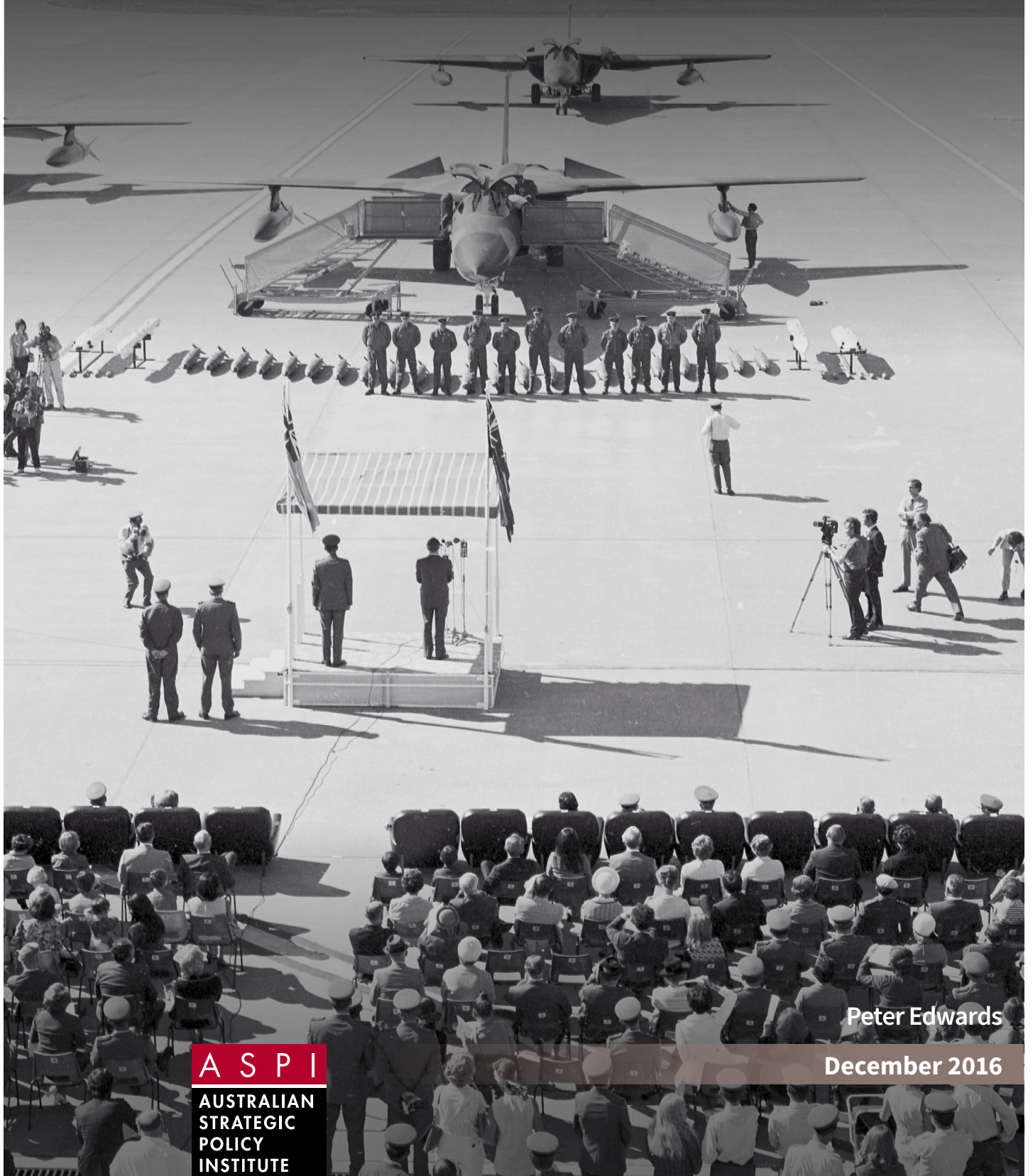


STRATEGY

A S P I

Defence White Papers at 40

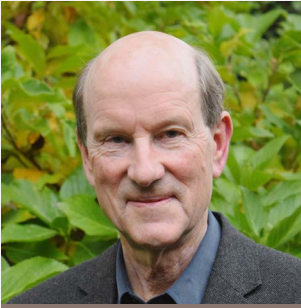


Peter Edwards

December 2016

A S P I

AUSTRALIAN
STRATEGIC
POLICY
INSTITUTE



Peter Edwards

Peter Edwards is a writer, historian and biographer who has published extensively on Australian and international history and politics. He is currently an Honorary Professor attached to both the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, and the Contemporary History Research Group, Deakin University.

As the Official Historian of Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts 1948–75 (the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation and the Vietnam War), Peter was general editor of the nine-volume series and author of the volumes dealing with strategy and diplomacy, *Crises and Commitments* (1992) and *A Nation at War* (1997). In 2014 he published *Australia and the Vietnam War*, a single-volume distillation of the nine-volume series. He is also the author of *Robert Marsden Hope and Public Policy* (2011), *Arthur Tange: Last of the Mandarins* (2006), *Permanent Friends? Historical Reflections on the Australian-American Alliance* (2005), and *Prime Ministers and Diplomats* (1983); co-author of *A School with a View* (2010); the co-editor of *Facing North* (vol. 2, 2003); and the editor of *Australia Through American Eyes* (1977). He played a major role in establishing the series of *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*.

Peter's books have won the Colin Roderick Award for the best book in any genre on an Australian topic, the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for history, the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for non-fiction, and a short-listing for the National Biography Award. Peter is a Member of the Order of Australia (AM), a Fellow of the Australian Institute for International Affairs, and a former Trustee of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. A former editor of the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Peter is a longstanding member of the Research Committee of the Australian Institute of International Affairs and of historical advisory committees in the Department of Defence and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

About ASPI

ASPI's aim is to promote Australia's security by contributing fresh ideas to strategic decision-making, and by helping to inform public discussion of strategic and defence issues. ASPI was established, and is partially funded, by the Australian Government as an independent, non-partisan policy institute. It is incorporated as a company, and is governed by a Council with broad membership. ASPI's core values are collegiality, originality & innovation, quality & excellence and independence.

ASPI's publications—including this paper—are not intended in any way to express or reflect the views of the Australian Government. The opinions and recommendations in this paper are published by ASPI to promote public debate and understanding of strategic and defence issues. They reflect the personal views of the author(s) and should not be seen as representing the formal position of ASPI on any particular issue.

Important disclaimer

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in relation to the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering any form of professional or other advice or services. No person should rely on the contents of this publication without first obtaining advice from a qualified professional person.

Cover image: Official welcome of the first batch of F-111s at RAAF Amberley, 1 June 1973. Photo courtesy Department of Defence.

Defence White Papers at 40



Peter Edwards

December 2016

© **The Australian Strategic Policy Institute Limited 2016**

This publication is subject to copyright. Except as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part of it may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise) be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publishers. Notwithstanding the above, Educational Institutions (including Schools, Independent Colleges, Universities, and TAFEs) are granted permission to make copies of copyrighted works strictly for educational purposes without explicit permission from ASPI and free of charge.

First published December 2016

Published in Australia by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

ASPI

Level 2
40 Macquarie Street
Barton ACT 2600
Australia

Tel + 61 2 6270 5100
Fax + 61 2 6273 9566
enquiries@aspi.org.au
www.aspi.org.au
www.aspistrategist.org.au



Facebook.com/ASPI.org



@ASPI_org

Creator: Edwards, P. G. (Peter Geoffrey), 1945- author.

Title: Defence white papers at 40 / Peter Edwards.

ISBN: 9781925229271 (paperback)

Series: Strategy (Australian Strategic Policy Institute)

Subjects: Australia. Department of Defence.

National security--Australia.

Australia--Defenses--History.

Australia--Military policy.

Australia--Strategic aspects.

