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Major General Rick Burr, DSC, AM, MVO, address to Australian Strategic Policy Institute Army's future force structure options conference, Canberra, Thursday 25 June 2015.

*Check against delivery.*

Australia's strategic environment is being transformed by the rise of an increasingly complex and interconnected Indo-Pacific strategic system. Major power relationships are being re-written by burgeoning wealth and shifting economic power, feeding strategic competition and military modernization. Bilateral and multilateral economic and security arrangements are evolving rapidly but unevenly, as some smaller states in the region continue to be held back by fragile polities, weak economies and fractured societies.

Our strategic posture in response to these conditions demands the focus and integration of all instruments of national power through national strategy. As one element of national power, and as the government's preeminent agent of hard power, the ADF also exercises soft and indeed 'smart' power through a range of mechanisms such as military diplomacy, capacity building, joint planning and training, and delivery of aid, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Defence's International Engagement program provides this mechanism, and serves Australia's national interests by:

- providing situational awareness and influence,
- building collective capacity, capability and interoperability,
- supporting transparency, and
- assisting in deterrence.

An effective International Engagement program fundamentally builds trust, understanding and capacity, and reduces that perennial feature of international relations – friction. Established relations are invaluable in time of crisis, increasing the speed and effectiveness of response options in the face of conflict, terrorism, or natural disaster. The program can also provide an enduring channel for dialogue that can reinforce political and economic relationships, and offer an alternate line of communication during times of diplomatic tension.

International Engagement is increasingly recognised, both within and beyond Defence, as a core military task. Engagement allows the government to derive

greater utility from its military. The time and resources we allocate to International Engagement represents a high-payoff investment in Australia's security in the region, contributes to military capability, and develops our people.

So I have two key messages today: International Engagement is an integral component of military strategy, and it makes an essential contribution to Army capability.

Many of the strategic challenges we face are transnational and networked by nature, and require a transnational and networked response. Land forces have a key role to play.

The Army International Engagement Plan is nested with the Defence International Engagement Plan. Collectively it complements other military lines of operation and comprehensive whole-of-government efforts. The Australian government requires its Army – as part of the joint ADF team, and in conjunction with other elements of national power – to contribute to three core tasks:

- to shape the strategic environment;
- to deny and defeat threats to Australia and its interests; and
- to protect and support Australian and foreign civil populations.

International Engagement is fundamental to all three of these tasks, which represent strategic objectives for land power. Activities under this umbrella seek to generate mutual understanding, influence, stability and strategic alignment.

These outputs are achieved through a combination of the physical footprint of our personnel overseas, the purpose and pattern of our collaborative activities with other forces, and the network of relationships established between our service personnel and those of other nations.

Army has a unique role in the conduct of International Engagement. Within the Indo-Pacific, land forces tend to be dominant and influential pillars of the national establishment, increasing the strategic significance of Army to Army relationships. Notably, our region includes six of the ten largest armies in the world, and the vast majority of military chiefs are army officers.

Investment in the human domain requires time, commitment, proximity and consistency. With its fundamental capability being its people, Army-led cooperation can facilitate enduring relationships and achieve unique access and influence through effective employment of our human capital – the professionalism, agility and imagination of our people.

Today the Australian Army maintains relationships with its counterparts in over 40 countries, conducting over 120 bilateral and multilateral exercises each year. Army conducts senior leadership staff talks with 18 counterparts annually. We have around 260 personnel permanently stationed overseas:

completing education, learning languages and immersing in cultures, conducting liaison, capacity-building and capability development, and who return home with experiences and perspectives of best practice to contribute to the continuous improvement of our capability. Reciprocal opportunities, hosted here in Australia, are another essential form of engagement with abundant potential.

Some practical case studies illuminate my theme.

The Australia – Indonesia relationship is vital to us, and the relationship between the Australian Army and TNI is instructive. Army has developed a cohort of officers who speak Bahasa, who have trained and instructed at Indonesian military colleges and who have worked closely with Indonesian counterparts in training and military diplomacy. Likewise Indonesia has a significant number of professional and experienced officers with strong Australian connections.

Both countries are well-served by robust interpersonal relationships, developed over many years and which have facilitated constructive engagement during periods of political friction. In 2011, the Australia-Indonesia Defence Alumni Association (Ikahan) was established, serving to strengthen dialogue between military and civilian personnel from the two countries. The initiative has served to broaden and deepen professional relationships, and represents an idea that might be expanded to cover other bilateral and multilateral partnerships.

