Chapter 13

Conclusion

Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people’s ideas, and although it’s ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise.

Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country*, 1964

The historian has actual men and women, real characters, crowds and choruses as the subject of his work; and it seems to me that if he cannot see that their qualities, motives and ideas in interplay combine to produce vast actual drama in the rise and fall and other vicissitudes of nations, then he is inadequate for his real task. Surely, especially at times such as the present, men and women look to the historian to tell them, as far as possible, not the partisan view of a period or an episode; it is difficult for them to shut their ears to the din of party propaganda, both honest and charlatan. The guidance which they seek is surely that of someone who will at least attempt to exhibit to them events, causes and results as they actually happened on the world stage. And if the historian cannot write that drama in its full truth, with the interplay of good and ill, wisdom and folly, all parties working to its complex conclusion, then so much less the historian he.

C.E.W. Bean, 22 February 1938.

From the perspective of military force projection, Australia’s luck and time is running out. When Donald Horne wrote *The Lucky Country*, he had in mind that, while other nations were becoming cleverer, Australia was still relying for its prosperity on the luck of its geographic, climatic, agricultural and geological circumstances. He called for Australia to become more innovative and proactive in shaping its future and making decisions in its national interests. Militarily, Australia has also been lucky rather than clever. At two historic tactical tipping points in 1942 and 1966, the nation depended on good fortune prevailing over incompetence. Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has been fortunate that more capable opponents or more demanding circumstances have not put deployed land forces under more pressure. Operations that should have been trouble-free dry runs for force projection have been bedevilled by persistent deficiencies and unnecessary risks. Good luck and the
resilience of junior leaders and small teams avoided strategic and political embarrassment.

Time is running out because Australia’s geographic advantages are no longer as significant in protecting the nation from attack as they used to be. The worldwide jihadist threat to Western interests and moderate Islam does not depend on invading maritime and air armadas for success. Jihadists are sophisticated learning enemies who employ barbaric but astute tactics that produce strategic effects. The terrorist attacks in New York city and Washington, DC on 11 September 2001 are evidence of this. They infiltrate borders, as well as nesting in the homelands of their adversaries before striking unexpectedly. The London Underground attacks in July 2005 are the result of such tactics. They learn from their operations and strike again, as shown by the terrorist attacks in Bali in October 2002 and October 2005 and the ongoing bombing campaign in Iraq and Afghanistan. They need to be fought by learning organisations and capable intelligence systems within ‘whole-of-nation’ security efforts. This monograph concludes that, from the perspective of force projection, the ADF was not a learning organisation and did not have capable intelligence systems at the turn of the century. The need for several inquiries into Australian intelligence in recent years suggests that this monograph is not alone in this assessment. 4

Time is also running out because Australia’s security circumstances are likely to change.5 So far, Australian Governments have been able to offer allies token contributions to campaigns against jihadists in Iraq and Afghanistan. There may come a time when the United States Government insists on more substantial Australian commitments in more dangerous settings against jihadists, or in response to other military emergencies in countries such as Iran, North Korea and Taiwan.6 Regional emergencies may also require Australia to respond rapidly into dangerous and volatile environments.7 At the time of writing, jihadists have not attacked Australia. There may come a time when the Australian Government orders a prompt, strong and smart response to an attack on the homeland. The government may also require the ADF to pre-empt an attack at short notice that is being mounted regionally or internationally. Based on this monograph, the ADF may be found wanting, because it has continually failed to apply lessons from its own operational history.

In 2003, the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), General Peter Cosgrove, opined that ‘the Australian Defence Force has come a long way in recent years. In my view, we have positioned ourselves as a modern, professional military organisation through the quality of our work’.8 He announced that the vision for the future was encapsulated in a Future Warfighting Concept that emphasised and enhanced previous concepts contained in another Defence guidance document, Force 2020, of the Seamless Force, effects-based operations and
network centric warfare.⁹ The accompanying booklet to Cosgrove’s covering letter offered:

This approach seeks to apply strength against weakness. It values surprise and deception. It requires an ability to act fast, to reach out to the critical place at the right time, and create simultaneous problems that an adversary cannot resolve. In order to fight this way, the ADF will need the ability to be deployed and sustained at home and at a distance. … The ADF’s ability to project power within Australia and its adjacent air and sea space remains vital; but the need to be capable of deploying forces overseas—generally as part of a coalition—remains important.¹⁰