Other Creators/Contributors:

Australian Strategic Policy Institute, issuing body.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	5
Introduction	
CHAPTER 2	6
Postwar Australian defence	
CHAPTER 3	8
The 1960s: <i>Konfrontasi</i> and Vietnam	
CHAPTER 4	11
The 1970s: from Guam to the first Defence White Paper	
CHAPTER 5	16
The 1980s: the Defence White Paper of 1987 and the Dibb Review	
CHAPTER 6	19
After Beazley: five Defence White Papers in 22 years	
CONCLUSIONS	23
REFERENCES	26
ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS	27



Minister for Defence the Hon Marise Payne MP, speaking at the launch of the 2016 Defence White Paper at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra. On 25 February 2016, the Prime Minister, The Hon Malcolm Turnbull, MP, and the Minister for Defence released the 2016 Defence White Paper, the Integrated Investment Program and the Defence Industry Policy Statement. Photo courtesy Department of Defence.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Defence White Paper brought down earlier this year (DWP 2016), the seventh of its kind, appeared shortly before the 40th anniversary of the first, which was tabled in parliament by the Defence Minister, James (later Sir James) Killen, in November 1976. For a governmental practice as for an individual, a 40th anniversary is a good time to stand back and assess the past, present and future. How is it that Australia managed for the first 75 years after Federation without a Defence White Paper and then produced seven in 40 years, the last three within seven years? How have the White Papers evolved over this time? What do they now achieve, and for which constituencies? Are they still a worthwhile tool for good governance, or might there be better ways of achieving their purpose that are more appropriate to the demands of the 21st century?

This paper looks in some detail at the context in which the first and second Defence White Papers (DWP 1976 and DWP 1987) were produced. It then surveys the next five more briefly, before making some proposals for the future.

The purposes of White Papers

In Westminster-style democracies, White Papers are major statements, tabled in parliament, in which the government of the day sets out a major new direction or development in its policy. For most of the 20th century, British White Papers were used not as periodic updates but as statements of long-term intentions on major issues, such as the 1922 and 1939 White Papers on the British mandate in Palestine. Those responsible for Australian defence policy in the decade before 1976 probably had in mind especially the British Defence White Paper of 1966 which, with subsequent revisions, outlined major changes in both global strategy and the structure of Britain's armed services.

For most of the 20th century, Australian governments similarly reserved White Papers for major statements on long-term policy development. For example, the 1945 White Paper on Full Employment set full employment as the primary target of economic policy. Before 1976, no Australian Government produced a White Paper on defence, even at times when it might have been appropriate, such as before the *Defence Act 1903*, which set out the basis for the new Commonwealth's policies, or after either of the two world wars, as the government of the day sought to frame strategic policies for the postwar era. It was only in the aftermath of the Vietnam War that the first Defence White Paper was produced to meet the particular circumstances that then applied to Australian strategic and defence policy. To understand those circumstances, we need to go back 30 years.

CHAPTER 2

Postwar Australian defence

For two decades after 1945, Australian defence policy and policymaking were governed by structures and attitudes inherited from World War II. The government's strategic policies were shaped largely by the chiefs of the three armed services, with the Defence Department Secretary, Sir Frederick Shedden, exercising considerable influence. Shedden's strategic views had been formed when he worked with the Committee of Imperial Defence in London in the 1930s, and he was closely involved in the wartime relationships of prime ministers Robert Menzies and John Curtin with British and American leaders, especially General Douglas MacArthur. The postwar papers produced by Shedden and the service chiefs, including *The strategic basis of Australian defence policy* and other policy statements, owed much to ideas from Australia's main allies, principally Britain at first but increasingly the US. These papers and other assessments remained classified. Parliamentary debates were conducted in broad terms: the public generally accepted that high-level strategic matters should be handled in secret by senior ministers and their military advisers.

Some challenges to the traditional views on policy and policymaking began to emerge in the 1950s from a young and inexperienced but increasingly effective and confident Department of External Affairs (as Foreign Affairs was known until 1970). Departmental officials, and often their ministers, thought that the Menzies government and its military advisers placed too much reliance on our alliance relationships, most notably the Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (the ANZUS Treaty) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The diplomats wanted the government to give greater emphasis to working as closely as possible with Australia's regional neighbours, many of which were gaining independence from the British, Dutch and French empires.

Defence was run by a group of six departments—Defence (sometimes known as Defence Central), Navy, Army, Air, Supply and Defence Production. All were based in Melbourne, at some distance from their political masters and other departments, until they moved in several stages to Canberra in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Each service had its own department and minister, as well as a uniformed chief of staff. The service ministers were at the tail-end of the ministerial hierarchy, and they had less access to information or influence on policy decisions than the service chiefs over whom they were supposed to exercise political control. While the governance arrangements varied, each service was effectively managed by a board of senior officers. The services developed their own plans and acquisition proposals, shaped by their own strategic views.

The structure, in short, institutionalised interservice rivalry. The Chiefs of Staffs Committee was frequently the site of contest rather than of coordination, even after the government appointed a chairman. While the chairman outranked the three service chiefs, by four stars to three, he was only a chairman, not a commander. The three chiefs remained the effective leaders of the military. All three services continued to plan to operate primarily in single-service coalitions led by a major ally, rather than in joint operations with the other Australian services.

Senior officers, especially in the RAN and RAAF, often seemed more interested in, and better informed about, developments affecting their counterparts in Britain or the US than their brother services in Australia.

One significant change was made in the early postwar years. In 1948, the government created, for the first time, a standing army, including the three infantry battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR). From then on, the central element in any Army commitments that the government would make would be not the great armies of the two world wars, formed by citizens recruited 'for the duration', but one or more of the small but professionally trained and equipped RAR battalions.

Major defence decisions in the 1950s were often taken in reaction to specific requests from London or, less commonly, Washington.

Major defence decisions in the 1950s were often taken in reaction to specific requests from London or, less commonly, Washington. Prime Minister Robert Menzies would generally call a meeting of the ministers and departmental heads of the Prime Minister's, Defence and External Affairs departments. As the Minister for External Affairs was often overseas and the Secretary of Defence was in Melbourne, decisions were often taken by just four men, and the Prime Minister's views were dominant. Committees designed to better coordinate official advice and ministerial decisions were gradually formed. At the most senior official level, the Defence Committee was chaired by the Secretary of Defence and included the three service chiefs and the civilian heads of the Prime Minister's, External Affairs and Treasury departments. Not until the early 1960s was a small ministerial committee, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, formed. Given the cumbersome structures and internal rivalries in the Defence group of departments, their contribution to discussions was often limited to indicating what, very limited, elements the services could offer in a particular crisis. Advice on broader strategic issues was seldom forthcoming, and the External Affairs Secretary, Arthur (from 1959, Sir Arthur) Tange, often complained that his department was required to do Defence's thinking.

During this time, Australia made four military commitments—to the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s and to the Indonesian Confrontation and the Vietnam War in the 1960s. All were in the Asia-Pacific region, and the last three were in Southeast Asia. In accordance with the strategy that became known as 'forward defence', Australia committed small professional forces to coalitions led by either Britain or the US. Menzies and his cabinet made it clear, to Australians and to allies, that they would commit forces only to this region and not to the Middle East or other distant battlefields, and that forces would only be committed alongside British or American forces or, preferably (as in Korea), both. Australian forces would be committed in order to keep our powerful but distant allies engaged in the region because, in the government's view, Australia didn't have sufficient resources to defend its territorial responsibilities (which included the eastern half of New Guinea) and the adjacent region without the much greater military and logistic capabilities of its allies.

In the late 1950s, the civilian and military officials of the Defence Committee noted that Australian and American policies towards Indonesia were drawing apart. They formed the view that Australia couldn't always rely on American assistance in this region and urged the government to give the Australian defence forces a greater degree of independent capacity. Cabinet firmly rejected the idea. Ministers evidently considered that greater self-reliance would be too costly and would be seen by the electorate as 'downgrading ANZUS'. After the Korean War ended in 1953, the government had placed a low ceiling on defence expenditure, despite criticism from London and Washington that Canberra wasn't taking an adequate share of the burden. In Menzies's view, Australia was not fighting 'other people's wars' but using its small forces, and its political and diplomatic rhetoric, to encourage powerful allies to fight Australia's wars.

CHAPTER 3

The 1960s: *Konfrontasi* and Vietnam

The strategy was successful in the 1950s, which was most clearly shown by the defeat of the communist insurgency in Malaya, but began to fall apart in the early 1960s when Australia's two 'great and powerful friends' pulled in different directions. Britain sought assistance in combating Indonesian President Sukarno's campaign of *Konfrontasi* or confrontation against the new federation of Malaysia, but remained determined not to become engaged in the developing conflict in Vietnam. The Americans, on the other hand, saw South Vietnam as the crucial battleground in the Southeast Asian theatre of the Cold War, while urging Australia and its partners, Britain, Malaysia and New Zealand, to exercise extreme restraint against the Indonesians in order not to drive them even closer to Beijing. Australia committed RAAF aircraft, Army advisers, Army engineers and other elements to the two conflicts, but both allies were clearly looking for 'boots on the ground'. Under continuing pressure from London and Washington, the Menzies government reluctantly agreed to expand the size and capabilities of the three services, but without a clear direction. When the services were asked for advice on the desired improvements, Tange described their response as 'three shopping lists' with no strategic coherence.

