

# Introduction

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On 11 September 2001, I was working as an integrated exchange officer of the US Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, DC. The day before, wearing my slouch hat, I had attended a ceremony held on the sunny lawns of the Washington Navy Yard. There, President George W. Bush presented to Australia's visiting Prime Minister John Howard the bell of the warship USS *Canberra*—itself a decommissioned US Navy warship. USS *Canberra* had been given the rare honour of being named after a foreign nation's capital to commemorate the close bonds built in the Pacific War between the two nations' navies and to honour in particular HMAS *Canberra*, which was sunk while fighting alongside US warships in the Battle of Savo Island in August 1942. The gift marked the 50th anniversary of the signing of the ANZUS Treaty between the United States, New Zealand and Australia.

As it turns out, the events that followed that fateful time would not demand of Australia the kind of commitment that Australians made during the two world wars. No conscription was necessary, and no mass recruitment drive was involved. Australians instead committed carefully selected force elements from their small and boutique all-volunteer defence force. With ongoing concerns closer to home, and mindful of the considerable contributions of other partners, the Australian Government chose to make a series of carefully calibrated niche contributions, alongside allies and coalition partners, on operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Looking back, nearly 20 years on from that moment, this book sets out to capture some of the details of what happened, examining how Australia chose to act this way, how it contributed forces and why it did so in the way that it did.

*Niche Wars* provides a range of rigorous academic perspectives combined with a variety of views of prominent practitioners. Of note, this book cannot hope to cover all the activities that transpired between 2001 and 2014. That is the work best left to the official historians, whose work is in progress. This book, instead, provides a snapshot of some of the problems, addressed largely thematically, without being comprehensive. To begin with, what follows is a synopsis of the contributions made by the elements of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) along the way. This is a scene-setter for the reader, providing context for the chapters that follow. The introduction then concludes with a brief overview of the structure and content of the book.

## Context

Since 1885, when the colonies sent a contingent to support British objectives in the Sudan, Australians have engaged in distant military operations in the Middle East and neighbouring areas. Thereafter, Australians deployed on combat operations in the Middle East during both world wars and maintained a peacekeeping presence there for most of the years since. This reflected the consistent imperative to remain engaged with affairs in the region, particularly given the ongoing reliance of Australia on Middle Eastern oil and trade routes. Indeed, Britain remained Australia's principal trade partner for decades after the Second World War, and the main trade route was via the Suez Canal. This was vital ground for Australia.

The Suez Crisis in 1956 was an inflection point. Egyptian President Abdul Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. Britain, France and Israel responded with force and, without knowing the details, Australia offered diplomatic support for Britain's action. US President Dwight Eisenhower, blindsided by these surprise actions, threatened economic sanctions, which forced Britain to withdraw. This also led to the creation of the first large-scale peacekeeping mission to be sanctioned by the United Nations, which was an initiative spearheaded by the Canadian External Affairs Minister Lester B. Pearson.<sup>1</sup> This ignominious moment saw Britain subsequently prepare to withdraw from east of Suez and Australia pivot towards working more closely on security issues in South-East Asia, but Australia's interests in

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1 See J. Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2006.

the Middle East never went away. Trade, as well as the flow of oil and the call for support from allies, would continue to echo in Australia's strategic consciousness for the rest of the 20th century and beyond.

In defence policy terms, for much of the latter years of the Cold War and the early post-Cold War years, defence of Australia was the top priority, but the Middle East had still featured occasionally, and Australia made niche contributions when required. The Australian Army, for instance, sent a select group of army officers on annual rotations to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) covering Israel and Palestine. In addition, a small contingent of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and Army personnel had served on rotations with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai on and off from the mid-1970s onwards. As the end of the Cold War approached, and as the Iran–Iraq War of 1980–88 came to a close, Australia contributed peacekeepers to the United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG). Australia withdrew its contribution following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

Following the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's forces, Australia was quick to join a UN-mandated coalition to liberate Kuwait. Australia supported this initiative but kept its military contribution modest, contributing some intelligence analysts, air transport and a rotation of Royal Australian Navy (RAN) warships. In that instance, three Australian warships participated in blockade operations in the Persian Gulf as part of a multinational naval interception force, to enforce the UN sanctions. Australia also provided a supply vessel, four medical teams and a mine-clearance diving team that joined a protective screen, under US operational control, around aircraft-carrier battle groups in the Gulf.