This is the credo of modern force projection as echoed in an earlier Defence publication, The Australian Approach to Warfare, which stated that ‘whilst Australia’s posture is defensive, we should seek to attack hostile forces as far from our shores as possible’.¹¹ The importance of force projection in support of allies was stated in National Security: A Defence Update in 2003 that was produced in response to the changing world security environment, precipitated in part by the jihadist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001.¹² In 2005, at the inaugural Australian Strategic Policy Institute International Conference, ‘Australia’s Defence and Security: Challenges and Opportunities at the Start of the 21st Century’, the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill, stated:

The role of the expeditionary force might have changed, but the need to be able to project our military forces—in meeting today’s security challenges, is as vital as ever—possibly more so. This was recognised by the Howard Government in its 2000 White paper which endorsed a program to significantly enhance our joint force expeditionary capacity.¹³

However, in 2003, three years after its last lucky force projection to East Timor and the publication of Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force, the ADF demonstrated once again that its structure, processes and procedures were impediments to acting fast, reaching out to the critical place at the right time, and deploying and sustaining at a distance.¹⁴ Post-operational reports from Operation Anode, a regional projection of a 2500-strong Australian-led combined force to the Solomon Islands to support a restoration of law and order, confirms this monograph’s conclusion that the ADF is not a learning organisation and has the wrong structures and processes for force projection.¹⁵ The government gave the ADF four weeks to prepare and deploy in July 2003 after contemplating its options in secrecy for several months. There was a familiar and lamentable pattern of the government and the ADF not using warning time effectively, followed by rushed planning, reconnaissance and preparation, haphazard ship loading, number capping and raising ad hoc headquarters.¹⁶ Orders and instructions took too long to produce and did not influence preparations and

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17 Good luck favoured this operation. No capable opponents awaited arrival. There were no substantial consequences from what were now becoming traditional problems with logistics, except that Australian and regional troops were inconvenienced and endured unnecessarily austere living conditions for four weeks.18

Is this monograph too fastidious? Will there always be difficulties and risks with military operations? Indeed, do military operations always depend for their success on the resilience of junior leaders and small teams? Should a middle-ranking power like Australia aspire to self-reliance? Allies have and will continue to underwrite Australia’s defence. Is it understandable and unremarkable that Australia began the twentieth century as a dependent British ally and finished 100 years later as a dependent American ally? Does the monograph over-emphasise the opinions of eyewitnesses at the tactical level and their post-operations reports as well as other evidence from departmental files? Surely these are minority views lacking a broader perspective? The majority view, endorsed by both senior Defence committees and successive governments, is that the ADF performed very well on operations during the late 1980s and the 1990s, and will continue to do so in the twenty-first century.19

Military operations are dangerous and difficult to manage. However, the imperative should be to minimise risk to one’s own forces and maximise the risk to one’s opponents. It is also important to ease the inevitable pressure on people who are being sent into harm’s way, not the reverse. Junior leaders and small teams deserve the best advantages they can get. The media will soon notice if these are not forthcoming. Relying on allies to cover gaps in Australia’s proficiency in force projection is not only folly, but also demeaning to Australia’s nationhood. Australia is obligated to develop a self-reliant defence. Not doing so invites the unsatisfactory circumstances of the defence of New Guinea in 1942, the battle of Long Tan in 1966 and the dangers in Dili in 1999 to repeat in some form next time the ADF is required to lead or operate alone. Reports from the tactical level are neither minority opinions nor the views of institutional dissenters. Evidence of eyewitnesses and first-hand research adds credibility. Although the Defence Department has an obligation to manage its public reputation, it must not ignore reports from those who faced danger simply because the documents contain inconvenient observations.

This monograph follows the historiography of Australia’s first official military historian, C.E.W. Bean. He favoured first-hand research, frontline sources and descriptive tactical detail. However, the monograph has adopted his research method, not his commemorative intent or heroic, Homeric style. Indeed, the monograph reverses his style. It examines and criticises rather than commemorates and inspires. Its narrative is aligned to a framework of the 10 enabling functions of force projection and follows the chronologies of four case
studies. It is akin to an historical audit of contemporary ADF operations. Like an audit, it devotes more words to breaches of best practice than compliance. While there are books and articles critical of the conduct of Australian military operations and campaigns, it was neither Bean’s intention nor possibly the intent of most Australian military historians to audit or critique Australia’s armed forces on technical proficiency. Arguably, military history audits, like their corporate counterparts, would not attract a wide and admiring readership. However, an audit approach to history not only gets closer to the plain and absolute truth—the objective of good scholarship—but can also become important for the nation’s future defence.