It gradually emerged that Menzies and his most influential civilian advisers saw the principal need as a larger Army, so that Australia could, if required, commit troops to any or all of three contingencies:

- an escalation of Confrontation from a low-level conflict in Borneo
- an expansion of Confrontation to engage Australian forces across the border between West New Guinea, recently incorporated into Indonesia, and the territories on the eastern side, still administered by Australia
- engagement in mainland Southeast Asia, such as in South Vietnam or Thailand.

The combination of these three potential commitments led the government to introduce a selective form of compulsory military service, including a commitment for overseas service. While a number of measures were taken to expand all three services, the introduction of conscription dominated public debate until the system was abandoned in 1972. Although the first 'nashos' wouldn't be available for service until 1966, the decision to introduce conscription allowed the government to take the crucial step of committing one RAR battalion to Confrontation and another to Vietnam, both in the early months of 1965. At that time, most Australians were more concerned about the Indonesian–Malaysian Confrontation than about the political turmoil and potential collapse of the anticommunist government in South Vietnam. The introduction of conscription and the other defence measures were seen in the context of a potentially escalated conflict with Indonesia. Few foresaw that Confrontation would end before it was necessary to send conscripts there, while the escalation of the Vietnam conflict and the dispatch of conscripts there would generate intense controversy for the next decade.

Although many crucial decisions on both the Confrontation and Vietnam commitments were taken at the same time and by very largely the same people, the policymaking processes were markedly different. The decision-making on Confrontation, like that on the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s, demonstrated skilful political, diplomatic and military statecraft. The Australian Government, while encouraging its British ally to remain engaged in the region,

exercised caution in responding to requests for troops, based on its own political and military assessments. Australians at all levels were reasonably well informed on social, political and economic developments in Malaysia and Indonesia. Australian diplomats conducted effective diplomacy in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, distancing Australia from the British 'neo-colonialism' that Sukarno denounced, while firmly rebuffing Sukarno's ambitions. The Australian Government carefully controlled the size and duration of the commitments and ensured that the troops operated under command and control arrangements, and employed operational methods and tactical doctrines, of which the government approved. Even while Australian and Indonesian forces were engaged in combat, with some casualties, Australia maintained diplomatic, aid, trade and educational links with Jakarta, and officers from the two militaries even attended each other's staff colleges. For their part, the Australian RAR and Special Air Service units operated with discretion as well as military skill, reinforcing the message that Australia wouldn't allow the Confrontation campaign to succeed but didn't want to prejudice its long-term relationship with such an important neighbour. This well-coordinated political, military and diplomatic statecraft did not come easily, but was the result of intense discussion and vigorous debate involving several ministers and their departmental advisers.

Similar comments couldn't be made about the decision-making that led to the Vietnam commitment. Australians, from senior ministers and their advisers to the man or woman in the street, knew far less about the former French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) than they did about Malaysia or Indonesia. Australia had no diplomatic or military representatives in Hanoi or Beijing and so had no basis for making independent judgements on developments there. In this case, while ostensibly using the same procedures, Menzies controlled the policymaking process to ensure his desired outcome. Dominating his cabinet, his party and the parliament, he was able to sideline those officials or ministers who counselled caution or sought to do so. For official advice, and to represent Australia at crucial meetings with the Americans, he relied principally on two senior military officers, both of whom reinforced his own views. The Americans had no clear strategy and had asked only for Australia to increase its contingent of Army advisers, but Menzies virtually thrust a battalion of troops on to them. Minimal attention was given to the commitment's duration, its size or the operational methods to be used. Tactical approaches and other operational methods caused considerable tensions between American and Australian military leaders in Vietnam, and the original commitment of one battalion was raised to a taskforce of three battalions and other Army units, as well as RAN and RAAF components. The command and control arrangements were complex and gave rise to further tensions between the numerous nations and services represented in Vietnam. By the end of the 1960s, the government was required to raise nine RAR battalions in order to have three battalions serving in Vietnam at any given time.

The intense controversy generated by the Vietnam War, and especially its association with the selective system of conscription, came as a shock to many Australians.

The intense controversy generated by the Vietnam War, and especially its association with the selective system of conscription, came as a shock to many Australians. During the 1950s and early 1960s, there had been little debate on foreign and defence policies. The electorate seemed generally to accept that Menzies was right to give strong support to the Western powers in the Cold War and that he was ensuring Australia's security by maintaining good relations with Britain and the US, both directly and through alliances such as ANZUS and SEATO. The Vietnam commitment was accepted at first, but a protest movement became increasingly prominent and assertive from 1968, reaching a peak with the Moratorium demonstrations in 1970–71, in which tens of thousands participated. Debates between the Old Left and the New Left over Vietnam and conscription, as well as other movements dedicated to the liberation of women, Indigenous Australians and homosexuals, dominated political discourse in parliaments, universities and even schools and other traditionally non-political institutions. These highly public

arguments tended to obscure the fact that some other Australians, by no means confined to the political left, had their own reasons to be dissatisfied with the way that Australia formed and implemented its strategic and defence policies.

In 1965, TB Millar, a former Army officer with an academic appointment at the Australian National University (ANU), published a book entitled simply *Australia's defence*. The following year, Millar established and became the first head of Australia's first defence think tank, the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC). Millar wasn't the only conservative who wondered about the wisdom of the Vietnam commitment, not for the reasons expressed with increasing vehemence by the moderate and extreme left, but simply because it was severely stretching Australia's limited defence resources, especially as forces were already committed to Confrontation. Among other things, Millar's book pioneered the practice of measuring Australia's commitment to defence by measuring defence expenditure as a proportion of the entire economy, not just the annual budget, using the measure of gross domestic product (GDP). More generally, the SDSC established the concept, new to Australia, that defence and strategic policies were legitimate subjects for independent, scholarly analysis and debate, rather than being the domain of a handful of policymakers who had exclusive access to classified information.

Unfortunately, however, rigorous and scholarly debate over strategic and defence issues was often submerged beneath the intense controversies over the Vietnam War and conscription in the late 1960s and early 1970s. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, there was widespread and often visceral reaction against anything that could be associated with 'Vietnam'—the name of the country being used to refer to the war—including the strategy of forward defence, the American alliance, the dispatch of expeditionary forces to fight alongside powerful allies, or a military response to the revolutionary forces gaining power in Asia.

In this context, Australia's Vietnam commitment was portrayed as an expeditionary force sent to a distant theatre in order to support the global interests and authority of our principal ally—comparable with, for example, the New South Wales contingent sent to the Sudan in the 1880s. In fact, forward defence had been focused entirely on Southeast Asia, a region of clear strategic interest to Australia. The distance from Darwin to Saigon is the same as that from Darwin to Hobart, and an enemy power's ability to use airfields in South Vietnam had been a major element in the fall of Singapore in 1942, which was arguably Australia's greatest strategic disaster. But in the context of the post-Vietnam reaction, many Australians saw any commitment outside Australian territory, or the islands and peninsulas to the immediate north, as unacceptable. Phrases such as 'continental defence' and 'fortress Australia' entered public discourse.

Moreover, the Vietnam commitment was portrayed as if it had been a response to American pressure—the payment of a premium on Australia's strategic insurance with the US. That was part, but only part, of the reasoning behind the commitment. Most Australians failed to understand the extent to which Menzies had been urging the Americans to commit forces to Vietnam, in what he considered to be Australia's interests.

CHAPTER 4

The 1970s: from Guam to the first Defence White Paper

After the Vietnam War, the US was seen as weak and discredited. Many Americans thought their nation had been humiliated by its first military defeat, at the hands of a relatively small Asian nation. The US would suffer further humiliation later in the 1970s, when a number of Americans were held hostage in Iran and an attempt to release them failed spectacularly. The moral standing of the US as a democratic model was undermined by the fall of President Nixon in the Watergate crisis and successive revelations by congressional committees of improper actions by the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Even before the crises of the 1970s, a statement by President Nixon in 1969, later elevated to the status of the 'Guam doctrine' and then the 'Nixon doctrine', told allies that they would have to rely less on the US for their defence and more on their own efforts. This had a dramatic effect on both official and public opinion in American allies, including Australia, although it was only making public what the Democratic administrations of presidents Kennedy and Johnson had been telling Australian governments for several years. Supporters and critics of the American alliance alike wondered whether the US could be regarded as a reliable ally. In particular, some contended that the joint Australian–American facilities at Pine Gap, Nurrungar and North West Cape placed Australian territory at risk in any nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union.