In addition to naval units, Australian personnel took part on attachment to various British and US ground formations. A small group of RAAF photo-interpreters was based in Saudi Arabia, together with a detachment from the Defence Intelligence Organisation. Four medical teams were also despatched at the request of the United States. Although the ships and their crews were in danger from mines and possible air attack, Australia's war was relatively uneventful, and there were no casualties.<sup>2</sup>

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2 For an authoritative account of Australia's involvement in the Gulf War, see D. Horner, *The Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations*, vol. 2: *Australia and the 'New World Order'*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2011.

At war's end, 75 Australians deployed to northern Iraq to assist in the provision of humanitarian aid to Kurds living in a UN-declared exclusion zone. The RAN continued its contribution to the interception operations, and several Australian naval officers commanded the multinational interception force. Australia later provided weapons inspectors in Iraq to monitor the discovery and disposal of prohibited nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. From then on, Australia also maintained naval ships on station in the Persian Gulf on an almost continuous basis.

A decade later, and after having had apparently quick successes in Afghanistan, the ADF was better placed and more prepared to make a more robust contribution to offensive, and inherently dangerous, military operations in Iraq. The Special Air Service Regiment contributed to a combat search and rescue force in Kuwait in 1998 in support of US-backed UN initiatives to enforce sanctions. That experience demonstrated the ease of deployment and the evident utility of special forces for contentious deployments far from Australia's shores. Howard wanted 'quick and clean' force contributions that could be 'in at the pointy end and then out fast'.<sup>3</sup>

Events after 11 September 2001, or 9/11 as it came to be known, would see the Middle East return to centre stage. Government policy shifted in part in recognition of the need to protect and advance Australia's national interests further from Australian shores than was envisaged in the preceding two decades.

These commitments, and the ones that would follow on a greater scale from 2001 onwards, exposed a historically deep-seated impulse to remain active far beyond Australia's shores. By 2001, however, the dynamics had shifted, with Australia still seeing the Middle East as important while looking to its near north as a priority, particularly in view of burgeoning trade connections.

President Bush called it the 'Global War on Terror'—perhaps in itself leading to a distracting focus on fighting a nebulous concept rather than a specific enemy. Sensing its awkwardness, Australia avoided endorsing the term. For Prime Minister Howard, however, 9/11 was a moment

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3 See J. Blaxland, *The Australian Army from Whitlam to Howard*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2014, pp. 218–19.

worthy of invoking the 50-year-old ANZUS Treaty. Howard committed Australian forces, from all three services, to operations alongside US and coalition forces in the Middle East, a commitment that ended up being for a longer period than either of the two world wars. (See Appendix 1 for a table of Australian units and formations deployed to Afghanistan and the Middle East, 2001–14.) But this time they did so while avoiding the politically contentious issues of conscription and heavy own-force casualties by making niche and calibrated force contributions and by utilising only a professional, all-volunteer force.

The United States identified Afghanistan as the primary target, being the state ruled by the Taliban, which was closely associated with the terrorist group al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden. The Taliban's refusal to expel al-Qaeda triggered the allied attacks aimed at their overthrow. The attacks began on 7 October, and within five weeks the capital, Kabul, had fallen to the US-led coalition's principal Afghan partners, the Northern Alliance.

A chronology of Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan commencing in 2001 is located at Appendix 2.

Few Australians realised the fight would continue for years thereafter. In reality, it would mean multiple deployments of ground, maritime and air contingents to the Middle East for the better part of the following two decades. Australians would soon be found in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, Qatar, Dubai and beyond, as well as in transit across the Indian Ocean and on deployments alongside US and other coalition counterparts in headquarters across the Middle East and in HQ Central Command in Florida.

In contrast to the commitments in the major wars in the Middle East in the early to mid-twentieth century, Australia did not rely on mass mobilisation of troops. Instead, as the chapters in this book illustrate, the Australian Government chose to make small contributions to generate carefully constrained strategic effects—notably in support of Australia's major alliance partner, the United States. There were compelling reasons beyond the alliance relationship for Australia to engage with these security issues, as did many other powers. But with an eye to the political fallout from the Vietnam War commitment decades earlier, the government sought to minimise domestic political risk from an open-ended commitment. Each decision to commit forces therefore was evaluated for the tactical, operational and strategic consequences, as well as the political

consequences likely to be generated back home. Notwithstanding these overarching constraints, operations in the Middle East would provide a wide range of unique additional challenges and opportunities for elements of the ADF to learn and adapt.

The deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq came in several iterations over the early years of the conflicts. At the outset, Prime Minister Howard wished to make a carefully calibrated, niche contribution to a US-led coalition, to ensure that Australia was not engaged in a protracted war and that it remained able to respond to any crises in our region should they arise. Hence the initial contingent deployed were special forces, with the first SAS Squadron being committed to operations in November 2001 as part of a US Marine Expeditionary Unit. Campaigning in Afghanistan ended inconclusively in mid-2002, and the special forces soldiers were withdrawn promptly.

The early success of the special forces in Afghanistan led to a similar political calculus for the deployment to Iraq in 2003. Operations BASTILLE and FALCONER were the names given successively to the preparatory operation and then the actual conduct of ADF operations as part of the war in Iraq. (See Appendix 3 for a chronology of Australia's involvement in Iraq, 2003–09.)

The controversy arising from the US Government's approach to preparations for war in Iraq generated protests around the world, notably in the capital cities of the principal participants, especially the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. That controversy would reverberate for years afterwards as the principal declared rationale for removal of the Saddam Hussein regime was the claim that he was hiding weapons of mass destruction (WMD). UN-sanctioned weapons inspectors had encountered increased wariness in Iraq, which appeared to point to Iraqi authorities having something to hide. Intelligence analysts working for countries for and against the projected war in Iraq agreed that Iraq must have a WMD program, but little thought was given to the internal logic of the Saddam regime's fear of disclosure. In hindsight, it appears obvious. Saddam did not wish to declare that he no longer had a WMD capability as it would have emboldened neighbouring Iran. Then, as war looked increasingly inevitable, he was too proud to concede and too confident that, like in 1991, the United States would not succeed in removing him from power.

The Australian Government, sensing the mood in Washington, DC, eager to support its key ally and believing the reports of an enduring WMD capability, supported military planning as part of BASTILLE and in anticipation of the switch to offensive military operations as part of Operation FALCONER. Hence, when it came finally to supporting US offensive action, the preceding preparations made the transition to FALCONER a relatively seamless one.

For FALCONER, Australia planned to make useful but niche contributions. This included an SAS squadron group, which deployed to the Iraqi western desert, supported by a squadron of RAAF FA-18 Hornet fighter aircraft and RAN fleet elements working closely with their US and UK counterparts. This was a considerably more substantial contribution than the ADF had made for the Gulf War in 1991.

The Australian special forces, as well as the RAAF contributions, were warmly received by their US coalition counterparts, who were keen to have international partners. Their presence, however, was tightly constrained to the initial phases of the war, on the understanding that after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime they would be released for return to Australia. The realities of war in the Iraqi desert involved long distances to be covered travelling off-road, with the risk of encountering armoured opponents. Arguably, this task was better suited to Australian cavalry forces, but Prime Minister Howard was confident that the special forces could do the job and with the least risk of Australian casualties. Nevertheless the Darwin-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment, together with a company of mounted infantry, did deploy to Iraq where they were retained to form an Australian Embassy Security Detachment in Baghdad.

Over the next two years, Australia maintained a low profile in Afghanistan and Iraq. In time, however, with the war proving not nearly as conclusive as President Bush had anticipated, the security situation in both Afghanistan and Iraq deteriorated, and the United States applied considerable pressure for Australian forces to return to assist. In February 2005, therefore, Prime Minister Howard committed an additional force to southern Iraq, deployed to Al Muthanna working closely with coalition partners, including Dutch, Japanese and British troops.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, having moved on from that theatre of operations to focus on Iraq, the US departure had allowed a resurgence of Taliban forces. By 2005, the calls for coalition partners to bolster the US position there were becoming stronger. As a result, Australia weighed its options. Eager to avoid a commitment that would expose Australia to a major force commitment, significant additional expense and a heightened risk of casualties, the Howard Government decided to recommit a Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) that year under the banner of Operation SLIPPER, this time to Uruzgan Province in central Afghanistan. Special forces had proven to be reliable as being readily deployable, highly professional and less likely to face significant numbers of casualties. Following three SOTG rotations, the 1st Reconstruction Task Force (RTF1) formed and deployed to Tarin Kowt, the central town in Uruzgan. There it worked to build up Afghan society as well as defeat the Taliban. In April 2007, a SOTG returned to operate alongside the RTF to provide a kinetic war-fighting capability.

