Is Australia's Defence Policy Right for the Times?

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This paper seeks to identify some of strategic issues that need to be considered in reassessing Australia's defence policy. While past Defence White Papers identified several such issues, these need to be re-evaluated in the context of a dynamic and complex global strategic environment. This will enable policymakers to ensure that defence policy is relevant to the future geostrategic environment and that Australia's defence forces are sufficiently prepared for contemporary and future challenges. Currently defence policy reflects a degree of institutional bias founded on past force structure models based on Cold War precepts and a war-fighting basis. There is a pressing imperative for defence policy to be reframed to reflect the way conflict has changed, factors that have influenced that change, and the resulting contemporary non-geographic transnational security challenges that often arise from non-military sources.

Security policy in the twenty-first century has altered, partly because the nature of conflict has changed. Competition between the United States and China, Russia's activities in and since its annexation of Crimea, North Korea's refusal to abandon its nuclear program, the Syrian conflict—its humanitarian crisis and shifting power alliances—grey-zone conflicts, and actions by non-state actors all highlight that the notion of security has changed. Security is no longer confined to the conventional military dimension of a nation-state and inter-state relations or confined to strategic balance of power issues. The situation is further compounded by complex trade relationships and dependencies, energy supplies and vulnerabilities, new complex non-geographic threats, as well as changes in the population mix due to regular and irregular migration flows, infectious diseases and the fragility of nation-states. Large numbers of displaced people are driven by conflict, climate change and natural disasters that affect food and water supplies as well as secure places to live.[1] Many of these issues also affect and shape the geostrategic environment and the operational space of Australia's defence personnel. All of these factors underscore the challenges for defence policymakers and the need to improve Australia's defence preparation, as well as the imperative to reassess the strategic underpinning of the 2016 Defence White Paper, its strategic defence interests and objectives.

Wars were generally short during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—they lasted only for about two years between the declaration of war and the signing of the peace treaty.[2] There were further changes in the nature of conflict following the experience of the two world wars. Cross-border wars were primarily a "small- or medium-power activity",[3] which meant the attention of great powers was focused on other types of

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1   Rita Parker, 'Unregulated Population Migration and Other Future Drivers of Instability in the Pacific', Analysis, Lowy Institute, 13 July 2018, <www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/unregulated-population-migration-and-other-future-drivers-instability-pacific>.

2   Stephen E. Sachs, 'The Changing Definition of Security', 2003, <www.stevesachs.com/papers/paper_security.html>

3   K. J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 25.

conflicts. In the period from 1946 to 1991 there was political discord, military tension and a series of proxy wars—where third parties were substitutes for opposing powers fighting each other directly.

The Cold War period involved several conflicts, the most notable were the Berlin Blockade in the late 1940s (1948–49), the Korean War in the 1950s (1950–53), and in the 1960s there was the Berlin Crisis (1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). The Vietnam or 'American' War, as it is known in Vietnam, which lasted sixteen years to 1975, was followed in 1979 by the Soviet War in Afghanistan which lasted a decade. During the Cold War period Australian defence forces were involved in several conflicts at the behest of Australia's allies. These included the Korean War (1950-53), the Malayan Emergency (1950-60), the Borneo Confrontation (1962-66), the Vietnam War (1965-73) and the Gulf War (1990-91).

Most of the armed conflicts during the Cold War period were between states; by contrast, since 1989 the majority of conflicts have been internal.[4] During the Cold War period there were enemy states and errant leaders. Hostile states were often treated from a realist's perspective as rational actors who could, sometimes, be dissuaded from hostile intent through explicit deterrence measures. It was a period in which game theory, brinkmanship and nuclear strategy were at the forefront of much decision-making. During this time, wars were often conducted 'unofficially'; that is, without formal declarations of their beginning or end, such as the Greek civil war in the late 1940s. Other conflicts could be described as a war in all but name, such as in Northern Ireland which lasted for decades until the historic Good Friday Agreement in 1998.[5]

