

## CHAPTER 2



# AUSTRALIA'S DEFENCE POLICY

Understanding our strategic environment and the long-term trends that are changing the Asia-Pacific region is the starting point for the Government when it comes to making decisions about the size and shape of the ADF. The strength of Australia's economy is fundamental to our ability to provide for our defence. But budgets are always limited, so difficult choices have to be made about the priorities we set for our military forces. It is vital to have a clear defence policy framework that guides decisions about developing the ADF's capabilities and helps us to judge when, where and how we might use our military power.

The first duty of the Government is to guarantee Australia's national sovereignty, protect our citizens and promote Australia's interests. To uphold that duty, the Government must ensure:

- security at home, to keep Australia free from direct threat;

- continued favourable economic conditions, essential for a trading nation and to allow us to sustain our way of life; and
- a benign international security environment that promotes our national interests, including the safety of Australians overseas.

The Government's enduring strategic priority is to keep Australia and the Australian people safe from attack or the threat of attack, and from economic or political coercion. A secure Australia depends on a benign security environment; and in turn this depends on continued economic growth, and the security and stability of our allies and trading partners. Stability and prosperity at home allows Australia to contribute to the wider regional and global security environment, and so to promote favourable economic conditions.

The possibility of unexpected shocks to our security arising from some of the trends described in the last chapter is high, though the timing and effect of such events are hard

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to gauge. Defence policy must be realistic about the limits of size and scale Australia faces. We have to take this into account in the design of the ADF. For example, maintaining a mass army on the same scale as some of our neighbours' is not possible given our demography, workforce and relatively small population. So the task of structuring Australia's defence policies and capabilities is a challenging one.

Our defence planning will always include a focus on our region. We live in an uncertain and changing part of the world where strategic shifts are challenging our assumptions about stability. For example, state-based conflict in North Asia – though a low probability – cannot be ruled out. We must rethink the amount of warning time we might receive about a strategic shock and closely watch the growth of military capabilities in other defence forces in our region. Still, our geographic distance from many conflicts can work to our advantage, as does the fact that we have good relations with our neighbours.

It is the Government's policy that our armed forces must be able to defend Australia without relying on the combat forces of other countries. We must be the sole guarantor of our own security. It is not healthy for a country to become dependent on another for its basic defence. That situation would not be good for Australia or our allies. Further, if Australia was ever to be directly threatened, our allies may well be engaged elsewhere, and unable to assist. This may sound unlikely, but it was a hard-learned lesson from the Second World War.

## **WHERE AUSTRALIA MUST LEAD**

We must be able to limit the options of potential adversaries in our area of paramount defence interest. That means it is essential for the ADF to have the capacity to act decisively on security issues and be able to deter and if necessary defeat any aggressive act against Australia or our interests in that area. Our area of paramount defence interest

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includes the archipelago and the maritime approaches to Australia to our west, north and east, the islands of the South Pacific as far as New Zealand, our island territories and the southern waters down to Antarctica.

Being able to reach beyond our immediate region for a variety of defence tasks helps us secure our defence. Such tasks might range from assisting civil authorities such as the police and Customs, to adapting to challenges posed by increasingly capable adversaries and to participate in large-scale coalition operations. Having a strong military capability reinforces our diplomatic and economic power and it reassures our neighbours that Australia is not vulnerable to an aggressor that could destabilise the wider region. It also contributes to the strength of our vital alliance with the United States.

A further consequence of the need to be able to play a leading defence role in our immediate region is that Australia's forces must maintain a high level of preparedness – that is, the capacity to be used on operations at short notice. The greater distance our forces may have to travel decreases the time available to respond to any event – it takes longer to get to the emergency and often longer for allies to assist. So it remains in Australia's interest to keep the initiative. Greater preparedness also deters would-be aggressors by complicating their task. The ability to control our air and sea approaches, as noted in Defence 2000, has evolved through necessity to cover our area of paramount defence interest. If need be, Australia must be prepared to assume

the burden of maintaining peace and stability locally, not least as a bulwark for our own security.

## WHERE AUSTRALIA SHOULD CONTRIBUTE

Further afield, Australia cannot expect to predominate as a military power nor ordinarily would it act alone. Australia will work to create a benign regional security environment and pursue our national interests in conjunction with allies and friends. Australia will aim to make significant ADF contributions to coalition operations where our national interests are closely engaged. Our range of potential military contributions covers the spectrum of ADF capability, from its core task of war-fighting, through to running stabilisation operations and humanitarian response missions. These tasks will often be performed in close cooperation with civilian elements and agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, police and aid organisations. The nature of these individual contributions – their shape, size, complexity – will vary according to circumstance. For example, in the last few years, significant combat forces, including air and sea units, have been deployed regionally and to the Middle East. The security, capacity-building and training taskforces assigned under Operations Catalyst, Slipper, Astute and Anode also comprise significant contributions to the pursuit of Australia's strategic interests. The ADF has specific skill sets often requested for coalition purposes, such as special forces and air-traffic controllers.

Australia's national interests are not spread uniformly across the globe, but nor do they decline in proportion to the distance from our shoreline. For the foreseeable future, we can expect there will need to be a Defence focus on security in both the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East for the reasons outlined earlier: the Asia-Pacific is our neighbourhood, while our strategic interests are vitally engaged in the Middle East.

While Australia has a wide strategic outlook and a clear interest in promoting a peaceful global security environment, our limited resources mean that we must design the shape of ADF contributions to coalition operations carefully and without wasting resources. We must distinguish between

issues in which our national interests are directly engaged and those where we have a general commitment because of our broader humanitarian responsibilities. Examples of discretionary contributions could include deploying medical teams or planning officers to UN missions. Australia has made and will continue to make such humanitarian contributions, but these clearly engage our security interests in a far less direct way than operations in our immediate region.

At a time of big strategic change it makes more sense to work with others to ensure peace and stability and to build a robust military force able to deal with many tasks and roles. We can expect to see more security partnerships and increased



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cooperation with our regional friends and allies. This cooperation will range from local multilateral security assistance provided to nations such as Solomon Islands and East Timor, to participation in larger undertakings, such as our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, and our close cooperation there with the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and deployed NATO forces. These partnerships enhance the ADF's capabilities, boost Australia's international standing and contribute profoundly to the security of our region.

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## SUMMARY

Defence's enduring task is to keep Australia and its people safe from attack and from military coercion. Defence policy will always have a home bias – we need certainty close to home, and expect to lead in shaping the security in our immediate region. But we also recognise our interests often must be secured in places distant from Australia. In those circumstances, we expect to work with allies and friends. Our contributions will reflect the importance of our interests and a 'best fit' with the task at hand and the nature of the overall operation.

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