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The Challenge of Warning Time in the Contemporary Strategic Environment

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The Challenge of Warning Time in the Contemporary Strategic Environment

Paul Dibb AM and Dr Richard Brabin-Smith AO

Executive Summary

- ✦ The importance of greatly shortened warning time cannot be overstated.
- ✦ Acquiring a substantial deterrent capability must now assume the highest priority in the government's defence planning because it will reduce the dependence on the accurate assessment of short warning time.
- ✦ A central question is what are the contingencies that should be included in the basis for Australian defence planning? This report examines the specific contingencies related to Cyber, Maritime, Taiwan, Korea, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, and China.

Policy Recommendation

- ✦ Appoint a National Intelligence Officer for Warning
- ✦ Give priority to long range missile strike
- ✦ Make regular, detailed assessments of our US Ally
- ✦ Establish an Australian Directorate of Net Assessments
- ✦ Invest in increased preparedness of the ADF, and develop plans for force expansion.

Australia's new strategic policy, announced in July last year, states that Australia can no longer assume a ten-year strategic warning time for a major conventional attack as an appropriate basis for defence planning. We must now be alert to a full range of current and future threats. These include the possibility of high-intensity conflict in which Australia's sovereignty and security may be directly tested.

The importance of greatly shortened warning time cannot be overstated because it has serious implications for a much more capable defence force at higher states of preparedness. Because potential warning times are now much shorter, the new framework for strategic risk management by Defence will have to be very different from that of the past.

Contingencies with little or no warning carry severe implications for accurate warning indicators and the ability to make timely intelligence assessments. We now need a more comprehensive suite of warning indicators that embrace the implications of different levels of conflict: extending from coercion and "grey zone" unconventional attacks with little or no warning, through to sustained high-intensity military conflict for which there should be some warning indicators.

Australia now needs to implement serious changes to crisis management and how warning time is considered in defence planning. The need to plan for reduced warning time has implications for the Australian intelligence community, strategic policy, force structure priorities, readiness and sustainability. Important changes will also be needed with respect to personnel, stockpiles of missiles and munitions, and fuel supplies. We can no longer assume Australia will have time to gradually adjust military capability and preparedness in response to emerging threats. In other words, there must be a new approach in defence to managing warning, capability, preparedness, and detailed planning for rapid expansion.

As the 2020 *Defence Strategic Update* observes, these trends signal a security environment markedly different from the relatively more benign past – with greater potential for miscalculation, including state-on-state conflict that could engage the ADF.² This does not mean that there would be no warning of the possibility of armed conflict, rather that potential warning will be much shorter and possibly ambiguous.

This lecture addresses these issues, recognising that they are a revolutionary break with the past era of what were much more comfortable assumptions about the military threat to Australia.

Warning Time and Defence Planning in the Past

For most of the past half-century, warning times of ten years or more for a major attack on our territory were integral to the basis for defence planning. This conceptual framework gave rise to the concept of the core force and the expansion base, with force expansion occurring in response to intelligence assessments that Australia's strategic circumstances were deteriorating. Classified official strategic guidance for many decades relied on a timely warning ahead of serious threats occurring.

The 1987 Defence White Paper, *The Defence of Australia*, set out for the first time in the public domain a comprehensive explanation about how warning time was derived and its implications for defence

preparation. It observed that the concept of warning, and its application to Australian defence planning, had been given careful attention by successive governments. The concept had its origins in the *Strategic Basis* documents of the early 1970s, which noted that it would take many years for any regional country to develop the substantial conventional military capabilities required to sustain major operations against Australia. Within our region, "no nation has the ships, aircraft and transportable forces that would be necessary to launch and sustain an effective assault upon Australia."³ The White Paper observed that "these are among the most expensive and sophisticated forms of defence technology for any country to acquire. Their acquisition and introduction into full operational service could not be concealed and the development of the operational expertise to use this technology effectively in an assault on Australia would take many years."⁴

We can no longer assume Australia will have time to gradually adjust military capability and preparedness.



This central defence strategic planning tool of warning time basically continued over the following decades to the present. As recently as 2016, the then Defence White Paper went so far as to imply that no major attack on our territory was likely over the next 20 years.⁵ Scarcely five years after that complacent judgement, our strategic circumstances have deteriorated so much that they have caused a radical change to Australia's perception of potential military threat. That alone should tell us a lot about the uncertainty of our current strategic outlook.

