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## **A Chief of Defence Force's perspective**

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### **Prelude**

In my four-year term of office as the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), there are three major operational commitments that stand out.

The first, and perhaps most important, commitment from a strategic and national point of view was the UN-mandated operation to provide security in East Timor carried out from 20 September 1999 until 28 February 2000. The International Force East Timor (INTERFET) mission stands as a watershed moment in Australian military history and for our nation; it was for the first time that Australia had to put together and lead an internationally sanctioned coalition operation in our neighbourhood using military forces from many nations. As a result, Australian military doctrine had to be changed rapidly for our leadership role and the resulting requirements for interoperability—that is, to be able to work effectively with counterpart forces from coalition partners.

The second major operational commitment was the provision of security for the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. This operation involved a substantial force of about 4,500 full-time and part-time ADF members who had to learn to work effectively with a variety of domestic law enforcement agencies and Olympic organisers before and throughout

the Games. The ADF also had significant training responsibilities for the provision of specialist security forces, including forces able to respond to a terrorist incident.

The third major operational commitment had its genesis in the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

At the time of the 9/11 attacks, the ADF was already engaged in two significant operational commitments. The first commitment was a follow-up to the security operation in East Timor: Operation TANAGER, involving about 1,600 personnel supporting the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). The second commitment was mounting Operation RELEX from 3 September 2001 until 1 July 2002 to deter people-smugglers selling one-way overland bus trips and boat passages intended to bring people into Australia without proper authority.

With this as background, I will examine the main events in the post-9/11 military world until I retired from command of the Defence Force. I will add some observations about unfolding operations in Afghanistan and Iraq after July 2002. I will then finish this chapter with my assessment of the implications of these events for the ADF and the nation.

## **The attacks of 9/11 in context**

On 26 February 1993, terrorists detonated a truck bomb in the basement of the World Trade Center. It killed six people and injured more than 1,000 people. The intention of these terrorists was to send the North Tower crashing into the South Tower, thus bringing both towers down and killing tens of thousands of people.

Investigations now show that Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of this operation, had spent time in al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan before 1991 when he began the planning of a bombing attack inside the United States. He later said that the 1993 attack was in vengeance for US support for Israel. Letters sent to media outlets in the United States just before the attack demanded that America end all aid to Israel, terminate diplomatic relations with Israel and end interference in Middle East countries' interior affairs. If these demands were not met, the letters threatened, further attacks would take place.

Yousef's uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, later considered to be the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks,<sup>1</sup> gave tips and advice to Yousef on the telephone. He also supported financially a co-conspirator, Mohammed Salameh, with a small wire transfer to him of US\$660.<sup>2</sup> The records now show that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was a skilful terrorist committed to the cause of attacking the West.

In 1996, Tom Clancy's new bestselling Jack Ryan book, *Executive Orders*, was released in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The back cover of the book had the following synopsis:

A runaway Jumbo Jet has crashed into the Capitol Building in Washington, leaving the President dead, along with most of the Cabinet and Congress. Dazed and confused, the man who only minutes beforehand was confirmed as the new caretaker Vice-President is told that he is now President of the United States.

The full story is in the opening pages of the book. Therefore it is possible that the breathtaking conception of using US technology to attack the symbols of US global leadership, such as the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, might have had its genesis in Clancy's work of fiction. Indeed, in 1996 Khalid Sheikh Mohammed presented Osama bin Laden with an outline of an idea along these lines.<sup>4</sup>

It was on my watch that the tragic 9/11 attacks occurred. I was dining with a friend in Perth when ADF Operations alerted me to an unfolding event in New York City. I turned on the television in time to see live coverage of the second aircraft fly into the South Tower. However, what became quite clear within hours of the collapse of both towers from the television coverage, supplemented by upgraded intelligence reporting, was the imperative for the United States to take immediate action in response in Afghanistan. Additional measures to safeguard communities who were in fear of what might happen next would also be necessary.

By midnight Perth time, I had decided I needed to return to Canberra as quickly as I could as I knew the Prime Minister, accompanied by a strong team from Australia, was in Washington, DC, for an official visit. We took the first available flight to return to Russell Offices and my headquarters.

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1 Included in the 9/11 Commission Report.

2 Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, [globalsecurity.org](http://globalsecurity.org), from an original on 21 October 2008.

3 T. Clancy, *Executive Orders*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1996.

4 BBC News, 'Suspect reveals 9/11 planning', 22 September 2003.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, there was a lot of uncertainty, including when our national leadership team would return from the United States. We tried to obtain more detail about exactly what had happened, as well as engaging with US military authorities on likely response options.

