

# 8

## Concepts for Defence Planning

Richard Brabin-Smith

Paul Dibb's main contribution to the development of concepts for defence planning came through his *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, and it is for this review that he is best known.<sup>1</sup> The public prominence that this work gave Paul is well-deserved, for it provided a much-needed rationale and direction to the development of defence capabilities that Defence itself had been unable to agree on. The principal conclusions and recommendations of the review were accepted by the Minister for Defence Kim Beazley, Defence Secretary Sir William Cole and Chief of the Defence Force General Sir Phillip Bennett. A few years later, Dibb was appointed to the position of Deputy Secretary B in Defence, giving him the authority to help ensure that the further development of defence capabilities was consistent with the concepts and principles set out in his review.

---

1 Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, report to the Minister for Defence (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1986), henceforward referred to as the Dibb Review. The original classified version of the review, on which the public version is based, is held by the National Archives of Australia. Since the writing of this essay, it has become available for public access, with excision of material still considered sensitive (see National Archives of Australia: K967, 8, barcode 12581224).

## The Background to the Review

The roots of the disagreement that the review was commissioned to resolve went back a long way. Some readers will recall the hostile incredulity that greeted the initial articulation of its defence policy by Gough Whitlam's Labor Government in the early 1970s. But in spite of the storm that the new policy created, the government stuck to its position, and the policy was developed further, both under Whitlam and by the subsequent Coalition Government of Malcolm Fraser, making it in effect bipartisan. The policy was set out formally in Australia's first Defence White Paper, published by the Coalition in 1976.<sup>2</sup> In brief, it gave priority to self-reliance in the defence of Australia and in operations closer to home. Small-scale contingencies might arise with little warning but these would not put at risk Australia's sovereignty or independence. More serious contingencies might arise but only after many years of warning, during which Australia's armed forces would be expanded. The prospect that Australia might contribute to operations further afield would have only limited influence on the capabilities and preparedness of the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

This policy became the framework for Australia's maritime strategy, giving prominence to the importance of capable naval and air forces but giving less importance to equivalent levels of capability for the Army. It was the context for the government's decision to choose the more capable F/A-18 fighter aircraft over the F-16 to replace the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) Mirage fleet, and to set the demanding parameters for the capabilities of what became the *Collins*-class submarines. Other decisions at that time on maritime capabilities included the replacement of the 10 P-3B Orion long-range maritime patrol aircraft with the same number of new P-3Cs, the upgrading of the F-111C fleet with precision-guided munitions (including the Harpoon anti-ship missile), the modernisation of the three guided missile destroyers (DDG), and the acquisition of the fifth and sixth *Adelaide*-class guided missile frigates (FFG). In practical terms and

---

2 Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Defence* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976), henceforward referred to as the 1976 Defence White Paper.

given the constraints of the defence budget, the champions for Australia's maritime and strike capabilities did not have too much to grumble about.<sup>3</sup>

Interpreting strategic guidance for priorities for the development of the Australian Army was, however, proving more problematic. With little or no priority for major expeditionary warfare, least of all outside our own region, with a priority for strong maritime forces (expanded if and when necessary) that would deter or defeat any attempt at major attack on Australia, and with a confident expectation of many years of warning of any such major attack, how were we to approach the question of the size and shape of the Army? Would a consensus on these difficult issues emerge? Would it prove possible to reconcile the Army's ambitions with views on priorities derived from a top-down analysis of Australia's strategic circumstances by the civilian policy areas? It is fair to say that matters came to a head once General Sir Phillip Bennett became the Chief of the Defence Force Staff on the retirement of Air Chief Marshal Sir Neville McNamara in April 1984.<sup>4</sup>

The issue on which the civilian policy staff, led by Cole as Secretary, and the headquarters of the ADF (HQ ADF), led by General Bennett, disagreed was quite fundamental: how should the various levels of contingency that strategic guidance set out, together with the associated warning times, determine priorities for the force structure? HQ ADF preferred to emphasise higher level contingencies; the policy civilians gave greater emphasis to shorter term needs and force expansion. While the issue in principle concerned the whole of the ADF (and for that matter other elements of Australia's defence capacity, such as intelligence, science and industry), it was more contentious for the Army for, as we have seen, the capabilities being acquired for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and RAAF did not leave much room for

---

3 This policy was also the framework for the lengthy debate about whether to continue with an aircraft carrier and embarked fighter aircraft once the former carrier HMAS *Melbourne* had paid off. The civilian policy areas of Defence argued that such an acquisition did not command priority and, with the promotion of Air Chief Marshal Sir Neville McNamara to Chief of the Defence Force Staff on the retirement of Admiral Sir Anthony Synnot RAN, the official position of the headquarters of the Defence Force became very similar. In the event, the election of Bob Hawke's Labor Government in March 1983 put an end to the matter, with the government's early decision not to take the proposal any further. The Navy was disappointed by this decision of course.

