

Chapter 12

Reflections and Observations

Reflections

In November 1999, senior Australian Defence Force (ADF) officers and Defence officials reflected on pre-deployment preparation, deployment and initial INTERFET operations.¹ The major issues were command and control and the performance of the ADF logistic system. From the perspective of command and control, the consensus was that *ad hoc* and secretive planning processes and a late change to command and control arrangements were unhelpful. There was a call for a review of the role of Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQ AST) and criticism of the uneven flow of information from the Strategic Command Group (SCG). There were also criticisms of intelligence collection and evaluation. One Service chief commented that the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) only offered 'classified news' readily available in the media and that the 'intelligence requirements of the SCG had never been communicated to DIO'.² There was evidence that logistic and communications staff functions at Australian Defence Headquarters (ADHQ) were dysfunctional. Staff capability and crisis management structures, as well as communications and information security within Defence and from Defence to other Government departments, proved unsatisfactory.³ One report commented that 'the transition from a foreign policy crisis to a whole of Government crisis was not well handled and Defence's lead role in managing a peace enforcement operation was not recognised by other departments'.⁴

On 24 November 1999, Air Vice Marshal Bob Treloar submitted a report on Theatre Command for higher level consideration.⁵ He affirmed that Theatre Command was working well and would work even better when component commanders were collocated in one building, 'a logical outcome of current ADF capability evolution. ... The co-located Headquarters will be structured for war but adapted for peace'.⁶ He also emphasised that 'the importance of the DJFHQ [Deployable Joint Force Headquarters] cannot be overstated'.⁷ He noted, however, that 'other than a liaison officer from Air Force and Navy there are currently no non-Army personnel in DJFHQ's joint staff; the core of the HQ and of any JTFHQ [Joint Task Force Headquarters]'.⁸

There was also consensus among senior ADF officers that there was room for improvement of logistic support. Higher-level logistic planning processes had also proved to be inadequate.⁹ There was a strong case for appointing a permanent strategic logistic component commander at ADHQ in Canberra.¹⁰ There was also comment that Brigadier Jeff Wilkinson had been more of a joint

logistic coordinator, rather than a joint logistic commander.¹¹ He never had authority over maritime or air force logistic units or assets. In effect, the navy and the air force had operated their own supply chains to their force elements, using their own vessels and aircraft, while also endeavouring to meet Wilkinson's requirements for land forces. Once again, the joint movements system (1 JMOVGP) had acted as a booking agent and coordination centre rather than a regulatory agency that managed priorities on behalf of commanders. Thus, Wilkinson had neither control of the means to move personnel and supplies to the right places at the right time, nor control over mounting base operations in Darwin.

The ADF contemplated its experiences from Operations *Spitfire*, *Warden* and *Stabilise* over the following months of 2000. There were several events organised to examine logistic lessons.¹² By September 2000, the newly appointed Commander Joint Logistics (CJLOG), Major General Peter Haddad, and Air Vice Marshal Colin Hingston, Head National Support, had written a paper entitled, 'National Support and Theatre Sustainment—Lessons from East Timor'. It addressed command and control, logistic management systems, combat service support capabilities, supply chain performance, civil support capability and international arrangements and agreements.¹³ In sum, Haddad and Hingston blamed the strategic level of command for not properly warning and including Major General Des Mueller and logisticians at Support Command in the initial planning for the force projection to East Timor. This exclusion left extant logistic arrangements unable to respond effectively and resulted in Wilkinson having to set up *ad hoc*, inefficient and complicated arrangements. In effect, Haddad and Hingston were stating that those same Melbourne and Sydney-based logistic organisations that had failed to manage the supply chain satisfactorily for operations in Somalia in 1993, and for Operations *Lagoon* and *Bel Isi* would have delivered a superior service for Operation *Stabilise* if there had been more time to plan at the beginning.¹⁴

Reflections on command and control and logistic support arrangements for Operations *Warden* and *Stabilise* were thorough. However, there were trends that echoed the failed efforts of the past to learn from operational experience and apply lessons to future operations. One trend was to change the form but not the substance. For example, past operations demonstrated conclusively that there were fundamental problems with force sustainment of deployed forces. These problems were not cited in reports to justify changes. Another trend was not to review previous operations to verify what worked well and what needed to be changed. Senior defence committees seemed to examine and note what happened in the most recent operation, but not the cumulative evidence of problems from past operations to inform their deliberations on what might need to be done. The ADF did not appear to have a mechanism or organisation for

analysing its operational performance objectively over time and identifying and acting on persistent systemic problems. In short, the ADF did not audit its operations.