Above all else, in the past our geographic position has provided assurance that we would have considerable intelligence warning of the possibility of substantial conventional threat. There are still significant elements of our geography that favour us – not least, our distance from the major centres of power in North Asia. Even so, China's militarisation of the South China Sea now increasingly threatens the strategic space to our immediate north. Prudent defence planning now needs to consider the possibility of Chinese bases with military potential being established in the archipelago and islands to our north and our east.

Australian defence planning has long considered that were a potentially hostile power to gain access to military bases in the South Pacific or nearby Southeast Asia this would have direct and important implications for our security interests. It would open a wider range of possible threats involving our centres of population and industry. Even then, any adversary would need to protect long and vulnerable lines of communication back through the Pacific. In the past, we would have judged that powerful US maritime forces would deter China from such a hazardous adventure. But in the coming years, that may no longer be the case.

The New Warning Time Defined


The classical definition of warning has three phases: political, strategic, and tactical. *Political warning* comes from the increase in state-to-state tensions that raise the possibility that military force may be used. This can occur rapidly in an unforeseen crisis or can accumulate across a period of days or months. *Strategic warning* comes from indications the enemy is building military forces consistent with a plan to use them. *Tactical warning* is the detection of the initial movements of the attack itself before combat is joined. If we fail to obtain warning, a surprise attack occurs that catches us militarily unprepared – with all the consequences that implies.

Such an analytical framework allows us to conclude that Australia now faces a very different situation with respect to warning. It is no longer appropriate to take the relaxed approach of ten years' warning for major conventional operations against us that has characterised Australian Defence planning for much of the past 50 years. Government policy acknowledges that such a level of prolonged warning time is no longer an appropriate basis on which to structure and prepare the Australian Defence Force.

Developments in modern technology demand that we include an additional new aspect of warning, which includes the possibility of little or no warning of cyber-attacks capable of disabling key elements of our society such as the Internet, electricity generation, water supply, air transport, and the financial sector. These are examples of the so-called "grey zone" threats in which it might be difficult to declare whether we were under deliberate attack or not – and if so from which state or non-state entity?

So, we now must now factor in a new definition of defence warning that has to embrace not only the traditional use of force but so-called grey zone activities in which the precise moment of attack might be difficult to detect. This calls for a radical new approach to warning and the sorts of intelligence indicators that may – or may not – confirm that we are under an enemy attack.

In Australia's current strategic circumstances, rigorously challenging credible contingencies – ranging from "grey zone" through to high-intensity conflict – should now be made an obligatory part of the policy advising process in the Defence Organisation. This will require not only a deep understanding of Australia's potential adversaries but also of the strengths and weaknesses of Australia's own war-fighting capabilities.



Developments in modern technology demand that we include an additional new aspect of warning.

The capacities of modern governments to gather and analyse intelligence are becoming ever much greater but the task of appraising potential enemies in forming net assessments is growing ever more complex and more difficult as the range of threats is becoming more elusive. We need more net assessments with actual political decision-makers playing a key role.

Warning Time and Deterrence

This situation changes radically the conceptual framework for assumptions relating to warning time. That is, the potential length of warning for the defence contingencies that should form the basis for planning for the structure and preparedness of the Australian Defence Force is now much shorter than for most of the past half-century. This does not mean that there would be no warning, as nations do not lightly decide to embark on campaigns requiring the direct use of military force, and in many circumstances, there would be a need to prepare for such activities. The key point, however, is that motive and intent can change relatively quickly, thus complicating the already-difficult task of intelligence collection, analysis and risk assessment. And in many respects, we cannot afford to assume that the unexpected will not happen. We are now in a period of continuing contestation and potentially quick escalation.

One way of lessening the risk of too much dependence on warning time and political response would be to develop a posture of deterrence in which Australia possesses highly accurate, long-range missile strike capabilities. This would be a policy of deterrence through denial. The *2020 Defence Strategic Update* advocates growing the ADF's self-reliant ability to deter actions against Australia's interests. The nature of current and future threats requires Defence to develop a different set of capabilities that "must be able to hold potential adversaries' forces and infrastructure at risk from a

greater distance and therefore influence their calculus of costs involved in threatening Australian interests."⁶ Longer-range strike weapons, cyber capabilities and area-denial systems are specifically mentioned.

