

Preface

In 1987 two events set the scene for Australian military activity in the 1990s and revived an historical paradox. In March, Defence Minister Kim Beazley released a White Paper, *The Defence of Australia 1987*, that explained a strategy of defence-in-depth of territorial sovereignty. The centrepiece was self reliance. Two months later a hastily assembled Australian military force sailed into international waters off Fiji—a contingency for evacuating Australians if there was widespread violence after a military coup. This activity, called Operation *Morris Dance*, was not about defence-in-depth. It represented enduring national obligations to Australian citizens in danger overseas.

The 1987 White Paper and *Morris Dance* symbolically revived the paradox of Australian Governments emphasising defence of sovereignty while demonstrating a predilection to project Australian military force well beyond the sea and air approaches to the homeland. The deployment of another expeditionary force from Australia's shores in May 1987 reaffirmed an historical penchant that began in 1885 for Australian governments to dispatch military forces offshore at short notice in support of discretionary strategic and humanitarian interests.

In the 1990s the paradox became more conspicuous. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) contributed forces to multi-national peace support operations in the Gulf, Cambodia, Somalia, Western Sahara, Rwanda, Papua New Guinea (PNG) (Bougainville) and Indonesia (East Timor) and humanitarian operations in northern Iraq, PNG, Irian Jaya and several South Pacific nations. Like *Morris Dance*, none of these operations defended Australia from attack but all of them were useful rehearsals of military force projection. Though most were small-scale, largely uncontested and did not involve complex manoeuvre or application of firepower, forces were assembled, prepared, employed and sustained beyond the Australian mainland in the company of allied military forces—the same mechanics for defending Australia.

Force projection is a centuries-old integrated offensive military system. It is not just an *ad hoc* flex of military muscle in times of emergency or political urgency. It is more than the act of dispatching forces. It should be the self reliant capacity to strike from mainland ports, bases and airfields that underwrites Australia's nationhood. The ADF should be maintained in a balanced and responsive posture to conduct an efficient projection cycle of preparation, command, deployment, protection, employment, sustainment, redeployment and reconstitution. If the ADF consistently gets this cycle wrong, then there is something wrong with Australia's defence.

Therefore, given that the same functions of force projection apply to all offshore operations, Australian regional peace support operations in the 1990s

Struggling for Self Reliance

were valid measures of the ADF's preparedness and capability to defend Australia—the main game. This monograph audits four regional force projections within the framework of force projection and offers observations and conclusions.

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