With the break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century, the political and intellectual climate changed[6] but many policy analysts, scholars and security specialists were uncertain how to interpret the consequences of change. The geostrategic environment could no longer solely be defined in terms of sovereignty or territorial defence. The growing range of issues included within the security agenda challenged the traditional realist concept of security and compelled development of a different perspective to view and to frame the security environment to take account of ongoing change.[7] This included analysis of security in the context of public policy and, separately, the reshaping and reframing of national security policy with implications not only for security policy but also for defence policy, its force structure, and capabilities. At the end of the last century, this debate was characterised as "a contest between traditionalists, who would like to maintain the field's focus on military conflict, and 'wideners' who believe that security in the modern world involves economic, environmental, and social issues as much as guns and bombs".[8] Since that time, there has been a greater awareness of the imperative to accept that security encompasses wider issues and it is not just about great power rivalry

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4   A. Dupont, *East Asia Imperilled* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

5   The Good Friday Agreement 1998 (also called the Belfast Agreement) established a devolved power-sharing administration, and created new institutions for cross-border cooperation and structures for improved relations between the British and Irish governments.

6   P. J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 8-9.

7   D. Caldwell and J. R. E. Williams, *Seeking Security in an Insecure World* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), pp. 8-10.

8   B. Finel, 'What is Security? Why the Debate Matters', *National Security Studies Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1999), pp. 1-18.

and military conflict. But there remain elements of institutional resistance that influence defence policy and associated spending through a prism based on military dominance focused on conflict and war scenarios within a national security context.

A New Cold War?

In recent times the notion of a return to the Cold War era or 'new' Cold War has surfaced. While this might be a form of shorthand to refer to posturing by certain nation-states and their bellicose leaders, it does not reflect those times which were a period of tense nuclear stand-offs, proxy wars, internal repression and which were ideologically grounded— basically communism versus democracy.

Conflict continues in Afghanistan with an increased mix of actors, and Russia and China have both behaved in a much more assertive and threatening manner in recent years. Yet their behaviour, the ongoing Afghan conflict and the humanitarian tragedy in Syria do not constitute a return to the great power clash of the Second World War or subsequent existential risks of the Cold War period. Nor do they reflect the reality of today's geostrategic environment. Talk of a new Cold War and that way of thinking is "imprecise at best, dangerous at worst".[9]

Our world is vastly different from the Cold War of the last century. Today, there is no single 'threat', instead the threat is multidimensional. The strategic order and the nature of conflict have changed, the world is a place of geostrategic complexity and dynamic change, and globalisation underscores that such changes occur in an interlinked way. This is not to diminish the challenges posed by China's global economic ambition and expanding soft power or Russia's influence over its neighbours, its engagement with the West and involvement in regional conflicts, but to highlight that other factors and actors require attention.

Also, Australia and its role are vastly different now from that of the Cold War era of last century. Such differences need to be reflected and strengthened in Australia's defence policies; the shift in priorities by Australia's allies also must be recognised. For example, the concept of securing allied support through the contribution of armed forces has long endured within Australia's strategic thinking and been reflected in past Defence White Papers. But this support can no longer be guaranteed and any such future contributions by Australia must be reassessed critically and objectively. The shift in priorities by Australia's most prominent ally is set out in US Defense policy regarding the Indo-Pacific.[10] To some extent that policy document is based on the former US administration's 'pivot' or 'rebalance' to Asia initiated by President Obama. Of particular significance is that the policy also emphasises a change in relationship by the United States with its allies. It highlights burden-sharing in the pursuit of Indo-Pacific security noting "the U.S. offers strategic partnerships, not strategic dependence".

9   Michael E. O'Hanlon and Sean Zeigler, 'Order From Chaos: No We Aren't on the Brink of a New Cold War with Russia and China', Brookings Institution, 2019, <www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/07/13/no-we-arent-on-the-brink-of-a-new-cold-war-with-russia-and-china/>.

10   US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, RefID: 0-1C9F36A, Washington DC, 1 June 2019.

Shifting Norms

In the twenty-first century, evolving transnational norms demand a broader conceptual framework than that offered by the realist definition of security which by itself is too limited to analyse or assess novel security issues. Further, the realist approach does not allow for appropriate consideration of gender or human rights perspectives which are relevant to critical security. Much of Australia's defence policy has been based on the realist approach which favours a military perspective and accompanying big spend on equipment. Notwithstanding that Australia is committed to maintaining a credible hard power deterrent, a narrow realist approach is not a justifiable basis to analyse risks and threats in the geostrategic environment faced by Australia today.