This situation changes radically the conceptual framework for assumptions relating to warning time.



Acquiring this deterrent capability must now assume the highest priority in the government's defence planning because it will reduce the dependence on the accurate assessment of short warning time. Any credible future enemy operating directly against us will have highly vulnerable lines of logistics support back to its home base in North Asia. Having the capability to destroy an adversary's forces and infrastructure directly threatening us would greatly enhance our deterrence posture. Concentrating completely on warning is no longer acceptable. The probability that deterrence will work is reinforced if we have a more-certain ability to deny an attacker the achievements of its military objectives. Solid deterrence provides a hedge against surprise, raises the costs to an adversary of acting against Australian interests and, if sufficient, makes an enemy's attack irrational.

However, having an ADF deterrent force capable of repelling attack from its normal posture in peacetime without mobilisation, reinforcement, and troop movements would be very expensive. But having a deterrent force based around the concept of denial – as distinct from deterrence through the much more demanding concept of deterrence through punishment – should be more affordable. Deterrence through punishment ultimately involves attacking the adversary's territory, whereas deterrence through denial is limited to attacking the adversary's forces and associated infrastructure directly threatening us. The idea of Australia being able to inflict unacceptable punishment on the territory of a big power like China is not credible.

The bottom line for defence policy is that as confidence in deterrence by denial goes up, our dependence on early response to warnings should go down. In other words, it would be easier and cheaper to go to a higher state of alert with this concept than with one based on deterrence through punishment. There would still be a need, of course, to respond to warning indicators and to take advantage of whatever degree of warning were available. If we did not believe that there would be at least some warning, then large parts of the ADF would need to be kept at high states of alert indefinitely – a very expensive exercise and one that would be difficult to justify in normal peacetime circumstances.

In the final analysis, warning is a necessary but insufficient condition for avoiding surprise. While urgency must be given to improving the intelligence indicators for warning of an attack, we must also have decisive deterrent capabilities in place, as well as the capability quickly to move to a heightened level of preparedness. And it needs to be understood that without timely political response, warning by itself is useless.

Assessing Our US Ally

Traditionally, Australian governments have made few intelligence assessments about our allies. In the past, it has been considered improper to make assessments about the strengths and vulnerabilities of the United States. But given the recent domestic upheaval and unpredictability in Washington, it would be irresponsible not to undertake a well-informed analysis of where we think the US is going in its confrontation with China and Washington's support of its allies, including the role of extended nuclear deterrence.

We need to accept in our strategic thinking that America is now a more inward-looking country that foreseeably will give more attention to its serious domestic social and political challenges. It also needs to be remembered that the US has – from time to time – undergone bouts of isolationism.⁷ We do not think that is likely to happen under the Biden administration. But it could recur under a differently motivated future President.

Therefore, we need prudent analysis about how the US will react to its own warning indicators of potential military attack and what it would expect of Australia. In our own region, we cannot afford not to be fully informed about US perspectives on, and planning for, contingencies in Taiwan or the Korean peninsula. So, we need to assess US military capabilities as well as intentions.

Policy Recommendations

Our policy recommendations include the following:

1. A National Intelligence Warning Staff

In view of the radical contraction in defence warning time, Australia needs to appoint a National Intelligence Officer for Warning. In the Cold War, which was a very demanding era in which warning of a surprise attack was a critical priority, the CIA had an NIO for Warning whose sole task was to scrutinise daily the incoming evidence from intelligence indicators and subject them to critical independent assessment.



In Australia, such an NIO together with its Intelligence Warning Staff could be in the Office of National Intelligence. It would be important that the Intelligence Warning Staff include officials from various disciplines – and not least intelligence officers skilled in the interpretation of political, strategic and military warning indicators and with some of them also having a policy background.

The NIO needs to have influential access at the highest levels of decision-making in the Government – including briefing the National Security Committee of Cabinet in times of impending crisis.

2. Priority for Long-Range Missile Strike

We consider that in Australia's new and much more demanding strategic environment, priority needs to be given to creating a posture of defensive deterrence. This means giving priority to equipping the Australian Defence Force with a variety of long-range strike missiles, including anti-ship, air-to-surface and surface-to-surface missiles. It is reassuring that, according to the VCDF, Defence will spend \$80 billion over the next 10 years on long-range strike.