As time passed, the focus for the RTFs turned from reconstruction to mentored reconstruction. Eventually, the focus shifted mostly to mentoring the Afghan National Security Force, with the aim of developing indigenous capacity-building. As part of this approach, efforts were made to ensure that initiatives funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and its Australian Aid projects were coordinated and that those undertaken by the Australian Federal Police were synchronised with the ADF initiatives as well. As some chapters of this book attest, this sounded good in principle but proved difficult in practice.

From one perspective, this carefully calibrated contribution made sense. The Australian commitment to operations in Uruzghan Province involved a defined physical area with agreed, limited force contributions and partnered with a prominent NATO member state, the Netherlands. Initially the Dutch would be in charge, not the Australians. This seemed to be a convenient way to ensure that the Dutch made a significant contribution to the international stabilisation operations in Afghanistan while keeping Australia's contribution in check. It also meant that Australia did not have to contribute all the force elements for an effective and holistic counter-insurgency campaign with long-term objectives in mind.

Successive Australian governments renewed the commitment to the war in Afghanistan despite mounting losses. Over time, the ADF deployment in Uruzgan generated a growing number of casualties: 11 Australians died on operations in Afghanistan from 2002 to the end of 2009, 10 died in 2010 and 11 in 2011.

A disproportionate portion of the load fell on the shoulders of Australia's special forces soldiers who deployed in successive SOTG rotations. By 2014, many had been on several such deployments. Eventually, this would lead to over-exposure of these elite troops to the brutality and apparent unending nature of a campaign that lacked clarity of purpose. Consequently, their actions led to some highly questionable outcomes and accusations of war crimes that would prove corrosive to Australia's special forces and the broader ADF.<sup>4</sup> In hindsight, this probably should have been seen as the inevitable outcome of a flawed strategy. Without a holistic counter-insurgency campaign for Afghanistan, let alone Uruzgan, much of the direction of tactical actions fell on the shoulders of soldiers and commanders. In the absence of a compelling overarching strategy, the main campaign plans left Australian and coalition forces with an inadequate *raison d'être* for the brutal fight they were tasked to undertake.

Beyond the SOTG rotations and the reconstruction and mentoring task forces, Australians were seconded to (i.e. embedded in) coalition units and headquarters in Tarin Kowt, Kabul, Kandahar, Bagram and in other locations across Afghanistan. In Tarin Kowt, under the Dutch-led Task Force Uruzgan Headquarters, Australian embeds assisted in coordinating missions, campaign planning and mission deconfliction among other duties, and used this experience in joint headquarters to inform Australian planning. This embedded experience allowed Australians not only to practice the art of military operations but also to utilise the information and experience they gained to inform planning and refine processes for future Australian deployments.

Meanwhile, the RAN and RAAF continued to gain excellent operational experience from their carefully calibrated force contributions, and their experience helped to generate momentum for development, introduction into service and refinement of significant capabilities. For the Air Force,

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4 See Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'Killing Field', *Four Corners*, 16 March 2020, [www.abc.net.au/4corners/killing-field/12060538](http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/killing-field/12060538) (retrieved 19 March 2020).

this included advances in niche capabilities including airborne refuelling, airborne early warning and control, airborne surveillance, communications and identification systems capabilities as well as ground-based air traffic control through the RAAF's deployable Control and Reporting Centre. Almost the entire RAN fleet undertook one or more deployment to participate in intervention and monitoring operations in and around the Persian Gulf for the entire period covered in this book and beyond. This experience helped to justify and refine technological advances, including weapons systems upgrades and enhancements to missile systems and phased array radars.

By 2014, about 1,550 Australian military personnel were stationed in Afghanistan as part of Australia's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism, maritime security in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) and countering piracy in the Gulf of Aden, all under the banner of Operation SLIPPER. All of this was commanded by a Joint Task Force headquarters sited in the Persian Gulf and answerable to Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC) back in Australia. An additional 830 ADF personnel were deployed across the broader MEAO, often alongside coalition partners, making discrete but important contributions. Australia also maintained a continuous maritime contribution to Operation SLIPPER, which included RAN frigates on rotation.<sup>5</sup>

The SOTG and the mentoring and reconstruction forces returned to Australia from Uruzghan in 2014. Australian forces had withdrawn from Iraq after Kevin Rudd's election victory in 2007, but they stayed on in Afghanistan until 2014 when a major US force drawdown took place. Yet the decisions made in 2014 did not see the end of the matter in either Afghanistan or Iraq. Iraq saw the rise of the so-called Islamic State in 2014 and a demand for a return to assist the government of Iraq alongside US and other coalition partners. How the situation arose, what transpired and how Australia responded is a separate story not recounted in these pages. Similarly, the post-2014 ADF mission in Afghanistan continued, but not in Uruzghan Province. That story, like the one for Iraq, is beyond the scope of this book.

