our considerable resources will be employed to finding civil employment.

We will not abandon one of our own. Implementing that will be challenging, but it is what I think this old and distinguished national institution that I lead should do.

The Australian Army faces the third decade of this century with great pride in its past and confidence in its future. We aspire to provide ready, relevant, agile land forces capable of joint and multi-agency operations both inside Australia and abroad in the service of our nation. We will do so on the shoulders of our men and women, many of them young, many of them with recent combat experience, all of them committed to the security of this nation. We're in good shape.