The timing, coordination, imagination and audacity of these attacks took the world by surprise. This was in spite of knowledge that al-Qaeda was a force to be reckoned. It had mounted successful attacks on USS *Cole* on 12 October 2000 and other attacks on US interests, such as the attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on 7 August 1998. The intelligence agencies had been doing their best to anticipate al-Qaeda's next moves, but this was one they missed.

After the tragedy that befell New York, the Pentagon and the passengers and crew members of all four large-body aircraft used in the attacks, the world watched and waited for the next big event. For some time after 9/11, it was thought that other 'spectacular' events had been planned. People watched and waited, while we were doing our best to try to outsmart al-Qaeda.

The British historian Niall Ferguson has summed up the position well, as follows:

The defining event of this century's first years was an attack on the financial and transport networks of the United States by an Islamist gang that is best understood as an anti-social network. Although acting in the name of al-Qaeda, the 9/11 plotters were only weakly connected to the wider network of political Islam, which helps explain why they were able to escape detection.

There was an evil genius to what the attacks of 11 September 2001 did. In essence, they targeted the main hubs of America's increasingly networked society, exploiting security vulnerabilities that allowed them to smuggle primitive weapons (box cutters) onto four passenger planes bound for New York and Washington, respectively the central nodes of the US financial and political systems ... the al-Qaeda operatives achieved the greatest coup in the history of terrorism. Not only did they generate an atmosphere of fear in the United States that persisted for many months; more importantly, they precipitated an asymmetrical response by the

administration of President George W. Bush that almost certainly did more over the succeeding years to strengthen than to weaken the cause of Salafist Islam.<sup>5</sup>

## Post 9/11

The Bush administration, with the support of Congress, responded quickly to these attacks with a statement of intent. During a televised address to the nation from the White House in the evening of 9/11, President Bush said, '[W]e will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.'

From an Australian perspective, my recollection is that an urgent meeting of the National Security Committee of Cabinet (NSC) took place in Parliament House on Wednesday afternoon following my return from Perth. This meeting was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson MP, and it included a hook-up with Prime Minister Howard in Washington, DC. The meeting canvassed a range of possibilities that might affect Australian security interests in the forthcoming weeks and the implications of a commitment to invoke the ANZUS Treaty as a framework within which to conduct consultations with the United States. The matter of the return to Australia of the Prime Minister's party was also discussed.

The government announced the activation of the ANZUS Treaty on 14 September after Howard's return to Australia. This was followed in Parliament on 17 September by a resolution that 'fully endorses the commitment of the Australian Government to support within Australia's capabilities United States-led action against those responsible for these tragic attacks'.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the government had set a high priority on the ADF doing as much as was prudent to assist the United States in its efforts to combat terrorism.

Within the Australian Defence Organisation, the Secretary, Dr Alan Hawke AO, and I discussed implications for our own security. We were anxious about further attacks on targets of opportunity, certainly within the United States, and possibly with close allies like Australia. As a matter

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5 N. Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower: Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power*, Allen Lane, London, 2017, pp. 333–4.

6 House of Representatives, Debates, 17 September 2001, p. 30739.

of urgency, we lifted the security watch at all ADF bases in Australia. I was also concerned that small groups of 'sleeper' terrorists in our community might decide to attack ADF members, and possibly their families, as a means of demonstrating al-Qaeda's reach and the seriousness of its agenda. Consequently, I decided to write a personally signed letter to families of ADF members in Australia emphasising the need to consider personal security measures, including the use of different travel routes to and from work, and schools where appropriate, as well as being watchful about their homes and within their communities.

Given the nature of our close relationship with the United States, it did not take long before the phones and the emails were running hot between US Pacific Command in Hawaii and, less frequently, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, DC. Our Defence staff in Washington, DC, and our consul-general in Hawaii were also busy discussing options for the conduct of immediate response operations in defence of our interests and to support the United States in the prosecution of al-Qaeda terrorist training camps, certainly in Afghanistan, and possibly in other places of interest.

Another proposal being pursued vigorously by the United States was the patrolling by naval ships of the Malacca Strait and the management of appropriate interception operations there. Early on it was evident that finding sufficient naval ships from reliable allies and partners of the United States would be troublesome. Australia was unable to participate in this activity owing to other operational priorities.