Britain was pulling out of Southeast Asia in the 1970s, as had been foreshadowed by its decision to withdraw from 'East of Suez'. For Australia, a policy based on keeping both our greatest allies engaged in Southeast Asia was clearly obsolete. Commentators began to forecast a multipolar world in which the US and the Soviet Union would have to share power with other potential powers, such as a more integrated Europe, Japan, India and perhaps other powers in Africa and Latin America.

On the positive side, all this was happening at a time when the geopolitical environment, after the long agony of the Vietnam War, seemed more benign and stable than it had for decades. The Cold War in Europe had entered an era of détente, and the US and the Soviet Union were negotiating agreements to limit their nuclear arsenals. China had come in from the cold, having been recognised by the US and other Western powers and admitted to a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, but the chaos of the Cultural Revolution had left it far too weak, economically, militarily and diplomatically, to pose a threat. After the fall of Saigon, communist regimes had come to power in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, but no more dominoes were likely to fall. Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and, most importantly for Australia, Indonesia were all in the hands of secure, pro-Western regimes, and the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) offered good prospects of regional cooperation. The horrific rule of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia contributed to Sino-Vietnamese tensions that led to a short but bloody war in 1979, but the violence inflicted by and between communist regimes was confined within the Indochinese peninsula. Australia was able to cope, without panicking, with an influx of refugees fleeing communist rule in Vietnam.

The 1972 Defence Review

In short, by the mid-1970s the combination of events within Australia and around the world created a broad consensus that Australia needed not just a new defence policy but a virtual revolution in the way that strategic and defence policies were considered, decided and implemented. Across the political spectrum, Australians were now willing at least to accept, and often to welcome, ideas that had been gestating in the minds of a small number of policymakers and academics for several years. They argued that Australia would have to rely more on its own resources and less on the American alliance. Consequently:

- we would have to do more of our own strategic thinking
- our primary attention would be directed towards defence of the Australian continent and its approaches
- the services must be prepared to act in joint operations, supporting each other, rather than in single-service coalitions led by powerful allies
- the capabilities developed by each service must be subjected to rigorous analysis to ensure that their proposals were militarily sound and consistent with a coherent, government-approved strategic concept
- the military aspects of national security policy would need to be coordinated with the nation's diplomacy and other instruments of national policy.

The implications of these ideas for the structure of Defence, for the organisation and culture of the services and for the education and training of military and civilian officers were many and radical.

In the late 1960s, the Secretary of Defence, Sir Henry Bland, with the backing of his minister, Allen Fairhall, initiated some reforms along these lines. Bland strengthened the structures and staff for joint, rather than single-service, planning and reorganised the services' intelligence bodies into the Joint Intelligence Organisation with a broader remit. He instituted the Systems Analysis Branch to analyse the strategic and other merits of the services' proposals on force structure and equipment and the Defence Science Division to coordinate the various scientific activities within the Defence group. Bland also initiated serious discussion of a 'tri-service academy', in which officer cadets of all three services would receive a university-level education at the same institution. The Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sir John Wilton, also put forward proposals to modernise Defence structures, particularly to allow for great 'jointery' between the services, but with a lesser role for the secretary of the department and other civilian officials.

These and other reforms, intended to encourage the development of a coherent defence policy at the expense of single-service loyalties, encountered resistance and institutional inertia. They also received little support in the turbulent years from 1969 to 1972 from John Gorton, as Prime Minister and briefly Defence Minister, William McMahon as Prime Minister, or David Fairbairn as Defence Minister. The prospects for reform were greater when a young and vigorous Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, appointed the more experienced and equally vigorous Arthur Tange, the former External Affairs Secretary, to head the Defence Department. Fraser soon fell in a spectacular clash with Gorton, which cost both men their positions, but Tange remained as Defence Secretary throughout the 1970s.

The idea of a White Paper as a means of introducing new ideas on defence policy and policymaking was first raised during the Bland–Fairhall years but not implemented. As the Liberal – Country Party coalition faced likely defeat in 1972, Prime Minister McMahon and Defence Minister Fairbairn decided that a White Paper might recover ground on defence policy for the government amid the controversies surrounding the Vietnam War. Tange grasped the opportunity to educate both policymakers and the public on the principles that he and like-minded officials and academics thought should now govern strategic policy. A White Paper incorporating many of the ideas being developed by Tange and his colleagues, as well as some elements designed to gain the endorsement of the Coalition government, was drafted under Tange's close supervision. At the last minute, McMahon decided that the document should be presented to parliament not as a White Paper authorised by the government but merely as a departmental review, with the author stated as the 'Department of Defence'.

Media commentators and leading parliamentarians were in no doubt that the principal author was Tange. The paper contained many of his favourite ideas and phrases. Self-reliance was a dominant theme, and ‘independence’ was given equal status with ‘security’ as the fundamental objectives of defence policy. ANZUS wasn’t discussed at length until the fourth chapter, but to prevent any accusation that the paper was ‘downgrading’ the American alliance it quoted Article II of the ANZUS Treaty, by which the parties committed themselves:

separately and jointly by means of continuing self-help and mutual aid [to] maintain and develop their own individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

The emphasis on ‘self-reliance’ and ‘independence’ couldn’t be regarded as downgrading the alliance if the ANZUS Treaty itself required the parties to take ‘separate’ measures of ‘self-help’ to develop ‘individual’ capacity as well as to act ‘jointly’ to give ‘mutual aid’ and develop ‘collective capacity’.

The 1972 review affirmed the idea that Australia should defend its interests beyond Australian territory, but it resisted distant commitments.

The 1972 review affirmed the idea that Australia should defend its interests beyond Australian territory, but it resisted distant commitments. It defined the ‘ocean and archipelagic environment’ to Australia’s immediate north, from Sumatra and the Malayan peninsula through Indonesia and New Guinea to the islands of the Southwest Pacific, as Australia’s ‘special strategic environment’. Contingency planning should include the possibility of conflict with Indonesia or another power attacking through Indonesia. One implication of this emphasis on what would later be called the ‘sea–air gap’ was greater support for the Navy and Air Force at the expense of the Army—a priority that understandably rankled with the Army and supporters of its traditional primacy in Australian military commitments.

The Whitlam government and defence reorganisation

During the Whitlam government of 1972–75, Tange and Defence officials continued to prepare papers that fleshed out the implications of a strategic policy based on the self-reliant defence of Australia and our immediate environs. Much more public attention, however, was given to a separate but related aspect of Defence reform that Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and Defence Minister Lance Barnard also entrusted to Tange. In addition to his other heavy responsibilities, Tange was commissioned to prepare a report on a major reorganisation of Defence that would abolish the ministers, departments and military boards of the three services and incorporate their functions into the Defence Department. At Whitlam’s instigation and aided by a small, predominantly civilian working group, Tange prepared a comprehensive report at great speed. The three services weren’t fully merged into a single service with a common uniform (an experiment briefly attempted by the Canadians) but were brought together into the Australian Defence Force. The Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee was upgraded to become the Chief of the Defence Force Staff, with the power of command over the three service chiefs, although initially with few resources with which to enforce his central role. The Tange report established the ‘diarchy’, in which the departmental secretary and the Chief of the Defence Force Staff would have co-equal status as the principal advisers to the Defence Minister. Within the new, greatly enlarged Defence Department, a complex structure of committees and branches reported to one or both members of the diarchy.

These radical changes provoked considerable pushback from the services, especially in the Army, already antagonised by many of the ideas included in the 1972 Defence Review and other papers on strategic and defence policy. Officers portrayed the Defence reorganisation as a civilian power-grab and deprecated the contention that Australia had the benefit of a benign global environment that would permit a long warning-time before a major threat could emerge. The individual services, and traditional views on the importance of the American alliance, retained considerable support in the Coalition parties and ex-service organisations. While debates over defence

weren't as prominent as other controversies, most notably the 'loans affair', they contributed to the general air of crisis that surrounded the Whitlam government in the months before the Governor-General dismissed it in November 1975.