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5 See Australian War Memorial, 'Afghanistan, 2001 to present', [www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/afghanistan](http://www.awm.gov.au/articles/event/afghanistan) (retrieved 30 March 2020).

## Existing literature

Despite the publication of a number of works in recent times on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which focus on US, UK and Canadian experiences, only a few works capture the Australian experience.<sup>6</sup> This is in part due to the nature of the ongoing conflict and a general reluctance to analyse what is not yet complete; it is also due to the comparatively small role played by Australians compared to the larger coalition partners.

Chris Masters, a leading voice on Australian Middle East operations, has written such works as *No Front Line: Australian Special Forces at War in Afghanistan*, which highlights special forces operations in Afghanistan, featuring experiences and testimonies gained during his 10-year investigation.<sup>7</sup> Masters' work also raised difficult questions that pointed to the controversial clouds hanging over operations undertaken by the Special Forces in Afghanistan—controversies that would be considered in searing detail in the Brereton Report of 2020.<sup>8</sup> Karen Middleton's *An Unwinnable War* provides insight into the political motivations for involvement in the Middle East and the critical decisions that led to Australian deployment and continued presence in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup>

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6 There are too many to list, but some examples from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada are highlighted here. On the United States, see J.T. Hoffman (ed.), *Tip of the Spear: US Army Small-Unit Actions in Iraq, 2004–2007*, Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 2010; S.A. Carney, *Allied Participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 2011; N.J. Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007–2008: US Army Campaigns in Iraq*, Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 2017; B. Neumann, L. Munday and J. Mikolashek, *Operations Enduring Freedom, March 2002–April 2005*, Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 2013; G.C. Schroen, *First In: An Insiders Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan*, Presidio Press, New York, 2005; D.P. Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York, 2014; and T.E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, Penguin, New York, 2006. On the United Kingdom, see T. Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, Vintage, London, 2018; C.L. Elliott, *High Command: British Military Leadership in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*, Hurst, London, 2015; and F. Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in the 9/11 Wars*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017. On Canada, see J.G. Steyn and E. Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, Penguin, Toronto, 2008; B. Horn and E. Spencer, *Canadian Forces in Afghanistan*, Dundurn Press, Toronto, 2016; B. Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan*, Dundurn Press, Toronto, 2010; S. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom: A Rogue Historian in Afghanistan*, Potomac Books, Washington, DC, 2005.

7 C. Masters, *No Front Line: Australia's Special Forces at War in Afghanistan*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2017.

8 Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force, *Afghanistan Inquiry Report* ('the Brereton Report'), [afghanstaninquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/IGADF-Afghanistan-Inquiry-Public-Release-Version.pdf](https://afghanstaninquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/IGADF-Afghanistan-Inquiry-Public-Release-Version.pdf) (retrieved 24 November 2020).

9 K. Middleton, *An Unwinnable War: Australia in Afghanistan*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2011.

Al Palazzo's manuscript on the Iraq War and his more recent edited work with Tom Frame, *On Ops: Lessons and Challenges for the Australian Army Since East Timor*, consider a range of practical tactical and operational factors, including command and control arrangements and logistics difficulties, encountered during Australian Middle Eastern deployments.<sup>10</sup> At the 'War in the Sandpit' conference, Garth Pratten delivered an excellent account of the Australian contribution to the coalition campaign (unfortunately not included here) in which he contextualised Australian operations in southern Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> In addition, my own work, *The Australian Army from Whitlam to Howard*, published in 2014, critically examines the development of the Australian Army since the Vietnam War and the influence of these developments on operations in the Middle East.