I was also conscious, particularly in the context of Malacca Strait operations, that there might be sensitivities in Jakarta to any US requests for support. Accordingly, I visited Jakarta to explain to colleagues there that any US requests for help should be taken seriously. I also pointed out that US officials might become tense if they encountered inexplicable obstacles. I had the impression at the time that my trip was worth the effort.

Providing air defence assets to protect the US naval support facility, US Marine Corps pre-positioned ships and US Air Force (USAF) bases in the British Indian Ocean Territory of Diego Garcia was another US priority. From an Australian perspective, the request to mount this operation with RAAF resources could be undertaken quite easily within the constraints of ADF priorities. The government readily accepted arguments for participation in these operations by RAAF Hornet aircraft

from the Air Combat Group. This deployment began on 9 November 2001 and lasted until 7 May 2002. The air defence of Diego Garcia was the first time since the Korean War the RAAF had been tasked to conduct potentially hostile air operations using our fighter aircraft.

Concurrent tasks, as pointed out already, severely limited Australia's ability to carry out substantial additional operations to support the US military effort. The ADF was still involved in Timor Leste as a priority, providing training to the new country and managing security operations under the leadership of UNTAET. For the Navy, and with some army support, Operation RELEX began on 3 September following the MV *Tampa* incident. Several fleet units were deployed in northern Australian waters to carry out patrols and conduct interception operations to frustrate the activities of people-smugglers.

Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, the US-led international effort to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and destroy Osama bin Laden's terrorist network based in Afghanistan, began on 7 October 2001. For the ADF, major operations in support of ENDURING FREEDOM demanded the highest attention during October and November 2001. Australia's parallel Operation SLIPPER, beginning on 22 October 2001, was marked by the political leadership farewelling in Perth our first contingent of special forces troops bound for Afghanistan.

The land operation was to deploy a highly mobile special operations force into Afghanistan to neutralise and, if necessary, destroy the al-Qaeda terrorists sheltered by the Taliban government. The naval operation in the Indian Ocean operation and sea areas adjacent to Middle East coastlines was to support our deployed ground forces and, if necessary, interdict unwelcome forces elsewhere. Both these operations formed the mainstay of the Australian Government's commitment to the United States under the ANZUS Treaty. The focus of these operations was a significant move away from our traditional area of operations in the Pacific and our relationship with Pacific Command. Quickly we had to build up a new relationship with US Central Command (CENTCOM) that would soon take priority over the long-standing relationship we enjoyed with Pacific Command.

How did we select these forces and not others? I was particularly concerned that we should include an amphibious ship (Landing Platforms Amphibious or LPA) in the force to ensure the presence of an Australian

medical capability nearby if needed by our special forces in Afghanistan. The inclusion of Australian special forces in a US operation would involve acquiring some new skill sets and equipment, but we were confident that operations on the ground would be relatively easy to conduct.

What was not going to be so easy was how we might provide support to other deployed forces, especially if things started to go wrong. We also needed to consider the resources for the rotation of deployed forces if these operations were needed for an extended period. For example, in the context of support to other deployed forces, we needed special diplomatic arrangements to operate RAAF Boeing 707 air-to-air refuelling aircraft from airfields close to Afghanistan, yet far enough away to offer a measure of security. Accordingly, we dispatched our Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Angus Houston AO, to the region with a brief to find us an airfield and a government that would be useful for our needs. He was able to arrange for Manas airfield in Kyrgyzstan to be used.

I had visited Washington on 30 September for the change of command ceremony when General Myers became chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 October 2001. While in Washington, I also had the privilege of a brief in the National Military Command and Control Center in which thinking about the range of operations being considered by the US military was outlined. I can say, from my perspective, that there were no surprises in anything I heard. At the end of the brief, I spoke about our base defence security enhancements and the letter I had written to ADF families about the need to look to their personal security.

The day following the change of command ceremony, exactly three weeks after the 9/11 attacks, my team and I flew on American Airlines flight 77 (the Pentagon crash flight) from Washington to Los Angeles. At Dulles Airport, near Washington, most of the terminal was deserted.

To complicate matters further, the writs for a federal election in Australia were issued on Monday 8 October for an election to be held on Saturday 10 November 2001. This meant that most of our response operations would commence during the caretaker period. Consequently, with the approval of the government, a considerable effort was made to keep the federal Opposition, and particularly the Leader, Kim Beazley MP, fully apprised of the government's intentions and the implications for our

alliance relationship. I spent several hours with Beazley and his leadership team going over the key issues for our deployments. He seemed interested to ensure the best possible support for our deployed special forces group.