The Fraser government and the 1976 White Paper

Amid the intense partisan controversies provoked by the Whitlam government's dismissal, Tange and his supporters were concerned that their views on strategic policy might be identified with the Labor Party and therefore rejected by the Coalition government, with Malcolm Fraser as Prime Minister, which was elected in a landslide in December. In January 1976, while Australians were still coming to terms with the new political situation, Tange addressed a summer school at the University of Western Australia on 'Defence policy-making in Australia'. While distancing himself from 'the two over-simplistic doctrines called "forward defence" or "fortress Australia"', Tange argued that Australia was inescapably moving towards a defence policy focused on our own security interests in our immediate neighbourhood, rather than on contributing to expeditionary forces alongside major allies such as the US. He said that Australia had to pursue two freedoms: 'freedom of our territory from interference and freedom to pursue national and international policies without pressure or duress from a militarily superior power'. Without spelling it out, he implied that a 'militarily superior power' that was an ally might be as much of a concern as one that was an overt or potential enemy. At a time when many on the left suspected that the US Central Intelligence Agency might have had a hand in the dismissal of the Labor government, and many on the right were dismayed by the American failure in Vietnam and the implications of the Nixon doctrine, these oblique references made a posture of self-reliance appear both palatable and inevitable.

Tange assured his audience that his emphasis on greater self-reliance and the focus on the immediate neighbourhood weren't based on partisan or ideological views. They were driven by geopolitical changes, such as the Nixon doctrine and Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez. As a consequence, he argued, the circumstances that had taken Australian forces to distant battlefields, in which he included Korea, Malaya and Vietnam as well as Europe, the Mediterranean and the western desert, no longer applied, and major commitments in places 'remote from Australia' were now 'highly improbable'. Tange noted that Fairbairn in 1972 had made statements referring to an increasing element of self-reliance in the Australian services.

Tange's deliberately unprovocative presentation helped to assure bipartisan acceptance of those views. Tange already knew, from serving then Defence Minister Fraser in the early 1970s, that the new Prime Minister shared many of his views, but he was less confident of the new Defence Minister, James Killen, who had been Minister for the Navy and who proudly proclaimed his devotion to many British traditions. In the event, Killen played an important role in gaining broad acceptance for Australia's first Defence White Paper, which he presented to parliament in November 1976. Killen personally wrote an introduction, paying eloquent tribute to Britain's historic role as Australia's chief protector but acknowledging that that era was over.

The remainder of the White Paper was drafted in the department. The principal author was WB 'Bill' Pritchett, whom Tange had recruited from External Affairs to head a team of strategic policy advisers. Pritchett would later succeed Tange as Secretary of Defence. DWP 1976's principal themes were by now familiar: the need for Australia to act more independently of allies; our limited ability to project forces to distant theatres of conflict; and the requirement to concentrate force structure and planning on areas close to the Australian continent. What did not emerge clearly from the intense public debates was that some supporters of the 'self-reliant defence of Australia' approach thought that these principles were appropriate for the current strategic environment and for perhaps a couple of decades ahead; others thought that they should underpin Australian strategic and defence policy permanently.

The reception of the 1976 White Paper

Some endemic flaws in the use of a White Paper to manage Defence were evident in the following years. Within a year, the government had to admit that defence expenditure wouldn't match the amounts forecast in DWP 1976.

Public spending was undergoing cuts in order to counter high inflation, and defence was no less vulnerable than other areas of the budget. The emphasis on the maritime region to Australia's north was qualified by the concern felt in some quarters, not least by Fraser himself, about the growth of Soviet naval power in the Indian Ocean. Fraser reacted particularly strongly to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Close observers of defence policy were no less concerned by the implications for capability planning and procurement. As a 2015 analysis by the Parliamentary Library noted:

The capability choices outlined in the 1976 Defence White Paper confirmed the policy shift towards self-reliance. It did not, however, provide a balanced explanation of how Australian military forces should be positioned to best respond to any of the potential threats identified in the paper. Despite the paper's emphasis on self-reliance, there was little in the way of a corresponding policy to support and promote the growth of an Australian industry for defence, which was needed to make 'self-reliance' a reality. (Brangwin et al. 2015:14)

Commentators in the late 1970s contended that procurement decisions were being driven not by the strategic principles outlined in the White Paper but by the individual services in accordance with their longstanding priorities.

Nevertheless, the White Paper had indicated that the government's defence planners were making a real effort to raise the level of debate on strategic issues, as well as to lay down some principles intended to guide force structure and planning decisions for many years ahead. A major contributor to the growing debate on what Tange liked to call 'strategic and higher defence policy' was the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the ANU. In 1971, a young soldier-turned-academic, Robert O'Neill, succeeded Millar as head of the SDSC and under his leadership the centre was responsible for a number of conferences and publications that explored relevant issues. Of particular importance was a 1976 conference on 'The defence of Australia: fundamental new aspects', which led to a publication with that title the following year (O'Neill 1976).

Alongside this work, O'Neill was writing the official history of Australia's involvement in the Korean War. Unlike previous official war histories, this work included an entire volume on Australian strategic and diplomatic decision-making before and during the war, including the negotiation of the ANZUS Treaty. The second volume of the history, on combat operations, also gave unprecedented attention to the wider military and diplomatic issues that affected the Australian operational experience in Korea and the extent to which Australian servicemen were able to influence the allied coalition's tactical and operation approaches. While O'Neill and his colleagues were debating the implications of a new era of defence and strategic policy, he was also providing an important, scholarly study of the era that had just passed. A new interest in Australian strategic and diplomatic history, which O'Neill helped to pioneer, contributed a welcome degree of context, depth and nuance to the discussion of new ideas.

The concept of the self-reliant defence of Australia, implemented by an ADF that coordinated the efforts of the three armed services, had implications for the education of young officers. As Tange told a parliamentary committee on the proposal for a tri-service academy at university level:

the self-reliant Australia about which we often speak needs more than technical training ... It needs independent thinking about Australia's defence policy and its deployments and its force structure ... thinking not dependent on borrowed ideas nor an inherited idea about strategy or organization.

Tange strongly supported those who wanted the academy to provide a 'broad and liberal' education, which would include humanities and social sciences as well as engineering and physical sciences. Future ADF officers would need to understand the history and politics of the region in which they were likely to be deployed, as well as of Australia's allies, to assess the value of assurances of future assistance. Fraser, first as Defence Minister and later as Prime Minister, strongly supported these views, but strong opposition from supporters of the single services delayed the establishment of the Australian Defence Force Academy, first mooted in the late 1960s, until 1983.

CHAPTER 5

The 1980s: the Defence White Paper of 1987 and the Dibb Review

The vigorous debates on strategic and defence policies in the 1970s continued into the 1980s. Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, the combination of domestic political events, a resurgence of Cold War tensions in Europe and regional developments, including Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor and turbulent politics in Cambodia, created a climate that encouraged a high level of debate, often highly charged, on strategic issues. How should Australia balance its relationships with allies, especially the US, and its relationships with Indonesia and other regional neighbours? Was it necessary or desirable for Australia to host the joint facilities at a time of revived Cold War tensions? Was it possible to reconcile 'alliance' and 'independence' as the bases of Australian strategy? What should be the relationship between defence and foreign policy?

Much of the debate on these and related issues revolved around the tension between those who supported an alliance-based, globally focused approach to Australian security and those who called for a more independent approach and an emphasis on regional, even continental, priorities in defence arrangements. At a time of revived interest in Australian history, especially in Australia's wartime commitments, debates about history often reinforced this division. As Australians discussed the relationships between their wartime prime ministers and allied leaders, such as between Robert Menzies and Winston Churchill or John Curtin and Douglas MacArthur, or the relative importance of Australian service in the North African desert or in the jungles of New Guinea, they were effectively arguing about the reliability of allies and the importance of concentrating on Australia's immediate region. Two of the most popular Australian films of this period, *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli*, were set in the Boer War and World War I, respectively, but both conveyed the strong message that Australia was unwise to commit our men to distant wars on behalf of our imperial mentor.

In this charged atmosphere, Bob Hawke (Prime Minister 1983–91) and Kim Beazley (Defence Minister 1984–90) were both determined to reconcile the idea of greater self-reliance in Australian defence with a strong Australian–American alliance. Together with Bill Hayden (Foreign Minister 1983–88), they worked towards a relationship in which Australia would demonstrate greater independence of mind while retaining the benefits of the alliance, most notably access to American intelligence and defence technology. These were aims that Gough Whitlam had expressed in the early 1970s, but the Hawke ministers demonstrated a much greater understanding of what was required to achieve this new balance.