In addition to these secondary works, a range of autobiographical accounts have provided on-the-ground insight into Australia's role in Iraq and Afghanistan, notably accounts from Majors General Jim Molan and John Cantwell,<sup>12</sup> as well as Colonel Marcus Fielding.<sup>13</sup> They all describe their experiences in frank detail, greatly adding to our understanding of the wars. In 2013, Victoria Cross recipient Corporal Mark Donaldson published his own autobiographical account entitled *The Crossroad*, in which he recalled the events that led to his receipt of the highest bravery honour.<sup>14</sup> Publishing via the Land Warfare Studies Centre in 2011, Colonel Peter Connolly painted a critical picture of his combat experience in Uruzgan and his concern over the lack of strategy from Canberra.<sup>15</sup> Biographical accounts are not just written by our soldiers, with photographer Gary Ramage and defence writer Ian McPhedran's *Afghanistan: Australia's War* providing a photographic depiction of Australia's efforts in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> McPhedran's commentary on Ramage's images is evocative and thought-provoking, providing details of an often unseen visual dimension to the wars.

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10 A. Palazzo, *The Australian Army and the War in Iraq: 2002–2010*, Directorate of Army Research and Analysis, Canberra, 2011; T. Frame and A. Palazzo (eds), *On Ops: Lessons and Challenges for the Australian Army Since East Timor*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2016.

11 G. Pratten, speech, 'War in the Sandpit' conference, [cove.army.gov.au/article/war-the-sand-pit-conference-doctor-garth-pratten](http://cove.army.gov.au/article/war-the-sand-pit-conference-doctor-garth-pratten) (retrieved 30 March 2020).

12 J. Molan, *Running the War in Iraq*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2008; J. Cantwell with G. Bearup, *Exit Wounds: One Australian's War on Terror*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2012.

13 M. Fielding, *Red Zone Baghdad: My War in Iraq*, Echo Books, Canberra, 2016.

14 M. Donaldson, *The Crossroad*, Macmillan Australia, Sydney, 2013.

15 P. Connolly, *Counterinsurgency in Uruzgan, 2009*, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, 2011.

16 G. Ramage and I. McPhedran, *Afghanistan: Australia's War*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2014.

The Official History of Australian Operations in the Middle East and East Timor is due to be published in 2022. In the interim, works such as this provide a new and expansive account of Australia's experience in deploying forces and conducting operations in Afghanistan or Iraq.

## Outline and contributors

This collection of papers covers a range of experiences of Australia's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, from maritime operations in the Gulf in the 1990s to the withdrawal of combat troops from Afghanistan in 2013. The authors come from a variety of backgrounds, and each contributes their unique perspectives and voices to further the efforts to achieve a more complete view of Australia's operations in the 'niche wars' described here. The book is divided into four parts: policy and strategy; Afghanistan and Iraq; joint forces, enablers and partners; and lessons and legacies.

These chapters were all chosen for a specific purpose. Most of the authors were presenters at the 'War in the Sandpit' conference in May 2017, lending their expertise to debate and discussion there as they have to articulating their thoughts for this volume. Most importantly, they illuminate a human perspective on these operations not often otherwise considered.

The first chapter in Part 1 is the keynote and opening chapter by Professor Robert Hill, Minister for Defence from 2001 to 2006, who relates his impressions of the political lessons from Australia's military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hill summarises his involvement in key moments of the campaigns, including the decision to withdraw special forces, and debates on how many troops to commit. He concludes with poignant lessons for future campaigns for politicians, emphasising that committing the ADF is not always the most appropriate solution for a problem.

The chapter by former Secretary of the Department of Defence Ric Smith on perspectives and lessons on Iraq and Afghanistan highlights the conflict between strategic objectives and circumstances on the ground, and the ways in which successive governments have sought to maintain the overarching strategic objective of Australia's alliance with the United States despite changing circumstances in the conflicts. Writing also of his

personal experience as Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, he provides immense insight into top-level decision-making from 2001 to the withdrawal of combat forces in 2013.

Admiral Chris Barrie, Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) from 1998 to 2002, writes of his perspective on Australian military strategy following the 9/11 attacks. He relates his recollections of initial challenges relating to interoperability, and the general sentiment felt towards operations by politicians and members of the ADF. He concludes with a reflection that he believes the Australian experience of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have fundamentally changed the Australian approach to war.