We now need to think in terms of missiles with strike ranges in thousands, as distinct from just hundreds, of kilometres. The Force Structure Plan specifically identifies high-speed missile systems – including hypersonics – to provide government with more deterrence options. The introduction of longer-range weapons will be critical for the ADF to be able to deliver credible deterrent effects.

There needs to be an increase in weapons inventory across the ADF to ensure stockholdings and resupply arrangements are adequate to sustain combat operations – including in high-intensity conflict – if global supply chains are at risk or disrupted. In this context, a sovereign guided weapons manufacturing capability will provide a second layer underpinning our posture of deterrence.

3. Assessing our US Ally

We now need to make highly sensitive classified assessments about the strengths and weaknesses of our American ally. We should assess US military capabilities, as well as intentions. We need to know what the US would expect of Australia in such contingencies as the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula. And it would be irresponsible not to undertake prudent analysis about Washington's contingency planning regarding China, including our vital interest in extended nuclear deterrence.

Contingencies


It is difficult to give too much emphasis to the consequences of reduced warning time. We said so in our ASPI paper of November 2017, and subsequently in our public lecture with Professor Brendan Sargeant in September 2018.⁸ This is such a vital point that it bears repetition, many times over. It is reassuring therefore that recognition of this reduction in warning time is set out in the government's Defence Strategic Update, published last year. The central point *now* is to decide what to do about it, and how quickly.

To assess the implications of warning time, as Richard Betts observes, defence planners need to address three questions: Readiness for **when**? Readiness for **what**? And Readiness **of** what?⁹ One way in which answers to these questions are connected is that they all have resource implications. There is a need, therefore, to set priorities. This means in turn that some potential courses of action

will get funded, and others will not. To decide between the winners and the losers will require analysis that is clear-sighted, and decision-making that is hard-nosed. The concept of *risk management* is integral to this.

A central question, then, is what are the contingencies that should be included in the basis for Australian defence planning? In what timescales might they become credible? What forces would we need to protect and promote our interests?

As in previous decades, we can differentiate between those contingencies where a strong response would be obligatory, and those where there would be a degree of discretion about how, or even whether, we responded.



It is difficult to give too much emphasis to the consequences of reduced warning time.

It is barely conceivable that an Australian government would not respond to direct attacks on Australia and our direct interests. Such contingencies could range from grey-zone activities such as cyber-attack, up to major assault on the Australian mainland.

Cyber

Australia has already been the subject of aggressive attempts to gain economic, political and security intelligence through cyber exploitation, by a variety of actors including China. In this sense, therefore, the warning time is, in effect, zero. In response, the government has strengthened our ability to withstand such hostilities. In addition, there have been cases of cyber harassment, such as interruptions to functionality through distributed denial-of-service attacks. Whether we have been subject to attempts at more serious cyber-attack, especially by foreign governments, is not in the public domain, although it is clear that such operations are possible.

The fact is that a campaign of cyber-attack could be launched against us with little notice, given the right level of motivation. The warning time for us to respond would therefore also be short. The Australian response would include enhanced assistance to those vital national institutions that were under attack, both government and non-government, and a campaign of retaliation, potentially to inflict major damage to the adversary's IT-based national infrastructure.

Is Australia prepared for this? In spite of the excellence of the Signals Directorate, we should be concerned that it would not have the capacity to be able *quickly* to handle a significantly expanded workload. There is a need, therefore, to have plans in place, thought out in advance, not only to conduct offensive cyber campaigns but also quickly to expand the cyber workforce.

The priority for maritime capabilities

With respect to more conventional campaigns, the nature of our strategic geography means that many of the forms of pressure that could be brought against us would be maritime in nature. This means that our principal response options would also be maritime. This observation is consistent with the focus, over many decades, on the development of the maritime capabilities of the RAN and the RAAF. We see this at many levels: capable air defence aircraft, airborne early warning and control aircraft, refuelling aircraft, surveillance systems (including the Jindalee OTHR Network, JORN), northern basing, electronic warfare aircraft, long-range destroyers, frigates and submarines, and much-improved communications and command arrangements.