Once operations began in Afghanistan in October 2001, our ADF planners became closely involved with US Central Command, something quite new and different from working with our customary friends at US Pacific Command. In a sense, the dice were being loaded towards Australian involvement in all further operations that could be connected to the outcomes of 9/11.

## Interoperability issues: Prisoner handling

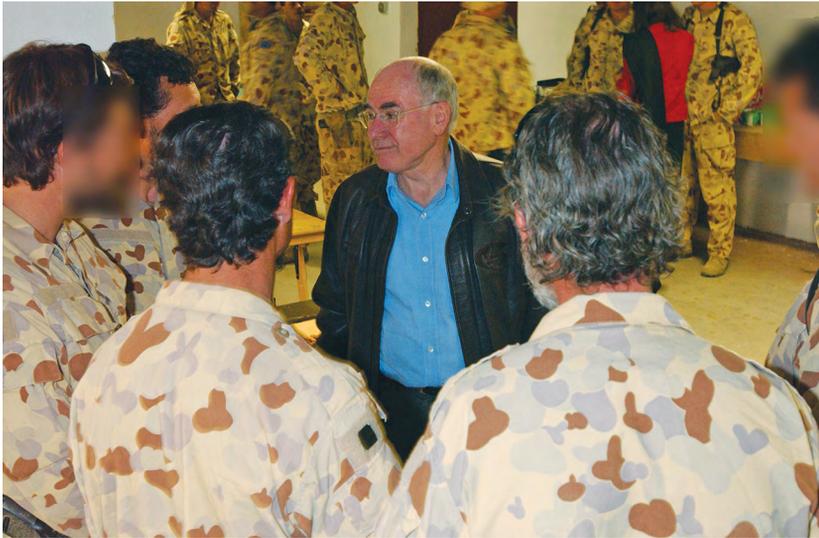
In January 2002 during a trip to the region with our Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill, I visited various ADF units deployed on Operation SLIPPER. Everywhere, I found that our forces had integrated well with US counterparts at sea and in Afghanistan. All operational issues were being carried out in the professional manner we have come to expect from the ADF. Of particular note was our visit to Bagram air base in Afghanistan where our special forces people were working closely with their US counterparts in headquarters and in the field. But, while our interoperability was as good as we might expect and the practice consistent with doctrine of its day, there was an important gap in interoperability that had to be sorted out: prisoner handling.

For my own part, this oversight was a surprise. I recall that during the Australia–United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) talks on 3 November 1999 in Washington, DC, I had introduced a discussion item into the agenda on interoperability. The intention was to show that interoperability was based on more than shared equipment and communications, extending to shared values and doctrine. This point was picked up in paragraph 13 of the AUSMIN communiqué, which stated:

Australia and the United States noted that interoperability remains a priority goal of the alliance. Rapid technological changes require both governments to maintain an open dialogue and continue to explore exchanges focused on interoperability.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Archived in Australia–United States Ministerial Consultations, 1999 Joint Communiqué, 3 November 1999, para 13, [dfat.gov.au/geo/united-states-of-america/ausmin/Pages/australia-united-states-ministerial-consultations-1999-joint-communicu.aspx](http://dfat.gov.au/geo/united-states-of-america/ausmin/Pages/australia-united-states-ministerial-consultations-1999-joint-communicu.aspx) (retrieved 31 March 2020).



**Prime Minister John Howard meets soldiers of the Australian Special Forces Task Group deployed on Operation SLIPPER in Afghanistan, 2005.**

Source: Courtesy of the Department of Defence.

In field operations by our special forces in Afghanistan it did not take long to appreciate that on some occasions al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters would offer their surrender rather than becoming casualties of combat action. For Australia, as a signatory state of all the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, this presented a serious problem if the number of deployed personnel was to be kept low.

Unlike Australia, the United States is not a signatory of all the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, and for prisoner-handling this presented a problem as we could not simply hand our prisoners over to US forces without breaking the Conventions. The Geneva Conventions require that the state accepts responsibility for the treatment of any prisoners that surrender to its forces, including under Article 3 in circumstances where the conflict does not involve one state fighting another.<sup>8</sup>

For the initial deployment to Afghanistan, the effect of the Conventions would have meant the deployment to Afghanistan of a considerable number of additional personnel to set up and manage a 'prison' in which

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8 The Third Geneva Convention is about the treatment of the prisoners of war. Article 3 of this convention applies in non-international conflicts; that is, when the combatant parties are not states.