4 The position of Chief of the Defence Force Staff was retitled Chief of the Defence Force in October of that year.

complaint. As Dibb commented, the disagreement became so intense and the parties so intransigent that they could not even agree on what the disagreement was.

This situation was hardly tolerable and, to help resolve it, Beazley turned to outside assistance, appointing an adviser to prepare a report on Australia's defence capabilities. Dibb was the ideal appointment for this, possessing a fearlessly independent mind and advanced analytical and conceptual skills (to use words favoured by the public service), having a solid defence background from his time in the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) (to use its current name) and the former Strategic and International Policy Division, and having institutional independence by virtue of his position at The Australian National University (ANU). In February 1985 the work got underway.

We must remember that the terms of reference for the review were wide-ranging but, also, set some important constraints. In particular, the review was to be conducted 'in the light of the strategic and financial planning guidance endorsed by the Government'.<sup>5</sup> The former meant that the *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy 1983* (SB83) would be a central point of reference.<sup>6</sup> The latter would help the review from falling into the trap of concluding merely that 'more is better', a failing to which far too many defence studies are prone.

In essence, SB83 continued with the policies set out in previous documents in the series and in the 1976 Defence White Paper. In so doing, it reinforced what might be called the new orthodoxy that emerged with increasing cogency from the late 1960s: it found 'a substantial measure of continuity with the recent past'.<sup>7</sup> So, for example, SB83 endorsed the priority to be given to self-reliance in the defence of Australia and operations in our region, noting inter alia: 'In sum, the basic strategic features of our own neighbourhood

5 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. xv.

6 *The Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy 1983*, formerly *Secret Austeo*, National Archives of Australia A13977, henceforward referred to as SB83. In September 1983, Cabinet endorsed SB83 inter alia 'as guidance for the forthcoming review of defence planning [by the Minister for Defence, Gordon Scholes] and for the development of Australian defence policies'. This followed its endorsement in May 1983 by the Defence Committee. The latter was a standing inter-departmental body, chaired by the Defence Secretary, with membership comprising the Chief of the Defence Force Staff, the three Service Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretaries of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Treasury, and Foreign Affairs. Its equivalent today (with changed membership) is the Secretaries' Committee on National Security.

7 SB83 (1983), p. 72.

have potential to absorb our total defence effort.<sup>8</sup> With respect to the central importance of self-reliance, it commented that '[t]he defence policies of Australian Governments have already recognised that we cannot rely upon US support in a defence emergency arising within our own neighbourhood but must develop our capacities to defend our interests by ourselves'.<sup>9</sup> And it continued to endorse 'an approach to defence planning which is based on insurance against future uncertainty'.<sup>10</sup>

It summarised the requirements of this approach as being intelligence collection and assessment, military planning, and a force-in-being capable of dealing with 'the kinds of defence contingencies that are credible in the shorter term, including deterrence of such escalation as an enemy might be capable of; and capable of providing a basis for timely expansion to counter deteriorating strategic circumstances'.<sup>11</sup> A major conventional attack on Australia remained 'only a remote and improbable contingency'.<sup>12</sup> *SB83* also reiterated the important policy conclusion that forces developed for operations relevant to neighbourhood contingencies 'will generally provide government with practical options for use of elements of the force in tasks beyond the neighbourhood in support of friends and allies'.<sup>13</sup> In brief, therefore, the policy context that the terms of reference set for the review focused on low-level contingencies that were credible in the shorter term, including the need to deter the possibility of escalation, and a defence force capable of expanding to meet the challenges of deterioration in Australia's strategic environment. The latter would require 'the careful and informed weighing of lead time [for force expansion] and warning time'.<sup>14</sup>

---

8 *SB83* (1983), p. 62.

9 *SB83* (1983), p. 61. See also, for example, p. 10 of the 1976 Defence White Paper: 'Indeed it is possible to envisage a range of situations in which the threshold of direct US combat involvement could be quite high.'

10 *SB83* (1983), p. 64.