The question is whether the readiness and sustainability of these highly potent capabilities are consistent with the reduced timescales in which Australia might now need to be able to respond. The challenges would be formidable: round the clock operations sustained over months not just days, reliable fuel supplies, sufficient numbers of aircrew, and sufficient supplies of munitions and maintenance spares, for example.

The key point is that there needs to be an explicit assessment of how, or whether, the current approach to readiness and sustainability would constrain the response options available to the government. Such an assessment would necessarily involve assumptions about the reliability of timely resupply, especially from the United States, and potentially at a time when US forces would also be operating at a higher tempo. In brief, ministers need to be left in no doubt about the consequences of their decisions for Australia's ability to respond to contingencies, and to sustain this response.



The nature of our strategic geography means that our principal response options would be maritime.

We would necessarily be involved through the joint defence facility at Pine Gap.

Taiwan

At least for now, the Chinese Communist Party should be in no doubt about the strength of America's commitment to Taiwan's security and its continued existence as a sovereign entity and economic partner. There remains, nevertheless, the possibility of miscalculation, or mistaken judgement, or inadequate escalation control following a minor incident, leading to major armed confrontation between the PLA and US forces.

It is easy to judge that an Australian government would conclude that it had little choice but to be involved, not least because a failure to make a significant military contribution would inflict enduring damage on the security relationship between Australia and the United States.

In any case, we would necessarily be involved through the joint defence facility at Pine Gap. Beyond this, we could draw on the extensive maritime capabilities that already command a priority for operations closer to home. For our contribution to make a difference and not be merely symbolic, there would need to be extensive operational planning and coordination between Australian and US forces. Some recent newspaper reports suggest that this is already happening.

Planning should assume a warning period of perhaps a few months. The key issue, as far as this talk is concerned, is whether Australia's maritime forces would be at an adequate level of operational readiness, and whether operations could be sustained.

Korea

Much the same arguments apply to Australia's potential involvement in the defence of South Korea against an attack by the North. Beyond the intelligence functions of Pine Gap, our most appropriate contributions would again be maritime in nature. However, Korea's distance from Australia would give our involvement there a lower priority than for contingencies closer to home, and the consequences of making only a modest contribution would be less adverse for our relationship with the United States than in the case of Taiwan. There is, nevertheless, an argument that we would have obligations under the armistice agreement that suspended the Korean War, although this is not universally agreed.

South East Asia

The range of possible contingencies in South East Asia is wide.

It's difficult to see that Australia would willingly become involved in the ASEAN nations' fishing disputes, or, for that matter, the defence of their offshore installations in grey-zone operations. But the threat of military action against ASEAN territory would be another matter. It's not possible to know in advance how the Australian government would respond, but it's clear that our interests would be more closely caught up in the sovereignty of, say, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia than that of, say, Cambodia or Laos.

Again, it's more likely that Australia would be in a position to contribute air and naval forces, and that the country being assisted would value such forces more highly than our land forces. Any involvement by Australia would need, of course, the agreement of the country concerned. In the case of Malaysia and Singapore, we would build on the collaboration, over almost 50 years, arising from the Five Power Defence Arrangements and the Integrated Air Defence System.

Indonesia merits special mention. It's the closest ASEAN to us, and its government's policies would be a major consideration in operations in which Australia's interests were at serious risk. It has a large population and economic potential, and a cultural predisposition to resist Chinese attempts at coercion or hegemony. Its Natuna Islands stand on the front line of Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea. Australia should continue to give priority to increasing our political and security engagement with Indonesia.

Contingencies involving direct Australian military assistance to the ASEANs are not a credible prospect in the immediate term. Relationships between China and the ASEANs would need to be much more tense than they are at present. Nevertheless, they need close intelligence monitoring to alert the government to the potential need to respond.

The South Pacific

A persistent theme in Australian strategic policy is the importance of ensuring that the South Pacific does not become dominated by a power that has hostile intent towards us. However, in the immediate future, operations to provide humanitarian relief, or, if invited, aid to the civil power, are more likely than those designed to counter the actions of a hostile major power.

The habits of consultation and cooperation between Australia and the Islands go back over many decades, including through the Defence Cooperation Program and more recently such renewed initiatives as the Pacific Step-up policy. These would form a strong basis on which to build in the event that the Islands' and Australia's interests were at serious risk. Overall, one thing we must not do is take the Islands for granted.