Institutional norms and assumptions have been based on what our ancestral history has prepared us to fear: what we cannot control; the immediate; and what is most readily available in memory.[11] If this continues as the foundational basis for security and defence policy, it means that in the current and future geostrategic environment Australia is at risk of selecting particular risks for attention with the result that some risks are "exaggerated or minimised according to the social, cultural, and moral acceptability of the underlying activities".[12] In the past, those underlying activities were the ones that suited preconceived notions about security policy that preferred defence capabilities and equipment. That approach is not relevant for any planning about future capabilities and force structure because it does not include sufficient capacity to deal with contemporary transnational security challenges and non-geographic threats that fall outside conventional war fighting doctrine.

As subnational agencies, Australia's defence organisations effectively use soft power rather than relying solely on coercive means. Australia's defence forces have a well-established reputation regarding the work done, particularly in military to military education and training, the provision of humanitarian aid and disaster relief, and its peacekeeping efforts. But within an institutional defence context, these roles are not generally seen as 'core' business. This bias needs to be counteracted so that appropriate weighting is given to these important activities that enhance Australia's ability to influence.

Australia's defence forces have become and continue to be involved in these 'soft' or tangential areas. Correspondingly, there has also been a shift in norms where the use of military hard power and their coercive effects have also been applied outside state-on-state conflict. Such hard power has been utilised in areas outside traditional military engagement to achieve political objectives, such as irregular migration.

Irregular Migration

For several decades irregular population migration has been increasingly identified as a security issue for Australia and used for political leverage. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, irregular population migration has incrementally shifted from a domestic policy issue and been reframed as one of national security and sovereign defence, resulting in

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11   D. G. Myers, 'Do We Fear the Right Things?', *APS Observer*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2011).

12   V. T. Covello, 'The Social and Cultural Construction of Risk: Issues, Methods, and Case Studies', in B. B. Johnson and V. T. Covello (eds), *The Social and Cultural Construction of Risk* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1987).

the involvement of military personnel and equipment. In 2001 the Australian Government introduced its Border Protection Act, the Prime Minister arguing that the legislation was focused not only on preventing refugees entering Australian territorial waters but also on protection of sovereignty. In support of his argument, Prime Minister Howard stated, in part, that the legislation was "essential to the maintenance of Australian sovereignty, including our sovereign right to determine who will enter and reside in Australia".[13] Although the Bill was defeated and the Opposition challenged the government's approach, which it described as alarmist, the government of the day framed the issue in a way that both responded to, and played on, public perceptions of uncertainty and fear of asylum seekers. That fear was generated by the events which preceded the proposed legislation with the rescue of asylum-seekers by a Norwegian cargo ship, the *Tampa*, in late August 2001. In the subsequent months leading up to the Australian federal election in November 2001, the government continued to exploit and to frame the subjective perceptions of risk and uncertainty associated with prospective asylum seekers. The statement "we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come",[14] was used by Prime Minister Howard in his election campaign launch speech and it was a main campaign platform for the government, which was subsequently re-elected.

The apparent success of framing the issue of refugees and asylum seekers in this way was used again in the lead-up to the 2013 federal election. Then Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Tony Abbott, announced sweeping plans to fast-track the deportation of unsuccessful asylum seekers and declared, "this is our country and we determine who comes here. That was the position under the last Coalition government, that will be the position under any future Coalition government".[15] The Coalition was duly elected to government by framing the issue as a security one which demanded military involvement as part of the response to the perceived threat. The elected government subsequently introduced 'Operation Sovereign Borders'—a military-run, border security operation led by a three-star general aimed at stopping maritime arrivals of asylum seekers to Australia.[16]

This example demonstrates the way perceptions of risk, together with risk's implied uncertainty and association with threat, are influencing factors that shape public policy across a spectrum of issues including broader security ones. It also demonstrates the way in which certain risks are downplayed while other perceived risks are emphasised as a means of maintaining and controlling the group—in this case, the voting public. Further, it demonstrates the way an issue is reframed from a domestic policy one to a security one, and then reframed further to demand military involvement. Such reframing in 2013 held implications for the future role of the military and associated defence capabilities and force structure. Today, Australian military forces and other agencies continue to be involved in migration issues because it has been framed as a defence and security matter. Indeed, the 2016 Defence White Paper used 'Operation Sovereign Borders' as a platform to acquire more offshore patrol vessels for its maritime surveillance capabilities including manned and unmanned aircraft.[17]

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13   John Howard, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, Canberra, 29 August 2001, p. 30570.