11 *SB83* (1983), p. 64.

12 *SB83* (1983), p. 60.

13 *SB83* (1983), p. 62.

14 *SB83* (1983), p. 65.

## The Review's Concepts

The review acknowledged this continuity in policy development:

strategic guidance developed ... over the last decade or more may thus be regarded as a continuum. Although certain thoughts and strategic concepts have been developed in more detail, there is substantial continuity of thinking. Successive Defence Committees (and some 20 different Service Chiefs and Secretaries of Departments) have endorsed the *Strategic Basis* series of documents which have, in turn, been agreed to by governments of various political persuasions.<sup>15</sup>

This was an important point, which Dibb frequently emphasised: not only had a wide range of ministers adopted the policies set out in the *Strategic Basis* series, but a large number of public service officials and ADF officers at the most senior levels had also endorsed them.

Nevertheless, given the central importance of *SB83's* analysis of Australia's strategic circumstances for the development of defence concepts and capability priorities, Paul sought to reassure himself that its conclusions were sound. In brief, the review examined and accepted the fundamental premise of different levels of warning time for different levels of contingency: only lesser contingencies were credible in the shorter term, even with escalation, while the warning time for more serious levels of contingency would be many years. With the theme of this festschrift being 'geography and power', it is appropriate to include the review's observation that '[a]bove all else, our geographic position provides assurance that we would have considerable warning of the possibility of substantial threat ...'.<sup>16</sup> The review goes on to reaffirm that '[i]t would take at least 10 years and massive external support for the development of a regional capacity to threaten us with substantial assault'.<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, the critical point.

The review observes also that these judgements were not universally accepted within the Australian defence community, even though they were government policy. Related to acceptance of the concept of warning time was Dibb's conclusion that, although the concept of the core force was not sufficient for force-structure planning,

---

15 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 26.

16 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 33.

17 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986).

'its approach to expansion base planning needs to be retained'.<sup>18</sup> Further, '[a]n expansion base, which plans on timely force expansion to meet higher levels of threat, is confirmed as an important defence planning concept'.<sup>19</sup>

Not surprisingly, the theme of geography occurs in many places in the review. The many examples include 'There is a requirement to study more seriously the effect of geography on force development'; 'geography is an unchanging factor in our strategic calculations'; 'What is needed ... is a strategic concept focused rather more deliberately on our geographical circumstances ...'; and 'We take into account the effects of the enduring features of geography on the forces of an attacker and on our own forces'.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps critically with respect to drawing conclusions about capability priorities and thus meeting its terms of reference, the review 'dismissed the prospect of invasion as a determinant of Australia's force structure needs'.<sup>21</sup> Further, in terms of priorities for military capability, 'any tendency to prepare for unrealistically high levels of threat, such as preparing to meet an invasion force, must be resisted ...'.<sup>22</sup> Such conclusions, reached independently from Defence's and the government's official position, were nevertheless strongly consistent with it.

The review drew some important conclusions about different levels of conflict, contrasting those that are 'credible now and for the foreseeable future, and the time that would be available to develop our defences in response to possibilities for higher levels of conflict'. It drew a careful distinction, therefore, between, on the one hand,

---

18 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 49. The term 'core force' was a convenient defence policy shorthand for describing an ADF 'capable of dealing effectively with the kinds of defence contingencies that are credible in the shorter term, while providing a basis for timely expansion to counter deteriorating strategic circumstances should these arise.' Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 34.

19 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 50.

20 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), pp. 38, 40, 49, 59 respectively. It is only fair to add that Dibb was not alone in recognising the profound influence that geography should have on Australia's defence planning; to give just one example, the 1972 *Australian Defence Review* comments that '[g]eography has a compelling influence on Australian security'. See Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Defence Review* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, Mar. 1972), p. 3.

21 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 52.

22 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 55.

contingencies that might be credible in the shorter term — low-level conflict and escalated low-level conflict, in which the enemy's objectives would be political rather than expansionist — and, on the other hand, more substantial conflict, credible only in the longer term, in which the adversary would seek to achieve significant military victories. The extent of any escalation that might be encountered in escalated low-level contingencies would be limited by the military capacity of the aggressor.<sup>23</sup>

Such considerations led to the articulation of the review's 'strategy of denial', which would ultimately rest 'on a capability to defeat an opponent in defined areas of our own vital national interest'.<sup>24</sup> Integral to this strategy was the concept of layered defence, 'a series of interlocking barriers to an attack on Australia', comprising: extremely high quality intelligence and surveillance; capable air and naval forces with the capacity to destroy enemy forces in the sea-air gap to Australia's north; defensive capabilities to prevent enemy operations closer to our shores; and ground forces capable of denying the enemy our vital population centres and military infrastructure.<sup>25</sup>

## The Review in Practice

Let me now give examples of how this conceptual framework led to specific recommendations and consequent development of the force structure.