Observations

After Operation *Stabilise*, the ADF did not substantially adjust command and control arrangements for operations in 2000. The theatre level of command was left in place awaiting the co-location of the environmental commanders and their staffs in one building with Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST) and his staff. Concerns remained. Would there be sufficient time for the strategic level of command to delegate planning and conduct of campaigns and operations to COMAST and his staff? If there was sufficient time, would political circumstances allow the theatre level to conduct campaigns and operations without undue interference? Would the Australian Government wait for the passage of information from the tactical level through to the strategic level, via an intermediate level of command, when it was instantaneous from the tactical level to the world?

The ADF did change arrangements for logistics more substantially, but left historical weaknesses. The new CJLOG was left to compete for, but not command, enabling logistic resources. He had no assigned deployable logistic support headquarters or units. He commanded the Defence National Supply and Distribution Centre (DNSDC) (a commercialised and joint distribution centre in Sydney) but not the means, such as navy vessels or service aircraft, to move stock along supply chains to deployed forces. Joint Logistic Command (formerly Support Command—Australia) consolidated force sustainment arrangements, but left CJLOG in charge of supporting too many functions simultaneously. There would be competing priorities within these functions as well as for the use of navy vessels and service aircraft.

So, despite ending the twentieth century with one of Australia's most strategically important and risky military force projections, the lessons were not applied again. Intuitively, one might have expected that a force-projecting island nation like Australia would have become increasingly proficient, having had opportunities for both rehearsal and practice for more than a century. The reverse was true—especially when allies were not in a position to help. During the decade leading up to Operation *Stabilise*, the ADF was neither as proficient as it believed it was, nor as competent as it should have been. Operation *Stabilise* once again exposed historically persistent weaknesses in the enabling functions of force projection. Australia had depended on good luck and the resilience of junior leaders and small teams at tactical tipping points in 1942, on the Kokoda Track, and in 1966, at Long Tan in Vietnam, and had to do so again in the streets of Dili in 1999. For Operations *Lagoon* and *Bel Isi*, deficiencies in force projection increased risk. The same increase in pressure occurred for Operation *Stabilise*.

Why was this so? Why were there still problems after 115 years of participation in the military emergencies and campaigns of allies as well as several operations in the near region?

Force of Habit

In 1987, the government announced that Australia's defence would be based on self reliance and joint operations.¹⁵ At that time, Australia and its armed forces had been conditioned by just over a century of dependence on allies for the functions of force projection. Overcoming the legacy of this conditioning was the major challenge. Following the habits of 100 years, the ADF did not design, develop or rehearse all of the enabling functions—especially those that had been provided by allies, such as deployment, protection and force sustainment, during the late 1980s and the 1990s. The ADF preferred to rehearse force employment after arrival, rather than pre-deployment functions that would optimise arrival and subsequent employment and sustainment. The major impediment to joint operations was allies employing Australian contingents from the three Services separately for over 100 years. The Services clung to the experiences of the previous decades by preferring to exercise and operate separately, and resisting joint arrangements for their command, employment and sustainment.

Preference for Good News

Faulty force projection increased risk on operations in the late 1980s and the 1990s. While tactical-level reports described the risks, the higher levels of command appeared to be out of touch, favouring good news over bad. After all, operational outcomes were excellent and these operations enhanced Australia's military reputation. Consequently, there appeared to be only a passing interest in the increased pressure put on the tactical level of command. There also appeared to be little enthusiasm or mechanisms for applying lessons. The ADF became a victim of its own success. Even when Australian Governments decreased official warning time to an average of four weeks, force elements appeared to deploy on time and in good order, and accomplish their missions. Fortunately, no capable opponents awaited them that might have taken advantage of the unhelpful circumstances of their preparation, loading, deployment and subsequent supply chain management.

Was Strategic Guidance at Fault?

An alternate hypothesis is to link strategic guidance with deficiencies in force projection, and play down 100 years of conditioning and inter-Service rivalry. Though it is not the purpose of this monograph to explore strategic level decision-making and policy development, an examination of the *Defence of Australia 1987* does not reveal a direct link. The architect of that White Paper, Paul Dibb, correctly assessed that 'Australia is one of the most secure countries

in the world' and faces 'no identifiable military threat'.¹⁶ However, he did not advocate continental defence or isolationism. The White Paper left all three Services with generic capabilities for force projection.