The Australian Army plays a role in facilitating communication between China, Australia and other nations. The first joint Australia-China-US exercise, Exercise Kowari, took place in the Northern Territory in November last year. Australian, Chinese and US troops were placed in small mixed teams and, after some training, left to survive in the harsh and challenging environment of Northern Australia for an extended period.

This novel approach required soldiers from different cultures to work together and to depend on one another. That shared experience is extremely powerful. Such activities provide foundations and context for broader strategic level engagement. This excellent example of a value proposition will be repeated later this year.

Deeper strategic engagement through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue with Japan and the United States serves to highlight the trend toward multilateral relationships. Attesting to this, many senior leaders in this room have just returned from the Trilateral Senior Level Seminar in Townsville, a forum that facilitates dialogue between our Army, the Japanese Ground Self Defence Force, the United States Army Pacific and the Marine Forces Pacific.

The recent creation of this forum, and together with the trilateral field training exercise Southern Jackeroo, represents new territory for the furtherance of a key strategic relationship.

And there are numerous operational examples that serve to illustrate the return on investment in International Engagement. A vital element of any HADR response is the coordination of the many contributors in what is typically a complex, chaotic environment.

The ability to contribute effectively to a Multinational Coordination Centre, drawing on experience of previous multilateral HADR exercises, greatly assists a Host nation in distress, and saves lives and alleviates suffering during the critical early stages of a crisis. This was certainly evident in response to the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in the Philippines, and most recently in Nepal.

Responding to the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 drew on the deep relationship with The Netherlands formed in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan, and the broader NATO relationship developed as a result of the ISAF contribution. You don't know how important these relationships are until you need them. But building trust takes time, consistency and sincerity.

In considering this subject matter, I also reflect upon my recent assignment as Deputy Commanding General, United States Army Pacific, where I was privileged to work under General Brooks, who joins us today, and will shortly share with us some of his perspectives.

This unprecedented arrangement is the result of a powerful idea to promote stronger partnerships and to demonstrate trust and transparency, and to deepen professional relationships through the region. An extremely successful initiative which continues to provide great benefit, it is an exemplar of the principles of international engagement.

The opportunities available to Army are many. Participation in multinational activities helps facilitate adaptive and relevant forces that can readily integrate with, or at least operate alongside, partners. Additionally, we have the opportunity to participate in a regional military community, sharing knowledge, experience and information – building shared understanding, respect and trust. At the individual level, it broadens and deepens our people and contributes to the excitement of a military career.

The complex nature of International Engagement subjects it to headwinds and challenges at every level. A small army with finite resources must balance efforts in this area with other calls upon its attention. But we must also appreciate that International Engagement complements force generation, force modernization and warfighting functions, and can help build readiness.

We must also be sensitive to the needs and constraints of partner forces. Well-intentioned engagement and assistance can rapidly overwhelm the will and capacity of smaller nations, particularly where multiple partnering relationships exist. We must avoid exceeding the capacity of other nations to absorb our assistance, and we must deconflict our efforts with others to prevent duplication and displacement.

Army's approach to international engagement must be holistic. As we further evolve Army's contribution to the Defence International Engagement program, we will benefit from a combined joint "campaign" approach that is strategy led, effectively resourced and appropriately prioritized, and with its effectiveness and focus continuously assessed.

The development of ADF's amphibious capability is illustrative of the intrinsic link between international engagement, force generation and operational effect. From inception, the development of strategy, policy and doctrine has been informed and enabled through engagement with international partners. As the Amphibious capability comes on-line, it will provide unprecedented capability for the conduct of regional engagement, capacity building and disaster relief.

But these exciting developments in Army and Joint capability will also require us to focus expectations in terms of readiness, responsiveness and delivery.

I said at the outset that, in addition to its strategic purpose, International Engagement fundamentally improves our Army. So as we habitually seek to modernise capability, so too we must strive to modernise relationships through an enhanced approach to International Engagement.

Influence, understanding and trust on the international stage are the product of vision, strong leadership, perseverance and patience. Time and resources correctly invested in International Engagement can yield an asymmetric benefit, often when least expected and most needed.

To conclude, quite simply, a more strategic and integrated approach to International Engagement and security cooperation must be a core component of Army's mission into the future.