### The Navy

For the RAN, the central issue was the fleet of new destroyers and their level of capability. The concept emerged in the review of at least eight 'light patrol frigates', which would 'primarily be for ocean patrol and sovereignty tasks'. Their most valuable characteristics 'would be range, sea-keeping, good surveillance and local command,

---

23 Dobb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), pp. 53, 54. Page 25 of the 1987 Defence White Paper made the important further point that there would also be practical constraints on the extent to which an aggressor could apply military force in escalated conflict. See Commonwealth of Australia, *The Defence of Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987).

24 Dobb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 50.

25 Dobb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 51.

control and communications capabilities, rather than advanced or complex weapons and high speed'. They would have a gun and an air defence system for self-protection and a hangar for a reconnaissance helicopter.<sup>26</sup>

As a matter of course, Dibb agreed to discuss his draft chapters, as they were written, with the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The chapter proposing frigates with less ambitious capabilities than the RAN had hoped for met heavy weather when it was thus discussed — so much so that the draft minutes bore only passing resemblance to what had actually been spoken and agreed. Dibb's strong representations led to an extensive revision of the draft minutes and a private meeting between him and Vice Admiral Mike Hudson RAN, the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS), at which they reached a broad agreement about the concepts behind these ships and the level of capability to be proposed.<sup>27</sup> This agreement did not stop the Navy subsequently arguing vigorously at the Force Structure Committee and the Defence Force Development Committee for more capable vessels.<sup>28</sup>

In brief, however, the ideas set out in the review prevailed and led to the government's decision to build the eight ANZAC-class frigates at the former Williamstown Naval Dockyard (by then in private hands), at more or less the level of capability that the review had proposed.<sup>29</sup> The only difference of significance was that the Navy won the argument for a five-inch gun, rather than the three-inch gun that the review had proposed.<sup>30</sup>

---

26 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 129.

27 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 130, esp. fn. 19. See also p. 44 of the 1987 Defence White Paper.

28 The Defence Force Development Committee, chaired by the Secretary, was the equivalent of today's Defence Committee. The Force Structure Committee was a subordinate group chaired by the Deputy Secretary.

29 There were, in addition, two ANZAC-class ships built for the Royal New Zealand Navy. There was also a subsequent midlife program to upgrade the ANZACs.

30 Force Development and Analysis Division argued that if there were a priority for a greater capacity for surface engagement than that which the three-inch gun would provide, then the best way ahead would be to fit the ANZAC frigates with the Harpoon anti-ship missile. The CNS, however, preferred the five-inch gun, saying that he would not want to be outgunned by any regional navy.

The review also supported the priority of surface-towed acoustic arrays for the protection of shipping in focal areas from attack by submarine.<sup>31</sup> The importance of this program emerged from analysis of the way ahead for anti-submarine warfare in the wake of the government's decision not to continue with an aircraft carrier. Nevertheless, the Navy's interest in this was at best only lukewarm, in spite of support for it in the 1987 Defence White Paper,<sup>32</sup> and the 1991 *Force Structure Review* in effect ended it.<sup>33</sup> To this day, the anti-submarine capacity of the surface fleet against a capable adversary remains equivocal.

## The Army

The part of the review addressing the Army proved a challenge to write, largely because this was the core issue that had led to the review, and because Defence's processes of review, analysis and priority-setting had tended to sidestep Army-related matters. As the review pointed out, the most recent consideration of the Army as a whole by the Defence Force Development Committee had been in 1973, when the ideas of the Defence of Australia (DOA), the core force and expansion base were at a relatively early stage. For example, the consideration in 1973 had looked at scenarios that were 'based on strategic assumptions quite different from those which dominate today's Australian Defence analysis', including the 'implications for the expansion base were there to be a need to expand to a million-man army for the defence of Australia against major attack'.<sup>34</sup> This was a polite way of saying that the conceptual foundations of arguments for the Army's size, shape and development were fragile and unconvincing. The review was similarly dismissive of the then contemporary *Army Development Guide*, having 'substantial reservations' about its conceptual framework, especially for more substantial levels of conflict.<sup>35</sup> Absent from Army's arguments

---

31 Dobb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 119.

32 1987 Defence White Paper, p. 38.