It wasn't easy for Hawke and Beazley to convince many members of the Labor Party that the 'defence of Australia' approach could be reconciled with the Australian–American alliance, and especially the continued existence of the joint facilities. Hawke made politically brilliant, if historically arguable, use of Curtin's 'turn to America' statement in 1942 to convince his party that a Labor Prime Minister could support the alliance while loyally defending Australian national interests. Hawke and Beazley persuaded their party that the joint facilities, especially Pine Gap, played a vital role in monitoring arms control agreements, and Hawke made an important parliamentary statement to

this effect on 6 June 1984. In this task, they were aided by the work of the SDSC scholar Desmond Ball, a vigorous defender of the ‘defence of Australia’ approach, whose well-informed publications on the joint facilities infuriated Tange but helped to convince the left that Pine Gap was an instrument of peace, not war. Other influential contributors to the defence debate from the 1980s onwards included Hugh White, who worked in Beazley’s office, and Paul Dibb, a senior Defence official who joined the SDSC.

This debate formed the background to the Defence White Paper tabled by Beazley in March 1987 (DWP 1987). In many respects, the second White Paper may be seen as the second part of its predecessor, reinforcing the basic strategic principles, reconciling the self-reliant defence of Australia with the American alliance and fleshing out the implications for Australian defence capabilities and for Australian defence industry. One of Tange’s favourite aphorisms was ‘If you haven’t talked dollars, you haven’t talked strategy.’ DWP 1987 sought to answer such questions as: What would be the cost of greater self-reliance? How much self-reliance could Australia afford? What capabilities were required by an ADF that was more self-reliant and more focused on the defence of Australia and its environs? Were they affordable?

Beazley commissioned two reports to contribute to DWP 1987. Paul Dibb wrote a report that addressed the capabilities of the three services in the context of a focus on what he called the ‘sea and air gap’ to Australia’s north and a potential threat that might come ‘from or through’ Indonesia (Dibb 1986). The preparation of the report was itself widely discussed amid visible tensions between civilians and uniformed personnel in Defence, and between the services, especially as the Army objected to the emphasis given to naval and air capabilities.

A review of Australian defence industry by Robert Cooksey attracted less public attention but a great deal of interest within the manufacturing sector (Cooksey 1986). He generally supported the idea that Australian industry could contribute more to Australian defence capabilities.

Beazley’s White Paper incorporated a good deal of material from the Dibb and Cooksey reports, together with a reaffirmation, and some revision, of the broad strategic principles of DWP 1976. The governing concept was now ‘self-reliance within an alliance context’. DWP 1987 proposed a number of capability acquisitions but gave no detailed costing of them. While Dibb’s report had indicated that 3% of GDP would be a desirable benchmark for the defence budget, DWP 1987 came down to a range of between 2.6% and 3%. In the following years, actual expenditure came down to 2.5% and then 2.3% of GDP and continued to fall throughout the 1990s.

Defence White Papers and their constituencies

To summarise, the first two Defence White Papers emerged from a widespread view that Australia was in a geopolitical environment greatly different from that of the 1950s and 1960s, and one that could reasonably (and, as it happened, correctly) be expected to endure for some time. They were closely associated with not only major revisions to strategic policy and policymaking but also a comprehensive and far-reaching reorganisation of the Defence organisation, a new approach to decision-making on defence capabilities and a proposed new institution for a tri-service academy for officer cadets.

Subsequent Defence White Papers have seldom had the same confluence of domestic, regional and global developments to justify the scale and scope of their preparation and production. As the following brief survey discusses, they have arisen in quite different circumstances. Over the years, however, several constituencies have developed an interest in the preparation and outcome of the White Paper process, and those constituencies may have influenced decisions to set the process in motion.

For those charged with the administration of Defence, at the political or official level, a principal role of a Defence White Paper is to maintain some degree of oversight, both strategic and financial, of the large, complex and cumbersome structure created by the reforms of the 1970s. Within Defence, almost a state within a state, many fiefdoms compete for attention, prestige and above all funds. With the exception of the period between 2003 and 2008, competition for limited funds has usually been intense, especially as it became evident that defence budgets

would seldom match the expectations created by statements in the White Papers. Measuring proposals for weapon systems, weapon platforms and other commitments against the strategic concepts and capability plans laid down in a White Paper offers at least some possibility of fiscal constraint and a strategic cost–benefit assessment.

Since the 1970s, Australia has seen the growth of a more developed constituency of commentators and activists interested in strategic and defence policy.

Since the 1970s, Australia has seen the growth of a more developed constituency of commentators and activists interested in strategic and defence policy. The 50-year-old SDSC has been joined by a growing number of other think tanks, including the Lowy Institute for International Policy, the Institute for Regional Security (formerly the Kokoda Foundation), the US Studies Centre, the Australia–China Relations Institute, the Australian Centre on China in the World, the Australia Defence Association and, as readers of this paper need hardly be reminded, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Some media commentary is still focused on the longstanding tension between global alliances and regional relationships, despite the fact that governments will invariably claim that they have established the right balance between those two poles and that they have ensured that their alliance and regional relationships are mutually supportive.

A further constituency has grown since DWP 1987. Industry has looked to Defence White Papers for guidance on the areas in which Australian companies might, in the short or medium term, contribute not only to ADF requirements but perhaps also to defence exports. In general, Labor governments have shown a greater inclination to ‘buy Australian’ and to encourage domestic manufactures, while the conservative coalition, until this year, has regarded ‘off-the-shelf’ purchases from experienced overseas suppliers as more reliable and cost-effective. But even before 2016, there were variations in that pattern over time.

CHAPTER 6

After Beazley: five Defence White Papers in 22 years

The publication of the third Defence White Paper in 1994 was much harder to explain. Domestically, Australia didn't have a new government with sufficient confidence to outline a future strategy, but one nearing the end of its life. After replacing Bob Hawke in 1991, Paul Keating had unexpectedly won the 1993 election, but few expected Labor to repeat that success in 1996. Globally, the major strategic change in the preceding years was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In that context, public opinion in many countries, not least the US, expected a 'peace dividend'—a reduction in defence expenditure. Similar pressures were felt in Australia, which was in the midst of a recession. A crucial element of DWP 1994 was a reduction of the aspirational benchmark for defence expenditure to 2% of GDP. In fact, defence expenditure remained below 2% of GDP in every year from 1995 to the present day.

In sum, DWP 1994 gave an impression of a government that was trying to look in control of its defence planning while pointing to a benign strategic outlook in order to justify a reduction in defence expenditure. Critics suspected that the fiscal situation was driving the strategic appreciation, rather than *vice versa*. But, simply by its appearance, DWP 1994 helped to establish the idea that it was appropriate to table a new Defence White Paper after about seven years.

The Defence White Paper of 2000

More substantial reasons lay behind the creation of the fourth Defence White Paper in 2000. The Coalition government led by John Howard was in its second term and was entitled to place its stamp on strategic and defence priorities, and particularly a stronger emphasis on the importance of the American alliance. More importantly, the benign strategic environment of the last quarter of the 20th century was clearly coming to an end. The rise of China, with uncertain but potentially major implications for the US–China relationship and thus for Australia's regional and alliance relationships, was now firmly on the agenda. Even closer to home, the 1999 crisis in East Timor, when Australia led the INTERFET coalition that ensured the independence of Timor-Leste from Indonesia, led to a new focus on the immediate region. The previous years had seen coups in Fiji and political instability in Vanuatu and New Caledonia, while the stability of Papua New Guinea had long been a recurrent concern for defence planners. The archipelagic environment to Australia's north and east was described as the 'arc of instability'.

The 1999 Timor crisis presented two major shocks to the Howard government. The first was that the US wouldn't put 'boots on the ground'. Although Washington gave invaluable assistance to Australia in logistics, intelligence and diplomacy, no US troops were committed to support a loyal American ally, despite urgent Australian requests. Second, the crisis revealed that the ADF was ill-equipped to carry out an operation close to Australia's shores. Inadequacies in the Army were especially evident. For all the talk in previous decades about the strategic importance of RAN and RAAF capabilities in the sea and air gap, the fact was that an intervention in Australia's 'special strategic environment' had required the dispatch of Army units, with the support of the other services.

After the constraints on resources in the 1990s, the ADF was severely overstretched. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Howard government exempted Defence from the expenditure cuts imposed on other parts of the public sector and that it produced a new White Paper to give shape to Australia's response to the strategic demands of the new century.

Like previous and some subsequent White Papers, DWP 2000 drew upon a number of smaller reports. It took a commendable step forward in specifically linking capability requirements to strategic priorities and setting out a long-term program to fund them. But the inability of the government to live up to its intention of spending its aspirational target of 3% of GDP on defence was soon evident.

The difficulties of predicting the strategic environment were vividly demonstrated by the unexpected terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001.