Thus, this monograph departs from the laudatory and commemorative style of Bean’s histories and some contemporary popular histories. It follows the more technical and objective style of the official histories of the Second World War, Korea, and of Australia’s involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts between 1948 and 1975. Dudley McCarthy describes the carnage and misfortunes of the Kokoda Campaign in 1941–42. Robert O’Neill points out that 3 RAR was ‘under-strength, under-equipped and collectively poorly prepared for war’ before telling the story of the battalion’s hasty deployment to the Korean Peninsula in 1950. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey record the poor preparation of battalions moving to Malaya in the 1950s and 1960s. They point out that 2 RAR was in a ‘parlous state’ and ‘did not reach its establishment until just before leaving Australia’ and that several years later 3 RAR was not ready for operations when it embarked. Ian McNeill leaves the reader in no doubt about the mismanagement that preceded the battle of Long Tan and the luck that had to prevail for the Australians to avoid a military disaster.

There would not be a significant difference between this monograph and official interpretations if the ADF audited its operations independently. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, tactical-level reporting did not move up the ADF chain of command without modification. Self-congratulatory and optimised reports from higher levels of command, typically from headquarters that commanded operations, did not encourage senior ADF committees to take action to apply lessons. An exception was the reporting on logistics in 1999 for the projection to East Timor. This Operation did attract the interest of the Australian National Audit Organisation. The resultant audit report identified many of the difficulties that the ADF was having in deploying and sustaining land forces. A useful innovation might be for the ADF to conduct audits of its operations, within the framework of the functions of force projection, employing an organisation or board comprised of suitably qualified and experienced persons that is outside the chain of command, but reports to the Defence Minister and the CDF.

The ADF has an institutional obligation to tell its story as part of Australia’s national story. It also has a duty to record, retain and analyse operational
performance and apply corporate memory to the planning and conduct of future operations. Alan Ryan points out that it would be useful to employ historians on operations both for telling the story and to provide useful operational analysis and corporate memory from past operations. Thus historians, who would not be in the chain of command, could conduct first-hand research and write histories of operations soon after they occur. The result would be satisfaction of imperatives to record as well as to learn from history simultaneously. These accounts would be the first draft of official histories, enriching them with eyewitness reports while history was being made. However, Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart highlighted one of the problems identified in this monograph when he wrote in *Thoughts on War* in 1944 that ‘the discovery of uncomfortable facts had never been encouraged in armies, who treated their history as a sentimental treasure rather than a field of scientific research’.

This monograph is a constructed narrative of events as well as a dissertation. Though not setting out to do so, it has made the case for consolidating ADF joint command and control and the ways and means of force projection. The three Services and their environmental commanders and their staffs are not positioned organisationally to contribute effectively. The separate and separated theatre level of command does not work. The ADF logistics system is still not functioning well for force projection. It is certainly not ‘joint’. And intelligence organisations have failed to deliver at the tactical level—where it counts.

Senator Hill announced a new Joint Operations Command on 16 March 2004 and there have been further refinements in 2005. Reflecting the advice of General Peter Cosgrove, his intentions were ‘to simplify and streamline the ADF’s command structure and allow more effective control of forces on operations’. Based on the historical analysis in this monograph, he did not go far enough in 2004. However, the appointment of a Chief of Joint Operations (CJOPS) to exercise command through an integrated joint headquarters (Headquarters Joint Operations Command or HQ JOC) located at Bungendore near Canberra, rather than one comprised of co-located environmental staff, almost completes the transformation required to facilitate prompt, strong and smart Australian force projection for the future.

The final step is to match responsibility with the ways and means to deploy, sustain and manoeuvre. As the officer ultimately responsible for ADF operations, the CDF needs CJOPS and HQ JOC to incorporate joint command of operations, a strategic joint logistics component commander, joint movements and a deployable joint force headquarters. The CJOPS should provide options and advice, both upwards to government and across to other departments and allies via the CDF, as well as direction and advice to both Service chiefs and environmental commanders.
The CJOPS has responsibility to deliver specified military effects at the right place at the right time. Based on historical precedents, he will be allowed about four weeks or less to do so. In 2004, Cosgrove recognised that, to fulfil this role, the CJOPS had to have authority over environmental commanders and their staffs. In 2005, the newly appointed CDF, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, recognised that it would be more effective to integrate rather than just co-locate environmental staff groups and environmental commanders in one facility. The step yet to be taken, however, is to consolidate high-readiness ADF force elements, intelligence assets, mounting bases and the means for force sustainment and joint movements—the enablers.