33 Commonwealth of Australia, *Force Structure Review*, report to the Minister for Defence (Canberra, May 1991), p 11.

34 Dobb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 78.

35 Dobb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 84. The *Army Development Guide* included a scenario where a major power lodged a four-brigade divisional group on mainland Australia, requiring a Australian field-force element of some 135,000 personnel and a total army of some 270,000 to counter it.

was acknowledgement that operations in the defence of Australia would be joint-force in nature and that the Navy and Air Force would have decisive roles.

In brief, and building on its earlier analysis of priorities derived from Australia's strategic geography, the review dismissed the Army's arguments that gave priority to more substantial conflict and the force-structure judgements that flowed from this. In particular, it dismissed Army's plans for mechanisation: it regarded 'Army's case as resting on premises that are at variance with Australia's strategic circumstances'.<sup>36</sup> It concluded that capabilities most relevant to that level of conflict should be included in the force structure only in limited quantity, 'having due regard to lead times for capability development and expansion, for both ourselves and other countries in the region'.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, the review gave priority to an Army capable of countering a protracted campaign of dispersed raids across the north of Australia, in which the enemy could deploy armed forces of up to company size. Australian forces would be needed to protect potential military and civilian targets and to react quickly to incidents before the raiding forces could achieve their objectives. The demands of such responsibilities would be formidable, and would require forces that were lightly but adequately armed, tactically mobile, and with good communications and good surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. The logistic support for these forces would be demanding.<sup>38</sup>

Just as the review was dismissive of the Army's case for a focus on higher levels of conflict, so too did it reject the arguments from some in the civilian policy areas that low-level contingencies would involve only terrorist-type activities, leading to a situation where the role of the Army would be 'little more than that of an armed police force'.<sup>39</sup> It chose also not to argue against the retention of a 'divisional' structure for the Army. In the context of potentially high levels of disputation on the central issue of how levels of contingency should influence priorities for the Army's development, proposing to get rid of 'the division' would have risked an unnecessary distraction.

---

36 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 138.

37 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 84. See also p. 89.

38 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 88. See also pp. 81, 82.

39 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 81.

And besides, if done properly, inherent to the division would be the flexibility needed for command and control, the allocation of resources and administration.<sup>40</sup>

The geostrategic foundations of the review gave rise to its proposal to base elements of the Regular Army in the north of the country, to facilitate exercising there and to gain greater familiarity with the area. It quotes the Army as saying ‘the environment itself is neutral and those forces which are best trained and equipped to operate and be supported in it will have the greatest chance of success’. The review’s preference was for ‘at least a Regular infantry battalion, with perhaps a brigade headquarters ...’, while the preference of HQ ADF was for a reconnaissance unit based on 2nd Cavalry Regiment, with an intention of establishing a brigade group in the longer term.<sup>41</sup> It is appropriate here to acknowledge the enthusiasm of the Chief of the General Staff Lieutenant General Peter Gration (later Chief of the Defence Force) for such an initiative (he had already been thinking along such lines), and the Army’s initiative in setting up the Reserve-based regional surveillance units across the north of the country, such as NORFORCE.

As the 1991 *Force Structure Review* subsequently set out, planning proceeded on the basis that the 2nd Cavalry Regiment would deploy to Darwin in 1993, followed by an armoured regiment and an aviation squadron in 1995, and an infantry battalion in 1998.<sup>42</sup> This led to the position today where the 1st Brigade, one of the Army’s three multi-role combat brigades, is based at Robertson Barracks, south of Darwin.<sup>43</sup> An associated suggestion was to establish a Northern Command (NORCOM). This was on the basis that, in an extended contingency in the north, there would likely be a need to establish a local joint-force headquarters.<sup>44</sup> Such a command was set up at Larrakeyah Barracks in Darwin, and continues there to this day.

---

40 Dibb, *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 82.

41 Dibb, *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 144.

42 Commonwealth of Australia, *Force Structure Review* (1991), pp. 23, 24.

43 For details about the 1st Brigade, see ‘1st Brigade’, *Army*, 3 Jun. 2015, at [www.army.gov.au/Our-people/Units/Forces-Command/1st-Brigade](http://www.army.gov.au/Our-people/Units/Forces-Command/1st-Brigade).