14   John Howard, *Election Policy Launch Speech: John Howard, Prime Minister*, delivered on 28 October 2001, in Sydney, NSW, p. 9.

15   Tony Abbott, Press Conference Statement, Liberal Party headquarters, Melbourne, 16 August 2013.

16   Department of Home Affairs, 'Operation Sovereign Borders', n.d., <osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/>.

17   Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), pp. 53-54.

Framing

The framing process is a critical, if invisible, element of the policy process influenced by several different actors and changing variables, and it is particularly important in the development and implementation of security and defence policies. The way issues are framed and reframed is not value-neutral; rather, the way an issue is framed reflects cultural contexts and the socio-political construction of security issues. The way issues are framed can also change because there is rarely just one way of stating a problem, examining it, or working out its resolution—although governments are often reluctant to consider options that do not support or promote their political agenda.

The policy and security environments since the end of the Cold War have been reframed, and that has led to the development of different ways to analyse defence and security. This reframing extends to overarching global and national security policy where security, economics, trade, technology and human rights are interwoven, and which influence and shape Australia's geostrategic environment. But the way these issues are weighted often reflects inherent biases that are perpetuated in government policies.

The framing of risks, threats, problems, their causes, and potential solutions is of vital importance in policy decision-making. Australia's defence personnel are well versed in risk analysis, using it daily to assess every aspect of procedural, tactical and operational engagement and in other areas of their responsibilities. Yet, within a policy context oversimplification and mischaracterisation can lead to poor quality policy.[18] The equal weighting of the three Strategic Defence Objectives set out in the 2016 Defence White Paper could be cited as such an example. Those objectives do not adequately reflect the risks and threats posed by new, complex non-geographic security challenges arising from non-state actors or from non-human sources.

An added challenge found in inherent bias is that risks and threats can be framed to fit a set of predetermined constructs or issues—including institutional concepts of force structure and capability. This is particularly evident when past actions and institutional biases lean towards continuing the status quo. For example, in the past, the military dimension was used to differentiate between defence and security activities. In many instances that approach continues to be used to distinguish between perceived traditional risks and threats and those arising from contemporary non-traditional sources. Yet that distinction is not always mutually exclusive as demonstrated through the military-led border security operation where irregular migration is being addressed with a military response.

Infectious Diseases

The use of rape in war to spread infectious disease links a non-traditional security issue—infectious disease—with a traditional security issue—war. This reframing was recognised by the United Nations Security Council which voted unanimously for a resolution describing rape as a tactic of war and a threat to international security.[19]

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18   Adam Gorlick, 'Is Crime a Virus or a Beast? When Describing Crime, Stanford Study Shows the Word You Pick Can Frame the Debate on How to Fight It', *Stanford Report,* Stanford University, 23 February 2011, <news.stanford.edu/news/2011/february/metaphors-crime-study-022311.html>.

19   United Nations Human Rights Office of the Commissioner, 'Rape: Weapon of War', n.d., <www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/rapeweaponwar.aspx>.

This example further demonstrates an important distinction about global and national security today which has been reframed to include non-traditional contemporary risks and threats of a transnational nature—namely, infectious diseases. Such shifts in focus at a global level hold implications for defence priorities and its spending at a national level.