Part 2 opens with a reflection on the early days, and, as with any reflective analysis, it is important to distil experiences from specific operational units. Brigadier Dan McDaniel, former Commanding Officer of the Special Air Service Regiment, articulates the political imperatives and pressures that led to the initial deployment of special forces troops to Afghanistan in 2001. He explains that the commitment of special forces troops was not just made in an effort to maintain the US alliance but as part of a broader effort to demonstrate the Australian commitment to the global rules-based order, and as a way to demonstrate autonomous ADF military power under worldwide scrutiny. McDaniel outlines some key lessons from the deployment. He notes what he sees as the miscalculation of the operational and practical strength of the ADF relationship with its counterpart US forces, and the need for certainty in command and control arrangements.

Air Commodore Chris Westwood, writing about his experience in the RAAF Control and Reporting Centre (CRC) from 2007 to 2009 in Afghanistan, provides a unique RAAF perspective on the conflict. He identifies key lessons from the deployment, dividing them into the broad themes of strategic, operational and tactical lessons. Westwood concludes that a successful and niche deployment should not be left unscrutinised, and that the experiences of the CRC can be extrapolated to future deployments of cyber and electronic warfare elements, among others.

In discussing his experience in Iraq, Major General Anthony Rawlins, former task group commander, reflects on Operation CATALYST and his personal experience with what he saw as strategic-tactical dissonance. He writes of the polarised perception of the effectiveness of stability

operations as practised by the Australians in Iraq. He claims that the Australians played a marginal role in southern Iraq from 2005 onwards, having only a limited—even at times negative—impact in Al Muthanna and Dhi Qar Provinces. He concludes that the command and control arrangements in Iraq were not the optimal way to proceed and set a disconcerting precedent for possible involvement in future conflicts. As a result, he urges a reappraisal of the form and substance of national command and control architecture to be applied in such circumstances.

Vice Admiral Peter Jones has played several and prominent roles leading Australia's naval endeavours in the Middle East over a prolonged period, including as commander of Australian naval forces and the coalition's Maritime Interception Operations Screen Commander in the lead-up to and during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He relates the maritime perspective of Australia's involvement in the Middle East, broadening his focus to include the ways in which the RAN combatted piracy and smugglers as part of the Maritime Interception Force (MIF). He outlines in great depth the nature and composition of naval missions from 1990 to 2003, highlighting some necessary adaptations that were made, and issues of interoperability and coalition command structures. He concludes that operations in the Gulf were largely a success in the Iraq War owing to the MIF's existing knowledge of Gulf waters and to efforts to liaise effectively with ground forces.

One of Australia's most famous integrated exchange officers, or 'embeds', Major General Jim Molan, provides a blunt but honest account of his experience as an embed in Iraq and the lessons Australian command and politicians can learn from his time. He emphasises the need for the ADF to understand the type of war they are fighting and what they are willing to sacrifice in the name of the US alliance in future conflicts, as this was a key point of contention in Iraq. He concludes with 11 generalised lessons from his time as an embed, which, he posits, can be applied in future conflicts.

Part 3, covering joint forces, enablers and partners, starts with a chapter on command and control. Major General Michael Crane has compiled his assessment of Australian command and control arrangements in the Middle East, leveraging his extensive experience as Commander of JTF 633 on two occasions, and at HQJOC and CENTCOM between 2006 and 2012. He reflects on such issues as the establishment of discrete national commanders, and his interpretation of the successes

and limitations of these divergences in command structures from the arrangements employed by Australia's coalition partners. He concludes by pointing to the wide array of issues that Australia has yet to resolve in establishing an approach to command and control of operations. He notes the difficulty of objective analysis of Australia's involvement in the Middle East, given that individual perspectives are driven by the context of the observer's unique experience.

Colonel Mick Lehmann's chapter on the role of army intelligence in Afghanistan is understandably constrained by operational secrecy provisions; however, he manages nonetheless to provide a remarkable insight into the practical workings of intelligence in this campaign. He touches on the importance of actionable intelligence and the essential nature of the 'Five Eyes' relationship in Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> He also outlines some of the reasons for significant failings experienced by Australian intelligence operations. Ultimately Lehmann concludes that, despite solid tactical and operational successes, the overall impact of intelligence on the strategic outcome remains uncertain and hard to measure effectively.

Dr Alan Ryan, Director of the Australian Civil-Military Centre, has compiled a chapter that provides a unique and important assessment of civil-military relations in Iraq and Afghanistan. He relates the experiences of several civilian actors in these conflicts and the challenges faced in attempting to deliver humanitarian assistance. He concludes with seven recommendations that, despite being ambitious, outline a clear path towards greater coordination and effectiveness of civilian efforts in conflict.