44 Dibb, *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities* (1986), pp. 92, 93.

## The Air Force

An issue for the RAAF was how best to achieve broad-area surveillance. Again, the problem was driven by geography: the huge areas of Australia's north and proximate waters did not lend themselves to surveillance by conventional radars, either on the ground or in the air. To meet these challenges, the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO, now the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG)), with strong support from Defence's policy areas but with only lukewarm interest from the Air Force, had been exploring the possibility of using high-frequency (HF) over-the-horizon radar (OTHR) — the experimental program known as *Jindalee*. This had started in the early 1970s and, by the time of the review, was showing great promise: 'there can be no doubt of OTHR's ability to provide valuable wide-area surveillance, although with some technical limitations.'<sup>45</sup> The review gave high priority to its continued development (not just for air surveillance but also in the technically more demanding area of sea-surface surveillance) and to planning for an operational network.<sup>46</sup>

By happy coincidence, Dibb was Deputy Secretary at the time that a decision was needed on the siting of the radars of the Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN), thus helping to ensure that its coverage would be consistent with strategic priorities.<sup>47</sup> Although the contractual arrangements for the construction of JORN were problematic (with the contract being novated after a few years), the operational network is said to be an outstanding success. It is a pity that security considerations do not allow more to be said publicly.

The review was more equivocal on the related issue of the priority to be given to airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft. While there was no doubt that they would improve Australia's air defence capabilities, '[c]urrent circumstances do not demand AEW&C aircraft',

45 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 62.

46 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), pp. 117, 118, 148, 149.

47 This was less straightforward than might be imagined, with an unseemly brawl breaking out between DSTO and Force Development and Analysis Division on how technical considerations might affect siting decisions. As might be imagined, Dibb was not amused by having to worry about differing views on the conductivity of black soil in central Queensland in wet conditions! There was also the occasion when, bombarded by claims of 'scientific fact', he retorted that 'cold fusion' was claimed to be a scientific fact too.

and '[t]he position should be reviewed after data on the operational performance of OTHR is assessed'.<sup>48</sup> In the event, it was not until 2000 that the government agreed to the acquisition of the six E-7A *Wedgetail* AEW&C aircraft, by which time technological solutions more suited to Australia's needs were becoming available and Australia's strategic circumstances were being seen in some respects from a different angle. This project, too, had some difficulties in execution but the capabilities now in service are said to be outstanding.

The issue closest to Air Force's heart was the future of the F-111C strike-reconnaissance aircraft, and the review was equivocal in some respects here, too. As the review commented, 'given the long warning times for contingencies that would call for the substantial use of strike capabilities, we need to exercise discrimination in determining the types and numbers of these forces'.<sup>49</sup> In brief, strike aircraft would have limited use in low-level contingencies and, while they would be more valuable in escalated contingencies, there would still be constraints on their use, with maritime strike being favoured over land strike. They would come into their own only in more substantial contingencies that the review and strategic guidance judged remote and improbable. At issue was whether the costs of upgrading them and keeping them in service would be commensurate with their operational and strategic value, or whether alternatives should be explored, such as an F/A-18-based option.

In summary, the review came down in favour of retaining the F-111, but with a 'minimum update program designed to sustain rather than enhance the aircraft in service until around the mid-1990s',<sup>50</sup> after which further options should be considered. Again, Dibb was Deputy Secretary when the Force Structure Committee (which he chaired) and then the Defence Force Development Committee agreed to recommend to government that the F-111s undergo a major upgrade.<sup>51</sup> The 1991 *Force Structure Review* expected that they would remain in service

---

48 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 132.

49 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 65.

50 Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (1986), p. 122.

51 The level of upgrade was probably more than the review had envisaged, but the proposal had been thoroughly examined by, and subsequently supported by, Force Development and Analysis Division.

until around 2010,<sup>52</sup> and the 2000 Defence White Paper imagined their retention in service until between 2015 and 2020,<sup>53</sup> but, in the event, they were out of service by the end of 2010.

## The Review Team

The review was a serious piece of work, of course, but there were some diversions along the way. For example, drafts of the review's chapters would sometimes draw the response from HQ ADF that the arguments 'were simplistic and naïve and lacking in professional military judgement'. At first, we worried about such comments but, after a while, came to realise that they signified merely that the HQ had run out of substantive argument against what we were proposing. Being old Defence hands, we turned 'professional military judgement' into an acronym — and allegations of lacking PMJ became a badge of honour.