The nexus between disease and security is founded in the relationship between disease and warfare.[20] Disease among armies has long been a contributing factor to military outcomes,[21] and warfare has contributed to the spread of disease. Infectious diseases have the potential to be existential risks to a nation-state and the well-being of its civil-society and therefore affect the levels of resilience and human security. Australian defence policy does, to some extent, recognise the significance of risks arising from non-human sources, such as infectious diseases, but usually in the context of the effect of health on military success. For example, discoveries made near the turn of the twentieth century, including the tracing of the natural history of diseases such as yellow fever and malaria were studied initially in an effort to protect military forces.[22]

The end of the twentieth century saw increased momentum to reframe infectious diseases from purely public health issues to those of security concern. These related to the spread of new and existing infectious diseases, the continued growth of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and bioterrorism. It has been argued that three viruses—HIV, SARS and H5N1—have "done most over the past decade to place infectious disease issues firmly on the international security agenda".[23] Infectious diseases do not recognise sovereign borders and a traditional military response would be futile. These factors and others were relevant and continue to be relevant to defence personnel and demand explicit action within future defence policy.

While the inclusion of non-traditional risks and threats may not suit those commentators and proponents eager to engage in a quasi-Cold War scenario, it is a more accurate reflection of the contemporary geostrategic environment. Today's scenario is one where Australia's future defence must work on the assumption that it will have to do more for its own security—including dealing with contemporary transnational risks and threats which were referred to as "problems without passports" by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.[24] In the current and future geostrategic environment, Australia as a middle power, has a role to play supporting its Indo-Pacific partners and neighbours to maintain security and harmony in the region by addressing these problems directly. This also includes maintaining democratic principles and the rules based international order. This scenario which includes contemporary security challenges does not necessarily equate to, or indeed justify, the purchase of more military equipment.

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20   M. R. Smallman-Raynor and A. D. Cliff, 'Impact of Infectious Diseases on War', *Infectious Disease Clinics of North America*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2004), pp. 341-68.

21   R. A. Gabriel and K. S. Metz, *A History of Military Medicine*, 2 vols (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992).

22   G. Berlinguer, 'The Interchange of Disease and Health Between the Old and New Worlds', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 82 (October 1992), pp. 1407-13.

23   S. Elbe, 'Pandemics on the Radar Screen: Health security, Infectious Disease and the Medicalisation of Insecurity', *Political Studies*, vol. 59, no. 44 (2011), pp. 848-66.

24   Kofi A. Annan, 'Problems Without Passports', *Foreign Policy* Special Report, 9 November 2009, <foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/09/problems-without-passports/>.

Climate Change

Among the most pressing challenges that have security as well as social, economic and political implications is climate change. It also has global, regional and national consequences that affect Australia, including its ability to exert influence and shape the region. Climate change is a strategic issue that must be a critical factor in reassessing Australia's defence and security policies in the context of its geostrategic position and relationships with neighbours and allies.

The 2018 Pacific Islands Forum's Boe Declaration on Regional Security[25] identified climate change as the number one existential threat to the region, yet Australia has yet to acknowledge explicitly or consistently that climate change and Australia's national security are inextricably linked. As a result, Australia has a diminished reputation globally, and particularly in the Indo-Pacific region because of perceived climate change inaction, and this is reflected in the strained relationships with its regional neighbours.

Australia has recognised, but has not always acted on, climate change as a threat multiplier notwithstanding that there have been occasional reference and some public policy rhetoric about climate change in past Defence White Papers. In 2007 Chief of Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, noted that the Australian Defence Force faced security challenges that it had not previously considered, naming climate change as one such challenge.[26] This was at a time when the United Nations Security Council held its first debate on the impact of climate change on peace and security. Over fifty delegates spoke on the issue including a representative from the Pacific Islands Forum who noted that the Pacific Islands were already impacted by climate change citing the example of Cyclone Heta that had left one-fifth of the population of Niue homeless in 2004.[27]

The 2009 Defence White Paper optimistically mentioned that the likely strategic consequences of climate change would not be felt until 2030. Consequently, the White Paper did not include explicit policy action. The 2013 Defence White Paper was widely regarded as a continuation of the 2009 Defence White Paper, while the National Security Strategy 2013 noted climate change was part of "broader global challenges with national security implications".[28]

There was some progress in the subsequent 2016 Defence White Paper; it acknowledged climate change related disaster relief will increase demand on Defence resources particularly in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), but this was set within the context that the force is not structured around such tasks. That is, HADR is not identified as core business for the ADF because its primary role is conducting military operations. It is noteworthy that in August 2018, the Australian Chief of Army,

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25   Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018, at <www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>.