Moreover, the difficulties of predicting the strategic environment were vividly demonstrated by the unexpected terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, when Prime Minister Howard happened to be in Washington to mark the 50th anniversary of the ANZUS Treaty. Having personally witnessed the enormous impact of 9/11 on Americans, from the President to average citizens, Howard formally invoked the ANZUS Treaty for the first time in its existence and committed Australia to give unreserved support to the US.

DWP 2000 restated the 'concentric circles' approach to strategic priorities, in which the defence of Australia and the needs of immediate neighbours were placed ahead of distant or global commitments, but Australia was soon to be engaged in Afghanistan in what would prove to be its longest commitment, and even more controversially in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Those commitments meant that the strategic and defence policies envisioned in DWP 2000 needed revision. The changes were set out in three major Defence Updates in 2003, 2005 and 2007. The strongest advocates of the 'defence of Australia' priority were deeply dismayed by these distant commitments as part of American-led coalitions, especially when the Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, in 2004 rejected the 'concentric circles' approach and asserted that peace and stability in the Middle East was a vital Australian national interest. Those weren't the only reasons, however, why the two commitments, especially Iraq, aroused the most profound and public controversy since the Vietnam War.

The Defence White Paper 2009

The Rudd Labor government produced the fifth Defence White Paper to honour a promise made in the 2007 election campaign. It was accompanied by no fewer than 12 reviews of particular aspects of defence policy and planning. DWP 2009 explicitly rejected both the 'defence of Australia' and the 'expeditionary' approaches to Australian defence as unduly limiting. It also rejected commitments to conflicts in the Middle East and other regions in urban environments on the grounds that casualties were likely to be unacceptably high, but acknowledged the continuing commitment in Afghanistan. Threats to cybersecurity, which had first been mentioned in the DWP 2000, were given greater prominence.

The main feature of DWP 2009, however, was the centrality of the rise of China and its uncertain implications for the future of the Asia-Pacific region. DWP 2009 spoke of China's rise and military modernisation in terms that provoked a rebuke from Beijing. The most prominent aspect of capability planning was the commitment to improve the ADF's maritime capabilities. The White Paper endorsed the acquisition of a number of major surface ships, which was foreshadowed in DWP 2000 and approved by the Howard government in 2007, but most attention was given to the commitment to acquire 12 non-nuclear long-range submarines.

DWP 2009 set out a proposed force structure to be achieved by 2030 but was imprecise about the timing and funding of major commitments. It promised 3% real growth in real expenditure for the next decade, followed by 2.2% real growth until 2030, but that prediction was undermined within days when the 2009–10 budget effectively cut \$8.8 billion from defence expenditure for the first six years of the period. Budgetary decisions in the next three years confirmed its effective demise.

DWP 2009 also set two questionable precedents. First, it foreshadowed the production of new White Papers at five-year intervals during its projected scope. Second, the White Paper was not tabled in parliament but announced at a media event at the RAN's base at Garden Island, Sydney.

The 2013 Defence White Paper

Julia Gillard, who had replaced Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister in 2010, brought the sixth Defence White Paper forward a year from its projected date in 2014. While it was presented as a continuation of DWP 2009, the underlying theme was the effect of the economic downturn on the government's ability to meet its long-term defence capability plans. Like its predecessor, DWP 2013 was not tabled in parliament, and the Opposition was immediately critical of the lack of precision in its funding commitments.

DWP 2013 was released soon after another White Paper, on Australia's place in the 'Asian century', which was widely criticised for presenting an optimistic view of Australia's economic prospects in the Asia–Pacific region while giving little consideration to strategic risks. It also followed a National Security Statement in which Gillard maintained that a decade of military activity prompted by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 was over and that future challenges would come from traditional great-power conflict rather than non-state actors. In the same statement, she also referred to the need for greater attention to cybersecurity and the importance of defence diplomacy in the region. Many critics drew the conclusion that DWP 2013 was intended primarily to cover the government's inability or unwillingness to fund the ambitious program set out in DWP 2009, when economic stringency was creating enormous political pressure to bring the budget back to balance.

The 2016 Defence White Paper

After the political turmoil and economic difficulties of the Rudd–Gillard–Rudd years and their impact on the fifth and sixth Defence Papers, a major task for the third White Paper in seven years was to re-establish the credibility of the practice. The process of its preparation, initiated while Tony Abbott was Prime Minister and concluded under Malcolm Turnbull, was extremely thorough. The costing provisions were more detailed and comprehensive than those of any of its predecessors. In these respects, it was probably as convincing and thorough as any Defence White Paper can be, and it was generally well received. In the longer term, however, DWP 2016 is likely to be assessed on the basis of two major characteristics.

The strategic concept that recurred 48 times in the document was support for 'the rules-based global order'. Australia has benefited from the international systems developed since 1945, in trade, military security and many other fields, during a period when the US was the world's principal or only superpower. For some years, those systems have been under challenge both from rising powers, most obviously China, and from non-state actors. There was therefore some validity in the idea that Australia should play its part in supporting the existing rules. But the frequency with which this phrase was used, without further precision, has given rise to a suspicion that it's designed primarily to give strategic cover for Australia to participate in actions, almost certainly involving US-led coalitions, anywhere in the world. This would not only be a defeat for the 'defence of Australia' school of thought, but would concern many who simply wish to see more nuance in decisions on which actions, presented in the name of support for the 'rules-based global order', should or should not include Australian participation. On this criterion, for example, many would draw a sharp contrast between the 1991 intervention to prevent Iraq from forcibly incorporating Kuwait and the 2003 invasion of Iraq in order to effect regime change.

The most striking element in DWP 2016 is the central role given to the development of Australia's domestic defence industry. In this respect, a Liberal–National coalition government has dramatically and unexpectedly outflanked the Labor Party, which has traditionally looked more sympathetically on domestic production. The implications of this development are far-reaching and radical. From now on, Australia's ability to implement its strategic and defence policies will be governed not only by global and regional geopolitics and by the fiscal resources that governments are able to allocate, but also by the capacity of Australia's manufacturing industries, most famously in South Australia but also in other states, to deliver the desired outcomes on time and on budget.

The importance of this development was symbolised by the appointment of a Minister for Defence Industry (not coincidentally from South Australia) who is senior in cabinet rank to the Minister for Defence. It's possible for two senior ministers to collaborate effectively at the head of a single department, as successive ministers for foreign affairs and trade have shown since their respective departments were merged in the 1980s, but it will clearly be a very considerable challenge.

CONCLUSIONS

This short, and highly selective, survey of Defence White Papers in the past 40 years suggests that it's time to draw breath on the practice. White Papers are, like royal commissions, an important instrument of governance, but one that can be eroded by overuse. DWP 1976 and its closely related successor in 1987 were based on the perceived need for a fundamental revolution in virtually every aspect of policy, policymaking and organisation. They were presented by stable governments—one Coalition, one Labor—who drew the conclusion that, given the global and regional geopolitics then and in the foreseeable future, Australia needed to lay down a new framework of strategic principles and capability planning, together with a major reorganisation of almost every aspect of the Defence organisation. The White Papers were presented to, and debated in, parliament as well as being discussed extensively in the media and in the small but growing constituency of specialists in strategic and defence studies.

Since then, the whole concept of a Defence White Paper has been to some degree devalued by their frequency. Some have been updates rather than major policy statements that deserved the status of a White Paper. In every case except DWP 2000, the funding subsequently provided by governments hasn't lived up to the expectations raised by the White Papers, creating a credibility gap. In some cases, especially DWP 1994 and DWP 2013, they have given the impression that the strategic assessment was heavily influenced by the government's fiscal position. Too often, a major motivation for a Defence White Paper has appeared to arise from domestic party politics or even leadership tensions within the governing party, rather than from a genuine need to reassess the nation's long-term strategy. The rapid turnover of defence ministers in the past 25 years, and of prime ministers in the past six, has reinforced that impression. The decision to produce a Defence White Paper has sometimes been used to delay or to avoid difficult decisions, to shape a strategic outlook in the interests of domestic politics, or simply to give the impression that the government is in control of a major policy area. The presentation of the last three White Papers in orchestrated media events, rather than to parliament, has undermined the fundamental concept that a White Paper on defence or anything else is first and foremost a parliamentary paper intended to set out the government's policy and to be the subject of a major parliamentary debate, as well as the focus of public discourse.

Although Defence White Papers have continuing value for the constituencies mentioned above—the administrators seeking to control the large and cumbersome Defence machine, with its many competing fiefdoms; the commentators and think tanks, looking for phrases or concepts that they find agreeable or otherwise; the companies looking for opportunities—their needs could be met by less comprehensive but more frequent Defence Updates, modelled to some degree on those presented by the Howard government in 2003, 2005 and 2007.