In respect to land forces, it specified that 'more emphasis will be given to highly mobile forces capable of rapid deployment'.¹⁷ Dibb saw Australia's geography as both a boon and a 'daunting task' for force projection.¹⁸ Remoteness from centres of global conflict and the sea and air gap around the continent, as well as self-sufficiency in basic commodities, were blessings for Australian defence because they posed significant force projection challenges for enemies.¹⁹ However, the 'daunting task' for the ADF would be self-reliant defence of Australian territorial sovereignty. Dibb envisioned Australia having to project military force over thousands of kilometres from the southern and eastern heartlands to the western and northern hinterlands.²⁰ To achieve this, he recommended an emphasis on projecting maritime and air power with support from ground forces able to operate over 'vast distances'—within continental Australia—to defeat 'raiding groups'.²¹ While the *Defence of Australia 1987* assessed that the primary purpose of land force projection would be national, there were sufficient land force capabilities to enable both regional and international projection. Dibb recognised that logistics would underwrite force projection. He recommended pre-positioning both combat forces and 'integral ADF logistic capacities within operational areas in the north'.²² He also identified the need for 'sustained exercises in the north, supported by bases in the south, to test and identify weaknesses in our logistic train'.²³

Practice Makes Perfect

The problems encountered during the four weeks before deployment originated in a lack of practice. The crux was slow responses down the chain of command. Orders and instructions arrived too late to influence tactical-level preparations and deployment. The ADF did not rehearse the use of warning time, planning processes, joint command and control, force protection, tactical deployment or force sustainment under simulated operational conditions. Flawed rehearsal became defective performance. The strategic and operational levels of command shrouded warning time in secrecy and then rushed planning. Planners imposed arbitrary and disruptive caps on numbers for land forces and made *ad hoc* command arrangements. There was insufficient preparation and reconnaissance. Though a small unit assisted pre-deployment preparations after 1991, tactical commanders had to rely on their own initiative and resourcefulness to prepare land forces, and on special pleading to secure additional resources for force preparation and capability enhancements before deployment.

Lead joint commanders nominated mounting authorities and mounting headquarters. However, the army did not have doctrine or practiced procedures

for mounting base operations. There was no over-arching ADF machinery for synchronising joint logistic preparation or personnel administration, except through collegial cooperation at the tactical level. Logisticians were under pressure to concentrate stocks for ship loading at short notice, often at great expense and always with unsatisfactory coordination. The consequence of rushing planning, preparation and deployment was increased risk at sea off Fiji in May 1987 and off Bougainville in October 1994. For land projections to Bougainville and East Timor, troops arrived tired, under-rehearsed and with an unnecessarily incomplete understanding of what lay ahead. Yet they were required to perform well immediately under intense media scrutiny. The results of increasing risk could have been casualties, diminution of Australia's military reputation, and some political and diplomatic embarrassment. Fortunately, ADF force elements were not facing opponents or circumstances on arrival that took advantage of their fatigue and lack of situational awareness.

Tribal Differences

The challenge for each Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) in the late 1980s and the 1990s was to overcome the impediments of a century of conditioned dependence on allies for some functions as well as inter-Service rivalry. The Australian Services maintained separate command and sustainment systems, and trained for independent employment until the early 1980s. Sir Philip Bennett's successors did their best to exercise their statutory authority to command assigned forces from the Services for operations. The Services resisted. Successive *Kangaroo* Exercises failed to bring the three Services under joint command or to establish efficient joint movements and sustainment arrangements. There was no testing of the logistic train. Once again, faulty rehearsal contributed to defective supply chain performance on operations. The navy and the air force did not support a land operation in Somalia satisfactorily in 1993, despite General Peter Gration ordering them to provide vessels and aircraft for sustainment.²⁴ Major General Murray Blake had responsibility for operational outcomes in Somalia, but not the enabling authority over navy vessels and service aircraft to support his deployed force. Major General Peter Arnison had no control over the means for supply for Operation *Lagoon* in 1994.