26   A. Houston, Speech to RUSI Conference, 16 May 2007. Media Release CPA 70515/07 Department of Defence, 2007-05-16.

27   United Nations Security Council, 'Security Council Holds First-Ever Debate on Impact of Climate Change on Peace, Security, Hearing over 50 Speakers', Press Release, SC/9000, 17 April 2007, <www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc9000.doc.htm>.

28   Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia's National Security* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

Lieutenant General Rick Burr, issued his futures statement entitled 'Accelerate Warfare'[29] focused on how the Army should prepare for war.[30]

The 2016 White Paper identified the risk that climate change would drive natural disasters and political instability in the Pacific. It further acknowledged that a rise in global temperatures would likely put more pressure on the Australian Defence Force's ability to respond. While HADR is not warfare, it can be argued that HADR responses contribute to Australia's strategic environment which is subject to natural disasters—with associated food and water shortages and displaced people urgently in need of assistance. As the Indo-Pacific region is one of the worst affected by natural disasters, the capacity to respond to regional disasters is a key role in how Australia influences the region. This is of particular importance given the increased attention the Indo-Pacific region is receiving from other nation-states and from non-state actors. There are implications for Australia, including its ability to provide support and aid during times of duress for its neighbours. These developments in the Indo-Pacific are of key strategic importance to Australia and are compounded because the region is among the worst affected both directly and indirectly by climate change. As such, Australia has the opportunity to extend its existing activities and engagement to support its regional neighbours.

Australia itself is experiencing increased climate related natural disasters in the form of cyclones, bushfires and flooding. As the numbers of disasters increase, so does the number of disaster relief missions that are likely to involve the Australian Defence Force. In fact, there have been occasion when more defence personnel have been deployed to assist with disaster relief missions than deployed at its height to Afghanistan. For example, Australia despatched 1,000 troops to support Operation Fiji Assist in 2016, about 1,600 to help after Cyclone Debbie hit Queensland in 2017, and almost 3,000 to help North Queensland clean up after floods in early 2019.[31] But, HADR is not seen as core business within defence and security policies although its effect is extensive.

Climate change itself does not cause conflict, yet extreme weather damage to electricity transmission infrastructure, transportation, communication and offshore installations not only impact affected communities but also are areas where Australia's defence and security are vulnerable. Climate change also puts pressure on natural resources which are critical to human survival. Food and water become scarce, basic health and shelter are jeopardised, populations migrate in search of safety and security, and conflict can occur as people struggle for limited resources. Such factors can drive political, economic, trade and cultural instability.

As noted above, climate change can act as a threat multiplier and can lead to transnational security risks and threats. It is directly linked to drivers of instability and strains already weak institutions, undermining post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding efforts[32].

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29 Chief of Army, 'Accelerated Warfare: Futures Statement', *Army*, statement released 8 August 2018, <www.army.gov.au/our-work/from-the-chief-of-army/accelerated-warfare>.

30 Zac von Bertouch, 'Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Trialling Accelerated Warfare Part 1', Army, 2 April 2019, <www.army.gov.au/our-future/blog/strategy/humanitarian-assistance-and-disaster-relief-trialling-accelerated-warfare>.

31 Pat Conroy, 'Climate Change is a National Security Issue', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 7 August 2019, <www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/climate-change-national-security-issue>.

32 C. Barrie, 'Climate Change Poses a "Direct Threat" to Australia's National Security. It Must Be a Political Priority', *The Conversation*, 8 October 2019, <theconversation.com/climate-change-poses-a-direct-threat-to-australias-national-security-it-must-be-a-political-priority-123264>.

While there has been some acknowledgement in the 2016 Defence White Paper of some effects of climate change, more explicit recognition of the risks associated with climate change is imperative. These factors need to be central considerations of future defence policy.