Other Contingencies

Other contingencies that could gain in relevance include those relating to Japan and India. These could arise through future commitments coming from the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue, especially if China's behaviours led to yet-closer cooperation between the leading democracies of the Indo-Pacific. The importance of close security relationships with Japan and India, and with Indonesia, would increase yet further if the US were to reduce its commitment to the area. The focus of such future cooperation would again be maritime, including surveillance and intelligence.

The China Contingency

Within the timescales addressed in this talk, we exclude the theoretical contingency of a full-scale Chinese attack on, or an attempt to invade, Australia. For that to occur, the fundamental strategic order in the region would need to have collapsed. Other countries, for example Taiwan, South Korea or Japan, are more geo-strategically significant for China, and much closer, and would be more attractive targets for Chinese attention.

Further, given the closeness of our alliance with the United States, we would expect, and China could not confidently exclude, large-scale intervention by Washington on our behalf. We note, however, that the extent to which America would come to our defence would depend upon whether it was already heavily committed elsewhere – such as Taiwan.

We exclude the theoretical contingency of a full-scale Chinese attack on, or an attempt to invade, Australia.



More credible would be attempts by China to increase levels of threat and coercion. For example, a Chinese naval task force might decide to “teach Australia a lesson”. It could seek directly to threaten our strategic space by operating aggressively within our 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone and inside our 12 nautical mile territorial seas, or perhaps even threatening our offshore islands, territories, and oil and gas rigs.

If China, in these circumstances, had already gained access to a military base in such places as Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands or Vanuatu, its capacity to project military force directly against us would be considerably higher. Access to such bases would most likely be necessary, were China to want to sustain high-intensity operations against us, because of the needs of logistic support.

Why do such contingencies matter? It's the age-old problem: the time taken to develop the high-end capabilities necessary for such operations is much longer than the period over which we can make confident strategic assessments.

A Directorate of Net Assessments

In summary, Australia's new strategic circumstances are demanding and complex. To avoid strategic and operational surprise in this new environment will require a thoroughly analytical approach. We believe that this would be best achieved by setting up a Directorate of Net Assessments.

The function of this Directorate would be rigorously to test credible contingencies. It would require a deep understanding not only of Australia's potential adversaries but also of the strengths and weaknesses of our own war-fighting capabilities.

It could be set up in the Strategic Policy area of Defence, with the understanding that it must involve a wide range of experience and aptitude, both civilian and military. If it is to have relevance, it will need to simulate high-level political and policy decision making in real time.

For comparison, the Pentagon has had an Office of Net Assessment since 1973, where its product has included long-term comparative assessments of trends, key competitors, risks, opportunities and future prospects of US military capability.

The function of this Directorate would be rigorously to test credible contingencies.

Thus our **fourth Recommendation** is to establish an Australian Directorate of Net Assessments. This would be in a strong position to contribute to well-informed judgements on the key questions about preparedness: for **when**, for **what**, and **of** what. It would thus improve the government's capacity for the management of strategic risk. Its target audience would not just be Defence but all those other players within the Machinery of Government who have a stake in these issues.

Our **fifth Recommendation**, following on from much of the previous discussion, is that the Government needs both to invest in increased preparedness of the ADF, and to develop plans for force expansion.

Governance

What are the obstacles that stand in the way of getting Australia in a better position for this more demanding future? They all boil down to a slowness to recognise the *extent* of the difference between the past and the future.

What about funding? Have we fallen into the trap of saying merely that the government should just spend more money to make the problems go away?

It's more subtle than that. The fact is that Australia has had it easy for the past fifty years. This has led to armed forces of only modest size, at low states of readiness and sustainability, with the Reserves not taken all that seriously, and a civilian defence workforce also of modest size and therefore finite capacity.

The contrast with what we have assessed for the future could not be stronger. It is not surprising that, in our view, defence and national security will require more funding than in the past. The benchmark for this funding is not what we needed in the easy years of last century but the more demanding future that we now face.

Many of the contingencies discussed above would be demanding across other areas of government, not just Defence. The intelligence services would need to expand, not just ASD, and so too would the policy areas in Defence and elsewhere, including DFAT. It is not popular, of course, to say this. But it is clear, from the past 25 years or so, that civilian support to the various operations that the ADF has conducted has come at the expense of other and important areas of work.