The role of the media in Australia's Middle East operations is of particular importance to debate. Karen Middleton, a political journalist, prominent war correspondent and author of *An Unwinnable War*, writes about her experiences as an embedded journalist on three separate occasions and how the ADF and Australian Government interaction with the media was starkly different from that of the United States. Karen emphasises the necessity of accurate and influential reporting from conflict zones and the responsibility of both journalists and the ADF not to obfuscate on operations.

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17 'Five Eyes' refers to the intelligence-sharing arrangements between the five English-speaking nations: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which is abbreviated to reflect the caveat used on shared classified documents thus: 'AUS/CAN/UK/US/NZ Eyes Only'.

Superintendents Col Speedie and Steve Mullins offer a comprehensive account of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) deployment to Afghanistan and the various opportunities and challenges that accompanied it. In particular, they note the ways in which police, who are not trained for warlike operational environments as their ADF counterparts are, managed to adapt to the environment effectively. Accordingly, they were able to negotiate bilateral intelligence-sharing agreements, create training doctrine and become an integral part of a coalition policing effort in Afghanistan.

David Savage reflects on the AusAID experience in Afghanistan and the problems that arose from attempting to deliver effective aid and reconstruction in a highly dynamic conflict zone. He relates the difficulties present in creating ongoing relationships with stakeholders and communities, building trust and delivering aid to the areas that need it most. Ultimately, David concludes that, for all their hard work, the lack of continuity in Afghan leadership and absence of central government support for reconstruction and aid-driven projects meant that AusAID's efforts had little or no overall long-term positive impact.

Australian Army Major Elizabeth Boulton provides a comprehensive account of gender issues and debates that have arisen from the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. She highlights a positive story that these wars saw the first mass employment of women in warlike operations, in combat-related roles, in Australian history. However, Boulton also highlights that there was a strategic 'gender' blind spot, with the significance of women's contribution of operational outcomes belatedly appreciated. Ultimately, Boulton argues, deployments can be greatly enhanced by a thorough understanding of the composition of the troops and of the human terrain, both of which have gendered dimensions. She makes clear that this should be focused on more intently in strategic planning.

Part 4 of the book covers lessons and legacies from the niche wars. William Maley, an ANU professor and respected scholar of the war in Afghanistan, approaches the question of the legacy of the war in Afghanistan from the perspective not only of lessons for the ADF but also the legacy for Afghanistan. He examines the psychological and societal impacts of the coalition forces' intervention in Afghanistan on the Afghan people, and notes that the entirety of the legacy of the Afghan war cannot yet be realised. He divides lessons for military deployments into seven points, covering the necessity for deployments to be linked to political strategy,

the difficulties of unintentionally fostering violence when attempting to create stability, and the impact of the miscalculation of the nature of insurgency in Afghanistan.

In the next chapter on the US and British experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, Professor Dan Marston articulates the importance of identifying military operational lessons and then analysing and debating these lessons. He criticises contemporary military leaders for rushing to declare 'lessons learned' when they have not rigorously analysed these issues in a way that is necessary if we are to avoid repeated failures in future conflicts. Marston identifies five themes that are common among the US and British experiences, and offers a starting point for further debates on these themes.

Lieutenant General (Retired) Peter Leahy was Australia's Chief of Army from 2002 to 2008, when he became Professor of National Security Studies at the University of Canberra. Leahy divides his assessment of the lessons and legacies for the Australian Army from Iraq and Afghanistan into nine strategic and operational lessons and three broad legacies. He extracts key similarities in lessons for Australia from the UK Iraq Inquiry released in 2016, and the pitfalls of maintaining an army unprepared for 21st-century conflicts. He concludes that the absence of a cohesive and enduring strategic objective was the main contributor to failings in the Middle East and that such an objective is a necessary criterion to fulfil for future conflicts. Finally, he recommends a thorough re-evaluation of the procedures that lead to Australia committing troops to overseas conflicts, and a stronger effort to care for returned troops in Australia.

As the Official Historian of Australian Operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and East Timor, Craig Stockings concludes Part 4 by imparting his initial impressions of the Official History project. He outlines the unorthodox process that led to his remit and how he has planned to approach the task of documenting Australia's involvement in these conflicts in six volumes.

We now turn to Part 1 and the opening chapter by the Honourable Senator Robert Hill.

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