Problems without Passports

The 2016 Defence White Paper recognises that Australia's first basic strategic Defence Interest could be subject to "unexpected shocks, whether natural or man-made" and there is a need to be resilient to them. While the supporting Strategic Defence Objective notes terrorism in its various forms, other types of natural and man-made risks and threats are not identified.[33]

Contemporary security challenges can take several different forms: they are transnational in effect; often occur with short lead-times; and their effects are not always immediate. Consequently, they are "more intimidating than the traditional ones",[34] and generally negate the use of a traditional military response. Many such issues can move along a continuum from one requiring priority attention to a tipping point where they become a matter of security concern and subsequent drivers of instability. This stretches the options available to deal with these forms of risks and threats, and it challenges the effectiveness of traditional decision-making and the role of defence personnel and resources. Transnational risks and threats are novel in the way they are perceived and therefore framed and treated as issues requiring security attention by nation-states and international institutions.[35]

Myriad issues have been identified under the broad umbrella of transnational challenges to security, and to a large extent they reflect and have been framed by the changing geopolitical environment. Changing environmental and climatic conditions, disaster management, food and water scarcity, unreliable energy, and the spread of infectious diseases can all contribute to instability and conflict. Other factors include man-made stresses such as civil conflict, fragile and unstable governments, growing interest from external actors, and organised crime. Where several factors converge, they act as a multiplier causing instability among nation-states as affected populations seek other sources of food, resources, stability or safety.[36] All these factors must be included as part of any strategic analysis of Australia's operational environment.

In policy terms, contemporary transnational non-traditional security challenges tend to be considered as outlier issues that do not demand immediate policy attention. However, such issues do not occur in isolation, instead they are interconnected and demand attention in future defence policies. In a region like the Indo-Pacific, a lack of understanding of the interrelationships of specific drivers of instability can lead to poorly constructed policy responses and wasted resources.

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33 Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), pp. 69-73 paras 3.6-3.19.
34 S. Chaudhuri, *Defining Non-Traditional Security Threats* (New Delhi: Global India Foundation, 2011).
35 D. Caldwell and R. E. Williams, *Seeking Security in an Insecure World* (MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).
36 Parker,' Unregulated Population Migration'.

As noted above, many contemporary risks and threats arise from non-military sources; that is, non-state actors and non-human sources. Identification of the source of a contemporary non-traditional security threat or risk in this way distinguishes it from traditional ones—which are usually responded to militarily—and this helps to clarify the target or referent object. Many of these threats such as terrorism and cyber-attacks by non-state actors threaten a nation's sovereignty. For countries like Australia, these are real threats to the liberal democratic model and rules based international order. But these transnational threats are not in a mould best suited to a traditional military response. Instead, to address these issues Australia needs to reconsider a whole-of-government approach that will support it playing a stronger leadership role in the region, without relying on the US alliance to effect action against contemporary security challenges. Addressing these issues is more relevant to Australia's future strategic role as a middle power than attempts to become involved in a pseudo-Cold War environment at the behest of traditional allies.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset, security policy has changed from the Cold War era of the last century and so too has Australia's role. It is now a middle power in a strategically significant part of the globe. As noted by the Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds, "the Indo-Pacific is dynamic, evolving, growing, prospering. It is at the heart of the global economy. It is home to more than half the world's population". She also noted that while the opportunities are great, so are the challenges that have "brought uncertainty and complexity to our region".[37] There are now more challenges arising from non-state actors such as terrorism and violent extremism, and attempts by non-state actors to undermine sovereign interests have become more prominent as the century progresses. Transnational issues that do not recognise sovereign borders such as infectious diseases and irregular population migration also present geostrategic challenges. Actions by state actors operating in the Indo-Pacific also now require Australia to manage growing strategic competition for influence where democracy and the rules based international order are being challenged.

Australia's contested strategic environment requires different thinking and ways to address and counter challenges arising from non-state actors and natural sources. As noted by the Minister for Defence, "The Indo-Pacific is being contested in ways that go well beyond the conventional military terms".[38] While Australia is committed to maintaining a credible hard power deterrent, its future defence policies need to reflect that hard power is not always the most appropriate response for all future challenges, particularly those arising from non-state actors, nature, and complex high-tech conflicts.

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37   Linda Reynolds, 'ASPI-FPCI 1.5 Track Dialogue 2019', Speech by Minister for Defence, 23 July 2019, Department of Defence, <www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/speeches/aspi-fpci-15-track-dialogue-2019>.