After experimenting with improvised arrangements in 1992 and 1995 on *Kangaroo* Exercises, General John Baker appointed a permanent theatre commander and raised a theatre headquarters in Sydney in 1996. The aim was to create a separate, as well as a geographically separated, operational level of command to plan and conduct joint campaigns and operations. The assumption was that interaction under a theatre commander would encourage the development of a culture of inter-Service cooperation among environmental commanders. Indeed, the eventual aim was to co-locate environmental headquarters under the theatre commander in one facility. The problem was

that there was insufficient time for development of strategic guidance and subsequent devolution of planning and decision-making to a theatre level of command. Experience showed that four weeks was not long enough for another level of command, between the strategic, operational and tactical levels, to receive and convert strategic guidance into orders and instructions and prepare force elements for deployment. Collegial cooperation between staff at the environmental headquarters and small coordinating staff groups at the theatre headquarters neither facilitated prompt force projection nor better logistics. Major General Frank Hickling, the lead joint commander for operations in Bougainville in 1997, could not rely on HQ AST to give him sufficient guidance and warning time before deployment. Subsequently, he could not rely on his environmental colleagues to provide his desired rate of maritime or air resupply effort or effect.

Failure of Theatre Command

The projection to East Timor in 1999 also demonstrated that, when time was short and political and strategic stakes were high, there would be circumscribed devolution of command to a theatre level. The CDF, Admiral Chris Barrie, delegated national, not operational command, to his theatre commander, Air Vice Marshal Bob Treloar. Arguably, his successors would most likely do so again in similar circumstances. Media scrutiny of this projection also epitomised the instantaneous visibility of the tactical level to a worldwide audience and scores of commentators. The operational commander in East Timor, Major General Peter Cosgrove, communicated directly to this audience, as well as directly to Barrie and his senior staff. There was a limited role for Treloar and his headquarters. The argument that having Treloar and his headquarters in the chain of command freed Barrie to command this strategically important operation by continuing to command 22 ongoing operations was thin. In reality, the three environmental headquarters had a closer relationship to those operations than theatre staff. There is some substance in an argument that Treloar commanded ADF assets that were on standby in case there was interference with the INTERFET deployment, but it would have been most unlikely that he would have had the freedom to respond to a threat. Barrie and Prime Minister John Howard would most likely have exercised command and control of operations against renegade Indonesian forces.

The other problematic argument justifying a separate and separated theatre level of command was that Treloar coordinated logistics for the East Timor projection. In reality, neither he, nor his logistic counterpart in Melbourne, Mueller, meaningfully coordinated force sustainment, which largely reverted to service control. Improvised and unrehearsed logistic arrangements applied for three months during the most critical period of the INTERFET projection. The Land Commander, Major General John Hartley, and Treloar's Logistic Component Commander, Wilkinson, had to make *ad hoc* arrangements during

this period for managing mounting and forward operating bases, as well as the supply chain.

Failure of Joint Logistics

Joint force commanders, who were usually army officers, were unable to control logistic priorities or the vessels and aircraft they needed to deploy and sustain their forces. For their part, ADF logisticians and the navy and the air force did not rehearse short notice tactical deployment of land forces or joint supply chain management. The ADF movements system moved troops and *matériel* administratively for major field exercises and for offshore operations. Deploying troops were passengers on haphazardly loaded navy vessels and air force and commercial aircraft. Fortunately, for these projections, there was time to unload and reorganise after arrival, and to move tactically thereafter. It did not matter that commanders, who were responsible for operational outcomes, did not control loading or the means for deployment. There was no substantial military contest awaiting their forces on arrival.

The penalties for joint operational commanders not having firmer control over logistic priorities and the means of deployment and resupply could have been high in September 1999. The projection to East Timor required efficient and precise tactical loading and deployment. While the navy and the air force did not have competing priorities for previous projections, both Services did for the INTERFET deployment because of the posture of Indonesian maritime and air force elements in general, and limited airport infrastructure in Dili in particular. Fortunately, the navy had the capacity to assign transport vessels exclusively in support of the INTERFET deployment. The leasing of HMAS *Jervis Bay* was a master stroke. However, there were competing priorities for the use of service aircraft flying into Dili. Neither Cosgrove nor his tactical land force commander, Brigadier Mark Evans, had control of these priorities. Consequent delays in getting troops and initial supplies to Dili increased risk significantly. If outnumbered Australian troops had become involved in an accidental escalation of hostilities in Dili on 20 or 21 September 1999, they would have run out of ammunition and potentially taken and inflicted heavy casualties—a tactical setback that would have had significant strategic, diplomatic and political repercussions.