Australia would bear full responsibility for the treatment of its prisoners. But, in the context of the early commitment to Afghanistan, it was highly desirable to find a solution for this problem. After briefing ministers about the problem and a possible solution, I wrote a letter to my opposite number in Washington suggesting that the creation of an Australian prison in Afghanistan would not be sensible if another solution could be found.

The letter resulted in a written assurance from the Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff that all prisoners taken by US military forces in Afghanistan would be treated in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols. This letter was taken as the basis for the Australian Government to agree that it would not be necessary for the deployment of a 'prison' to Afghanistan if arrangements could be made in the field for a US military officer to accept the surrender of any captives taken during Australian operations. This turned out to be a neat solution to an important interoperability issue.

## Iraq

In the lead-up to the Iraq invasion I was retired, working in Oxford, watching carefully how things were unfolding from a UK perspective (now the subject of the Chilcott Report), and paying little attention to Australian events. I did, however, check the ABC News website to gauge community responses to the government's decision to commit Australian military forces to the invasion force, under US leadership, on 18 March 2003.<sup>9</sup> I was surprised, and a little pleased, to see on that website ADF personnel responding to some people in the community who wanted to label ADF members as 'war-mongers' by reminding them that the ADF was a 'force for good'!

I spent some time trying to work out what knowledge might have brought Bush, Blair and Howard together on such a joint venture. At that time my presumption was that highly classified intelligence assessments about Iraqi WMD capabilities were such that the three leaders became united in their intent, despite their differences in politics. No other scenario is credible.

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<sup>9</sup> See 'Howard commits troops to war', 1 March 2003, [www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/03/18/1047749732511.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/03/18/1047749732511.html) (retrieved 31 March 2020).

The invasion of Iraq took place nearly nine months after I handed command of the ADF over to General Peter Cosgrove. I cannot know what took place in classified conversations from the time of my retirement until the invasion of Iraq. But, at the time of my departure in early July 2002, it was my opinion that no special evidence existed to make an invasion of Iraq essential, which became one topic of conversation during my final call with the Prime Minister.

Australian information available to me at the time seemed to focus on the simple decision by Prime Minister John Howard that Australia should join its alliance partners to invade Iraq, even though the contrast between Australia and the United Kingdom, in terms of community responses, could not have been more different. I remember well the UK campaign ‘Not in Our Name’, which sought to undermine Prime Minister Tony Blair’s willingness to go along with President Bush’s plans for toppling Saddam Hussein. I did not find much reporting of similar community opposition to the invasion of Iraq in Australia. But, in my view, the wisdom of crowds as witnessed by the opposition campaign in the United Kingdom has now been sustained through the exposure of systemic failings outlined in the Chilcott Report, which shows how misguided the invasion turned out to be.

In Australia, it seemed, the executive power of the government was sufficient to begin what we would now describe as the ‘long campaign of war’, which grew to include Afghanistan as well as Iraq. This revealed once again, as in Vietnam, fundamental weaknesses in conceptions of the usefulness of strategic military power in circumstances short of total war. Reporting from the press after the government’s announcement of our contribution to the invasion of Iraq showed that voters were strongly against a war in Iraq without UN support, even though 61 per cent of the same voters would have supported the invasion if it had been backed by the United Nations.

The unconscionable cost for our all-volunteer forces—some members of which have now served in conflict overseas for longer than anyone did in either of the two world wars—is incalculable. Many of the consequences, in terms of casualties, destroyed family relationships, mental illnesses and disabled veterans, will be a burden on our society for decades to come. Yet the only people who really noticed were surviving members themselves and the families of those who are suffering, wounded or have been killed.

Once committed, of course, successive Australian governments of both political persuasions have not been able to do much other than follow the US grand strategy. Hence, it is possible to argue that the only superpower that existed in 1945, having triumphed in the European and Pacific theatres of war, has learned that short of total war, a determined and intractable enemy can succeed despite all the trappings of power—in Vietnam, in Iraq and in Afghanistan. What is even more curious is that we have failed to learn from the lessons to be drawn from these expeditionary fights.

## Afghanistan after the invasion of Iraq

At the turn of the century, well before I handed command of the ADF over to General Cosgrove, two books were published under my signature by the Australian Defence Organisation. The first of these books is titled *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, and the second is titled *Force 2020*. I commend them both not because of the wisdom in them but because they are a useful summary of our thinking in the early part of the 21st century. I note that, on page 33 of *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, we show a war on terrorism from 2001 to the present being listed as ‘Participation in US-led campaign against international terrorism’.<sup>10</sup> None of us at that time—even though there was strong recognition that the post-Vietnam War era had passed—could have predicted that more than 15 years later Australia would still be involved in the Middle East and Afghanistan combating terrorism.