It is not realistic merely to say that civilian policy and intelligence staff should now be expanded. Rather, plans should be developed that would facilitate the timely expansion of such areas if the need arose. Perhaps the civilian equivalent of reserve capacity could be explored.

Perhaps there is also a cultural barrier that is getting in the way of coming to terms with the future. The campaigns that are most dominant in Australia's strategic memory all happened off shore (except perhaps the bombing of Darwin). Even those of recent years where our interests have been closely engaged were off shore: Timor Leste, Bougainville, and the Solomons. So, do we need more strategic imagination, to use Brendan Sargeant's expression, to recognise that, one day, the bell will toll for us, and not just some hapless group of other people in some other place?

Finally, what about the pace of defence acquisition? Defence's capacity quickly to develop acquisition programs of sufficient maturity to withstand public scrutiny is finite, as is industry's capacity to respond. On the other hand, it seems that the implementation of the 2020 Force Structure Plan is proceeding at a pace more appropriate to yesterday's strategic circumstances than today's. Timeliness of implementation is already a critical factor and would become more so in the event of further strategic deterioration.

In brief, there is much to be applauded in the government's 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the Force Structure Review. Our principal criticism is that it's not happening quickly enough. It looks like a case of *Festina Lente*: make haste, *slowly*. Far better would be *Carpe Diem*: seize the day. It is, after all, well within our capacity to do so. We just need to get on with it.



Perhaps the civilian equivalent of reserve capacity could be explored.

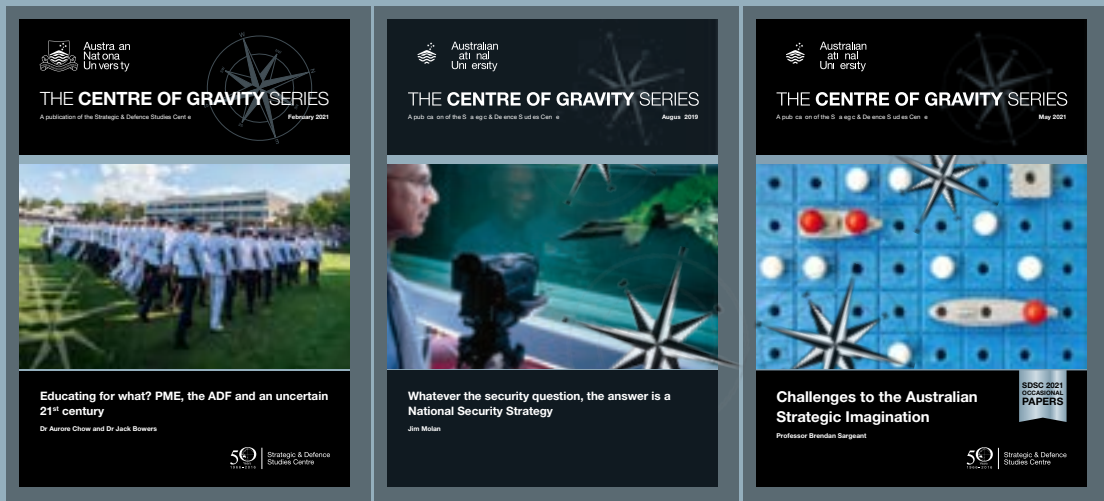
Policy Recommendation

- ✦ Appoint a National Intelligence Officer for Warning
- ✦ Give priority to long range missile strike
- ✦ Make regular, detailed assessments of our US Ally
- ✦ Establish an Australian Directorate of Net Assessments
- ✦ Invest in increased preparedness of the ADF, and develop plans for force expansion.

Endnotes

- 1 Paul Dibb, Richard Brabin-Smith, *Deterrence through denial; a strategy for an era of reduced warning time*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, 2021.
- 2 *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, p. 17.
- 3 *1987 Defence White Paper*, p. 30.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *2016 Defence White Paper*, pp. 34 and 40.
- 6 *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, p.27.
- 7 Charles A. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- 8 Paul Dibb, Richard Brabin-Smith, Brendan Sargeant, *Why Australia needs a radically new Defence Policy*, Centre of Gravity Paper 44, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra, 2018.
- 9 Richard Betts, *Military readiness*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1995, p 33.

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