The five full-time members of the Dibb team also met the criteria for entering a team in the annual Defence fun run: military/civilian, male/female, SES/non-SES. I can't now recall how well the team did, but we did all finish. There was also the multi-hour 'FISHEX' maritime surveillance flight in a P-3C from Edinburgh via Learmonth to Darwin, at the end of which a diligent air force NCO plus guard dog tried to stop Dibb taking a photograph of the airbase. There were endless references to and sometimes inspections of the standby emergency generators at many of the bases we visited, so much so that they became something of a review joke. There was the failure just after take-off of one of the Caribou's two engines when we were flying out from the *Jindalee* transmitter site at Hart's Range near Alice Springs. And the Air Force gave Dibb a flight in an F-111, including a phase in terrain-following mode, about which he never stopped talking.

When the review was over, we all went our separate ways. Dibb's personal assistant, Ferol Beazley, became personal assistant to Deputy Secretary B and then to the head of Australian Defence Staff in Washington; Colonel Bill Crews was later promoted to Major General

---

52 Commonwealth of Australia, *Force Structure Review* (1991), p. 28.

53 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000, Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 2000), p. 93.

and became Director of the DIO; Martin Brady returned to the policy area and later became Director of the Defence Signals Directorate and, after that, Chair of the Defence Intelligence Board; and I, too, returned to policy work, later becoming the Chief Defence Scientist and then Deputy Secretary for Strategic Policy.

As for Dibb, he completed the edited version of his review for public release and worked on the drafting of the first half of the 1987 Defence White Paper.<sup>54</sup> He was then appointed Director of the DIO and, after two years, was promoted to the position of Deputy Secretary B, the principal senior policy position in Defence. Dibb was the last person to hold this position with the responsibilities allocated to it under Sir Arthur Tange's reorganisation: force development and analysis, strategic and international policy, and programs and budgets. This combination of responsibilities was demanding but it recognised that the allocation of resources within Defence was primarily a *strategic* function, not an exercise in accounting. There were good reasons for removing programs and budgets from the control of Deputy Secretary B and replacing it with responsibilities for the oversight of intelligence, but it did weaken the mechanisms for ensuring that the allocation of resources within Defence, changing as necessary over time, was consistent with strategic priorities — a weakness that has continued to this day. More recently, the Peever Review has recommended that the responsibilities of the Deputy Secretary for Policy include once again oversight of intelligence and 'a strong and credible internal contestability function', for which read a modern version of the former Force Development and Analysis Division.<sup>55</sup> These responsibilities will be very similar to Dibb's in the early 1990s but which subsequently became much diminished. Then, in October 1991, he returned to ANU to become professor of strategic studies and

---

54 He was supported in this by Steve Merchant, later the Director of the Defence Signals Directorate and then Deputy Secretary for Intelligence and Security.

55 Department of Defence, *First Principles Review, Creating One Defence* (the 'Peever Review'), 2015, p. 25. The government has agreed, or agreed in principle, to this and all but one of the review's other recommendations. However, the review has recommended that Defence's Chief Finance Officer have formal accounting qualifications (*First Principles Review*, p. 26), thus allowing room to question whether it has sufficiently recognised the strategic nature of decisions on resource allocation.

head of the SDSC, making him one of the relatively few examples in Australia of someone who was equally distinguished at senior levels in both the public service and academia.<sup>56</sup>

## The Review's Legacy

For the decade or more following its publication, the review was strongly influential. Perhaps most importantly, it resolved the impasse of disagreement between Secretary and Chief of Defence Force, with both of them signing up to the review's proposals. The importance of this cannot be overstated. While the review put forward an orthodox interpretation of Australia's geostrategic circumstances and government-endorsed strategic guidance, it served to give significant momentum to the development of capabilities that were unequivocally consistent with this guidance. This influence was reflected in the concepts, priorities and programs set out in the 1987 Defence White Paper and in the 1991 *Force Structure Review*, with Dibb being closely involved in the drafting of both of these important papers. It heightened the recognition of the influence of geography on the development of the ADF and its basing, especially with respect to operations in and to the north of the country. At least until the end of the century, it served to guide the Army's perspectives and ambitions. It played an important part in encouraging a joint-force perspective from the ADF, rather than one that focused more on the separateness of the three services.