## Final thoughts

It involves a great deal of complexity to assess fully the outcomes of our involvement in the ‘long war’ (as operations in Afghanistan have become known). More likely, it is far too early to make such a call. In making an interim assessment, however, we must take into account the important assumption that Australia would not have been involved in military operations in Iraq or Afghanistan—or indeed anywhere else in the Middle East—in the absence of significant pressure from the United States to

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Defence, *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2002.

support its agenda in the region. It also follows that Australian forces will not be operating anywhere in the Middle East after a withdrawal by the United States.

To place the 'long war' in context, there are two points that I think would be important to assessments of success or failure.

The first perspective relates to the 13 years of campaigning involving the ADF as an all-volunteer force. In effect, ADF personnel at the centrepiece of our consideration have undertaken combat operations in the full knowledge that people in Australia, apart from their own families, would barely notice. I am aware that some ADF personnel have participated in more than 10 deployments to Iraq and/or Afghanistan. This raises a question about the serious limitations of undertaking extended duration and extensive operations without the benefit of national service.

The second perspective relates to Australia's ability to conduct its own campaigning. As a relatively small contributing nation, Australia was involved in two significant coalition operations (Afghanistan and Iraq) in which the United States asserted its primacy as the lead nation. This has meant a return to the pre-East Timor doctrine in which Australia would always be operating as a small component of a much larger multinational coalition. Presumably, although we continued the practice of deploying an Australian national command headquarters into the combat zone, there have been implications for our ability to be fully in charge of our own operational imperative in both conflicts.

On reflection, I think the 9/11 attacks fundamentally changed the dynamics of the Australian approach to war. Just as Operation RELEX was launched to counter people-smuggling, the responses to these attacks were not deliberate. We learned as we went. In the three months after 9/11, these responses were cobbled together as the world held its collective breath awaiting news of the next attacks. We simply had no idea of the possible nature and scale of what might follow. But what we did know was that the basis of our security was under serious threat from experts in asymmetric warfare; this has been a common characteristic of all groups intent on using terror to achieve their objectives.

As with INTERFET, the initial insertion of our special forces into Afghanistan was accompanied by a clear exit strategy. Success was defined as the destruction of al-Qaeda terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and

significantly reducing its presence in country. This success we achieved quite quickly, but then the priorities and complications presented by the invasion of Iraq meant that we took our eyes off this ball too early.

Now, it seems evident that the search for WMD was an artifice to cover the real intent of the invasion of Iraq, which was to topple Saddam Hussein. In May 2002, at a meeting with senior administration officials in the US Department of Defense, we were told that planning for a campaign in Iraq was for contingency purposes only. It is now rather revealing from the books written by Bob Woodward that US intentions over Iraq had firmed in December 2001, beginning with a high-level meeting of the administration at President Bush's Crawford ranch just before Christmas.

In my tour as CDF, we transitioned from a focus on our region and relative peace into the post-9/11 age when, having been caught short over Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, we suddenly woke up to the fact that the world had been undergoing changes that entailed significant new challenges to the established order. Whereas in the previous four years we had been the lead nation in the UN-mandated coalition operation to restore security to East Timor involving 26 other countries, we now returned to an operational environment in which the United States called the shots.

Notably, at the time of mounting INTERFET in East Timor, I do not think that Australia would ever have contemplated invading Indonesia to set East Timor free. If we had invaded Indonesia to set East Timor free, the dynamics of our region would have been reshaped quickly in ways that would not have been good for Australia as it is hard to believe that war with Indonesia would not have resulted. By 2003, it seemed we were more circumspect in 1999. In today's world it seems it is much easier to invade a country that is not your neighbour.

Finally, I cannot help but observe that while Parliament has held a full inquiry into the circumstances of 'Children Overboard' and other matters resultant from certain events of political interest during Operation RELEX in October 2001, it has not yet held an inquiry into the circumstances leading up to and during the 'long war' from 2001 until the present.<sup>11</sup> Given the cost of the long war to the nation, this failure to examine

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11 Parliament, Senate, *Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident* (report), The Committee, Canberra, 2002.

## NICHE WARS

fully all these issues beggars belief about our priorities and the impact of political expediency. This failure also lends support to those who call for a change to the processes we use in Australia to decide on war.

If national service of some kind had been required in the United States and in Australia before embarking on the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the decisions for war would have been a lot more difficult to make.

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