38   Linda Reynolds, 'Keynote Address, Hudson Institute, Washington DC', 2 November 2019, Department of Defence, Canberra, <www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/transcripts/keynote-address-hudson-institute-washington-dc-0>.

Defence policies also need to reflect accurately the changing nature of alliances, particularly relating to developments of strategic concern in the region, as well as the concerns of neighbours and partners in the region. Explicit account of regional sovereign aspirations and interests is vital for Australia's ongoing relationships and future in the region. Australia's future defence must be based on the assumption that it will have to do more for its own security based on strategic partnerships including with regional neighbours.

To meet the contemporary and likely future geostrategic environment, it is imperative that future policies address entrenched institutional norms and assumptions that have previously shaped past capability investment. To some extent these inherent and often unintentional biases continue to frame policy formation and perceptions of the appropriate future role of Australia. There is an urgent need for an integrated and strategic perspective to achieve comprehensive and cohesive policymaking and implementation to enhance security and stability as a strategic priority for Australia. Such an approach needs to recognise that deliberate actions that aim to bring about change in a specific area often lead to unanticipated and potentially unwanted consequences elsewhere. This has been keenly demonstrated by Australia's past overall climate change inaction and reduction in development aid in the Pacific region which has led to tensions between Australia and its neighbours and partners. An unexpected result of Australia's inaction has enabled other nation-states to fill the void.

From a defence perspective, climate change can affect how it operates with changing threats and missions, particularly in geographic environments subject to more severe aspects of climatic conditions. The impact of sea level rises and flooding, ocean acidification, increase in extreme temperatures and extreme weather events directly impact Defence capabilities, personnel and equipment. A secondary level consideration to be taken into account is the impact Australia's defence operations have on the climate through deployment decisions and the use of its equipment and personnel. The impact of climate change on defence force structure is a necessity whereby decisions reflect environmental considerations as well as producing benefits in terms of cost and capability. Therefore there is an imperative for environmental costs to be given more emphasis during the policy development and decision-making phase as well as in the subsequent design, procurement and operation of equipment, and decisions concerning deployment.

Australia has an opportunity to focus on, and to be a leader in, environmental security associated with the climate related impact on national and regional security. Demonstrable actions of leadership include acting to mitigate climate change by ensuring the Paris Treaty is implemented properly so that real efforts are made to limit global warming. The effects of climate change in the Indo-Pacific have a real potential to destabilise the region. As such, the impacts of climate change need to be factored at the highest level—that is, in its strategic defence interests and objectives, as well as in all future military plans as part of core business, not only in the context of HADR. Future defence policy should reflect strategies that recognise climate change and utilise technologies that support mitigation strategies.

While Australia has an established record of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Indo-Pacific, there is a growing requirement for it to increase its capacity to assist before, as well as during, times of duress. This includes increasing existing actions that assist island nations develop capacity and capabilities to strengthen their resilience.

During times of duress the provision of timely food, water, and shelter as well as access to other resources and infrastructure will minimise the need for affected communities to seek these elsewhere.

Australia's leadership and reliable assistance in this way will alleviate pressure on communities, reduce the likelihood of conflict and lead to increased stability and resilience thereby enhancing security in the region. While Australia has an established role in HADR, and welcomes other nations providing assistance, it needs to ensure its position and role are not diminished by other nations seeking to replace it as an ally of Indo-Pacific neighbours. This can be achieved by maintaining and expanding defence cooperation with regional countries, through capacity building, infrastructure development, and support for governance arrangements that enhance the rules based international order and economic growth.

Australia's defence personnel are well positioned to maintain good relations with our neighbours but policy actions in these areas must be supported by a whole-of-government approach and not be the sole responsibility of defence. A holistic and integrated policy approach would facilitate overall security and stability in the region, an area of strategic importance to Australia and its allies. These issues and the changing geopolitical challenges in the Indo-Pacific region require Australian defence and security policymakers to focus jointly on drivers of instability and actions by powers outside the region. This broader policy approach will ensure defence capabilities are adequate to address these challenges, and Australia's role as a middle power is meaningful. A comprehensive national security strategy that moves beyond tactical and operational issues, and takes a holistic and whole-of-government view, is necessary now more than ever.

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