The ADF’s operational experiences of the late 1980s and the 1990s make a case for the formation of an ADF rapid response command under the CJOPS. This command would be comprised of permanently assigned combat and logistic formations and units from the three Services, intelligence assets, vessels, service aircraft and infrastructure.\(^{35}\) This would change the paradigm for ADF joint operations from ‘pulling’ assets and support from the Services to ‘pushing’ assets and support to deployed forces that are under operational control and have been rehearsed thoroughly for force projection. Service chiefs and Defence equivalents would still retain technical and administrative control of personnel and assets assigned to rapid response command, but not operational control.\(^{36}\)

Most importantly, a rapid response command would rehearse the functions of force projection under simulated operational conditions and develop a joint force projection ethos and culture. This type of rehearsal could facilitate whole-of-nation responses to regional and world events requiring some form of military action, as well as efficient specific force preparation, deployment and sustainment. Thus, warning time would equal preparation time. Planning compartments could be vertical down to the tactical level of command rather than just horizontal across organisations and departments in Canberra. Reconnaissance could include each level of command and a range of specialists belonging to the one organisation. Forward elements could practise tactical deployment, preceded and accompanied by force protection elements, and followed by responsive joint logistics, with stamina as well as intelligence that would blend human and technical capabilities.

In summary, the history of Australian military operations until the end of the twentieth century was mostly about national, regional and international force projection. After the first projection to the Sudan in 1885, Australian forces, fostered by allies, participated in international military emergencies and wars, as well as Southeast Asian and Pacific area campaigns for the next 87 years. By 1972, Australia’s military posture was evolving to include national force projection. In the 1976 White Paper, *Australian Defence*, the emphasis moved to self-reliant defence of the homeland and near region.\(^{37}\) The ADF spent the
next 11 years periodically rehearsing national force projection. During the late 1980s and the 1990s, Australian Governments returned to responding militarily to particular regional and international emergencies and events, mostly in the company of allies, while still continuing to rehearse nationally. In the twenty-first century, this trend has continued.

This monograph tells the story of Australia’s military force projection in the late 1980s and the 1990s and analyses proficiency within the framework of 10 enabling functions. It concludes that all was not well. The ADF has to consolidate rather than divide command and control arrangements. At the same time, the ADF has to divide into a rapid response command for operations and assign Service chiefs the crucial tasks of raising, training and maintaining their environmental capabilities. They would retain technical and administrative command of forces assigned to rapid response command. At the time of writing, a rapid response command does not exist. Its formation awaits a victory for commonsense under the present Defence senior leadership group, a major terrorist attack on Australian soil or on Australian interests overseas, or a military disaster.

ENDNOTES


6 At a recent conference on ‘Next Generation Threats’, Professor Robert J. O’Neill, former Chichele Professor of the History of War, All Souls College, University of Oxford, former Chairman of the Council of Institute of Strategic Studies and inaugural Chairman of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, offered that it was possible that Australian forces could be asked to participate in US-led operations in Iran, North Korea and Taiwan. Patrick Walters, ‘Our troops “facing three wars”’, *The Australian*, 26 October 2005.


25 Dennis and Grey, Emergency and Confrontation, p. 90. The authors cite members of the battalion complaining that too much time was spent rehearsing for a pre-embarkation parade when weapons training for reinforcements would have been a wiser use of time. Subsequent marksmanship on operations was poor, pp. 98–99. Comments on 3 RAR, p. 222.


34 Author discussed these new arrangements with Lieutenant General Ken J. Gillespie, VCDF and Chief of Joint Operations on 5 August 2005.

35 The British Government recognised the need for consolidating force projection capabilities into a Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF) in August 1996. The British armed forces solved the problem of only assigning a lead joint commander just before deployment by appointing a Chief of Joint Operations (CJO) and establishing a Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) as well as the JRRF. However, they demurred on permanent assignment of high readiness force elements and a direct relationship between CJO and Chief of the Defence Services (CDS). See Richard M. Connaughton, ‘Organizing British Joint Rapid Reaction Forces’, Joint Force Quarterly, Autumn 2000, available at
36 technical control: It also covers specialised and professional authority for the proper management of assets including technical standards and regulations for maintenance, repair and use of vehicles, weapons, equipment and other matériel. administrative control: This term covers the non-operational administrative responsibility, such as personnel management, including individual training.