But the passage of time has changed in some respects the prism through which Australia's strategic circumstances are seen. The idea of the core force and expansion base had been developed at an earlier time as a concept with which to argue for levels of defence funding when, otherwise, funding levels would have gone much lower. Those times have passed, and with them the need for that kind of argument, although the logic of needing to plan for force expansion remains compelling even if neglected. Further, and to be blunt, with Dibb's

---

<sup>56</sup> An early publication on Dibb's return to ANU was his monograph *The Conceptual Basis of Australia's Defence Planning and Force Structure Development*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 88 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 1992), drawing inter alia on the ideas set out in his review, the 1987 Defence White Paper, and the 1991 *Force Structure Review*.

departure the ranks of those comfortable with such sophisticated concepts became too thin to win the arguments, with most other players preferring simpler ideas.

A characteristic of Australian strategic thinking in the 1970s and 1980s was concern about the nature and commitment of American leadership and the judgements behind it. This followed the outcome of the war in Vietnam and the US enunciation of the 'Guam doctrine' (also known as the 'Nixon doctrine'), which made it clear that the United States would expect its allies to become more responsible for their own security. Such reservations are less in evidence today, and Australia has followed the American lead in the first and second Gulf wars (Kuwait and Iraq), Afghanistan, and currently in operations against Jihadist extremism in the Middle East.

Additionally, Australia's prosperity and security depend critically on the stability of the current world order, to the preservation of which America's commitment and armed forces are vital. This is especially relevant in the Asia-Pacific region, with uncertainty about whether China, in seeking to advance its own interests, will attempt to make radical changes to at least the regional order. Australia, so the argument runs, should therefore plan to make a more significant military contribution to US-led operations than we did in the Cold War, where the locus of potential conflict was more distant from us.<sup>57</sup> This would argue that expeditionary warfare should become more influential in the planning of Australia's military capabilities than in recent decades. Some would argue that Australia is so naturally secure and its neighbourhood so benign that the defence of Australia is no longer an adequate foundation for Australia's defence policies, thus amplifying the case for an expeditionary focus. And others argue that modern threats of terrorism and cyber attack are so little constrained by geography that the geographic focus of Australia's defence policies should be correspondingly broadened. Whether those who put forward such arguments are always being impartial deserves serious reflection.

---

57 It should be remembered, nevertheless, that, even in the Cold War, Australia made an important contribution to the Western cause, for example by hosting the Australian-US Joint Facilities (thus making Australia a nuclear target (see p. 12 of the 1987 Defence White Paper)) and by conducting maritime surveillance against Soviet nuclear submarines.

Dibb addresses many of these observations in a set of essays published in 2006.<sup>58</sup> In brief, he argues for the continued relevance of the then current 2000 Defence White Paper. He notes that there are many potential flashpoints for major interstate conflict in the Asia-Pacific and that there continue to be instabilities closer to the Australian homeland. He accepts — and argues for — the need for some adjustments at the margins of defence planning in response to the threats of terrorism (at home and abroad), in readiness and, for example, in interoperability with the United States. But he rebuts those who argue that the risks of terrorism require radical changes to Australian defence priorities. And he dismisses as ‘strategically indefensible’ arguments that would focus Australia’s defence efforts on what would only ever be a small expeditionary Army, capable of little effect against a serious adversary yet requiring most of the Navy and Air Force to protect it.

At the time of writing, with the 2016 Defence White Paper still in preparation, we can only speculate on the changes that Malcolm Turnbull’s Coalition Government will make to Australia’s defence policies. It would, however, be a brave government that stepped away to any significant degree from policies that retained a strong focus on the defence of Australia. And besides, the country’s economic situation will constrain any more ambitious approaches to defence planning for the foreseeable future. But to the extent that defence policy moves on from what it was when Dibb conducted his review, so the influence of the review will fade.

Yet many of the ideas that Paul has promoted have enduring value. It is Australia’s geography that leads us towards a maritime strategy, with capable naval and air forces. It is Australia’s geography that leads us to differentiate carefully between priorities for maritime capabilities and those for the Army. And the nature of Australia’s geostrategic circumstances allows us to avoid the expense of large standing forces at high levels of preparedness, at least for now. In summary, the imperatives of Australia’s strategic geography need to remain the foundation upon which Australian defence planning continues to build.

---

58 Paul Dibb, *Essays on Australian Defence*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 161 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2006).

This text is taken from *Geography, Power, Strategy and Defence Policy: Essays in Honour of Paul Dibb*, edited by Desmond Ball and Sheryn Lee, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.