Control of the enablers was the root problem for deploying and sustaining deployed land forces. Service chiefs and their logistic support commanders were not in the chain of command for ADF operations; yet they controlled logistics. This was not a major issue for the navy and the air force. These Services owned transport assets to support their organic logistic capabilities. They routinely practised force sustainment under operational conditions. Both Services were competent in independent deployment and distant logistic support, including supply of spare parts. The army was a dependent service bereft of the means

for deployment and resupply, and under-rehearsed in supply chain management. After Defence established the DNSDC as well as joint logistic units (JLU) around Australia in the 1990s, the army lost control of much of its organic logistic infrastructure and became another customer. Offshore land operations competed for logistic support with navy and air force priorities as well as with the needs of domestic training and national base-to-base supply. Accordingly, force sustainment was not pushed to land operations by commanders responsible for operational outcomes, but had to be pulled from Service chiefs, their logistic commanders and departmental fleet managers, amidst competing priorities.

Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, after over a century of dependence on allies for sustainment and independent Service employment, and just under 30 years aspiring to self-reliance and a joint and commercial logistic culture for operations, ADF logistics was still not working satisfactorily. New arrangements that were put in place in 2000, following the projection to East Timor, awaited testing in the new century.

All of the Australian force projections of the twentieth century were successful and enhanced Australia's military reputation. Arguably, if Australia continued as a dependent ally and did not aspire to self-reliant defence and joint operations, the status quo would suffice. However, circumstances in 1942 and 1966, and during the late 1980s and the 1990s, required Australia to project force independently and demanded inter-Service cooperation. This monograph shows that independent projections in the late 1980s and the 1990s were successful, but that there was room for improvement. The challenge for the twenty-first century would be to reduce the level of difficulty the ADF was having with force projection in the final two decades of the twentieth century.

ENDNOTES

¹ Classified sources.

² Classified sources.

³ Classified sources.

⁴ Classified source.

⁵ Air Vice Marshal Bob Treloar, 'Theatre Headquarters', HQAST 01568/99, 24 November 1999, 623-11-1.HQ AST, Potts Point.

⁶ Air Vice Marshal Bob Treloar, 'The Form and Function of HQAST', HQ AST 01570/99, 24 November 1999, p. 14, 623-11-1, HQ AST, Potts Point.

⁷ Treloar, 'The Form and Function of DJFHQ', HQAST 01569/99, 24 November 1999, p. 1, 623-11-2, HQ AST, Potts Point.

⁸ Treloar, 'The Form and Function of DJFHQ', HQAST 01569/99, 24 November 1999, p. 4.

⁹ Classified sources.

¹⁰ Classified source.

¹¹ Classified source.

¹² HQ AST, Augmented Theatre Commanders' Meeting, 21 February 2000. The agenda item was 'Logistic Lessons from Operations in East Timor', Support Command—Australia Conference, 24 February 2000, Presentation 'Logistic Observations for Operations in East Timor 1999 to 2000'. HQ AST, 'OP Stabilise—Lessons Learnt Seminar', 1 March 2000.

Struggling for Self Reliance

¹³ Major General Peter F. Haddad and Air Vice Marshal Colin M. Hingston, 'National Support and Theatre Sustainment—Lessons from East Timor', 6 September 2000, classified file, Defence Archives Queanbeyan. Copy held by author. (Note: The reference itself is not classified.)

¹⁴ Headquarters Logistic Command (HQ LOGCOMD) in Melbourne and the Moorebank Logistic Group in Sydney had supported Operation *Solace* unsatisfactorily in 1993. For Operation *Lagoon*, Moorebank Logistic Group had become the Defence National Supply and Distribution Centre (DNSDC), and it was this centre and HQ LOGCOMD that provided unsatisfactory support. For Operation *Bel Isi*, HQ LOGCOMD had become Headquarters Support Command—Australia (HQ SCA), and this headquarters and DNSDC provided unsatisfactory support.

¹⁵ Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia 1987*, presented to the Parliament by the Minister for Defence, the Honourable Kim. C. Beazley, MP, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1987, pp. 1–2, 60–62.

¹⁶ Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, Report to the Minister for Defence by Mr Paul Dibb, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, March 1986, p. 1.

¹⁷ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 63.

¹⁸ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*. See p. 1 for geographic advantages and p. 2 for economic advantages of self sufficiency in basic commodities.

²⁰ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 3.

²¹ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*. See pp. 7–9 for emphasis on projecting and defending with maritime and air power and p. 10 for organisation, disposition and mobility of ground forces.

²² Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 12.

²³ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 12.

²⁴ See *A Little Bit of Hope, Australian Force—Somalia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998, chapter 6.