DWP 2016 has made the most comprehensive effort for many years to assess the strategic situation, to formulate the appropriate Australian defence response and to set out a capability program with a detailed funding commitment. Fulfilling this program will stretch Australian resources for many years to come. The need now is to give the new regime time. The electorate clearly wants a greater degree of bipartisanship between the major parties and an emphasis on long-term policymaking, especially on budget repair. DWP 2016 has set out a comprehensive, long-term program: those implementing it should be given time to settle in and to overcome the inevitable obstacles. The ability of two senior ministers to collaborate effectively in directing the implementation of the program will clearly be important.

Furthermore, the strategic context is both less benign and less predictable than that of the 1970s and 1980s. Even in the months since DWP 2016 was presented, there have been major changes in the strategic outlook. Australia faces a multiplicity of potential threats. Some are given prominence in the media, such as the rise of China and its regional implications, the resurgence of Russia, *jihadi* terrorism and cybersecurity. Other longstanding concerns, such as questions of regional stability in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific, and nuclear proliferation, are currently less prominent but no less demanding of attention in the long term. Assessing the priority to give to different potential threat scenarios will be challenging, and situations may well change quickly. The key words in the current discussion are ‘nimbleness’ and ‘flexibility’.

A further element of unpredictability has been added by the widely unexpected election of Donald Trump as President of the US. Given his campaign rhetoric, it’s far from clear what policies his administration will apply to the alliances, relationships and international institutions that have underpinned the post-1945 global order.

In this context, future Australian governments aren’t likely to bind themselves to strict interpretations of either the ‘self-reliant defence of Australia’ or the ‘support for the rules-based global order’ doctrine. Instead, they’ll do what their predecessors have always done in both word and deed: they’ll seek the best balance possible between Australia’s local and global interests, according to the circumstances of the day. Sometimes, no doubt, they’ll get that balance right; sometimes they won’t. On the issue at the front of everyone’s mind at present, Australia will probably not have to make a single ‘China choice’ but a continuing series of choices on a host of major and minor issues. Striking the right balance will require constant reassessment, based on the best possible information about current developments in Beijing, Washington and regional countries. Much the same can be said of many other less prominent areas of strategic policy. We should never forget, for example, that irrespective of what’s in the headlines from week to week, what happens in Indonesia and Australian–Indonesian relations is always of central importance to our foreign and defence policies.

These specific considerations exacerbate the perennial difficulties faced by Defence White Papers (or, for that matter, White Papers on foreign policy). For diplomatic or security reasons, some fundamentally important elements can’t be discussed in White Papers. No government, for example, is likely to air its deepest fears about the capabilities or the intentions of either its friends and allies or its potential enemies. Moreover, no-one can predict what some call the ‘black swans’—the unpredicted events that shake all previous assumptions. (Having grown up in Western Australia, I find black swans entirely normal, and white ones more remarkable, but let that pass.) Singaporean analyst Peter Ho has recently referred to the ‘black elephants’—the combination of black swans and the elephants in the room, the dread topics that no-one dares discuss for fear of bringing them about (Jayakumar 2016). What would happen if there were a radical change of regime or policy direction by a major power, such as the US or China, or a regional neighbour, such as Indonesia, Malaysia or Papua New Guinea? In recent months, few foresaw either the Brexit vote in the UK or the Trump electoral victory. A few years ago, regionalism appeared to be thriving around the world, but what if current tensions within the European Union or ASEAN were to escalate? What would be the global ramifications if NATO or other American alliances were deconstructed?

In these circumstances, there should be no more White Papers, as distinct from smaller and more frequent Defence Updates, for at least 10 years. This is emphatically *not* to say that there should be less debate on defence and strategic issues by the general public and especially in parliament. On the contrary, the need now is for more frequent statements by the government indicating how the overall view set out in DWP 2016 is being implemented, and when necessary adjusted, to meet changing circumstances. The framework of major decisions on capabilities has now been set, but the government needs constantly to show that it’s adapting, within that framework, to new developments. Not only should there be regular updates on both strategy and capabilities, but both the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Defence Industry should also make more statements, not just in response to a particular crisis but with a view to showing how the government is developing and implementing its program. As the Minister for Defence sits in the Senate and the Minister for Defence Industry in the House of Representatives, coordinated statements by both ministers at the outset of debate in both houses would enable the government to demonstrate that they are collaborating effectively.

Those statements should be made to the proper forum: the Australian Parliament. One theme of recent debate on the demand for parliament to vote on Australia's military commitments, for example in discussions of James Brown's *Quarterly Essay*, 'Firing line', is the need for parliamentarians and their principal advisers to be better informed about strategic and defence matters.

In addition to statements to the House of Representatives and the Senate, the government should make greater use of parliamentary committees. If the government expects support from parliament and the people for major commitments, it must do more to educate the people and their elected representatives on the context of those commitments. It should increase the number and scope of briefings to relevant committees and to the leadership of the Opposition, even sharing classified material when appropriate.

An analogy might be reassuring. One of the outcomes of the major reforms to the Australian intelligence agencies in the 1970s and 1980s was the formation of a parliamentary committee on intelligence. Initially it was confined to the oversight of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, as it was feared that the risks from parliamentarians having any knowledge of the other agencies were too great, but its scope has over time been expanded to include the entire intelligence community. By most accounts, that has worked well, contributing to better informed discussion of sensitive issues. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee has held inquiries into some major policy decisions and acquisitions, including the Joint Strike Fighter, but a further expansion of the role and scope of the parliamentary committees dealing with strategic and defence issues would be greatly beneficial.

The prominence given to Defence White Papers also reinforces the regrettable tendency in many circles to regard military measures as the sole, or overwhelmingly important, instrument of national security. The government needs to show how it's coordinating Defence with other arms of government, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the intelligence agencies and the Australian Federal Police, in a whole-of-government approach to national security. A major challenge to Australian security now comes not from military forces invading our shores but from hackers, whether government-backed or freelance, invading our computer networks. In an age in which cybersecurity is clearly a major challenge and there's no obvious military threat to Australia's territorial integrity, it's surely time to reconsider the balance between the resources allocated to traditional military capabilities and those provided to intelligence, diplomacy and other non-military instruments. The Rudd government introduced the position of National Security Adviser and produced a major national security statement, but they have been given little prominence in recent times. It would be timely to revise the attention given to a whole-of-government national security policy.

Forty years ago, the first Defence White Paper was an admirable instrument for raising the level of debate on strategic and defence matters and providing a framework for a revolution in designing and implementing defence policy in the late 20th century. It's now time to consider new and more appropriate ways of developing not only a 'whole-of-government' but also a 'whole-of-parliament' approach to discussions of the strategic issues that Australia will face in the next decades of the 21st century.

REFERENCES

- Ball D, Carr A 2016. *A national asset: fifty years of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre*, ANU Press, Canberra.
- Brangwin N, Church N, Dyer S, Watt D 2015. *Defending Australia: a history of Australia's defence white papers*, Parliamentary Library, Canberra.
- Brown J 2016. 'Firing line: Australia's path to war', *Quarterly Essay*, 62, Black Inc., Melbourne.
- Brown J et al. 2016. 'Correspondence', in Watson D 2016, 'Enemy within: American politics in the time of Trump', *Quarterly Essay*, 63, Black Inc., Melbourne.
- Cooksey RJ 1986. *Review of Australia's defence exports and defence industry: report to the Minister for Defence*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1986.
- Dibb P 1986. *Review of Australia's defence capabilities: report to the Minister for Defence*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1986.
- Edwards P 2006. *Arthur Tange: last of the mandarins*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Harris S 1998. *Will China divide Australia and the US?*, Australian Centre for American Studies, Sydney.
- Huisken R, Thatcher M 2007. *History as policy: framing the debate on the future of Australia's defence policy*, ANU E-press, Canberra.
- Jayakumar S 2016. *State, society and national security: challenges and opportunities in the 21st century*, World Scientific, Singapore, p. 10.
- Marston D, Leahy T 2016. *War, strategy and history: essays in honour of Professor Robert O'Neill*, ANU Press, Canberra.
- Millar TB 1965. *Australia's defence*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- O'Neill RJ (ed.) 1976. *The defence of Australia: fundamental new aspects: proceedings of a conference organised by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, the Australian National University, October 1976*, ANU, Canberra.
- Taylor B, Farrelly N, Lee S 2012. *Insurgent intellectual: essays in honour of Professor Desmond Ball*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
ANU	Australian National University
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
SDSC	Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization

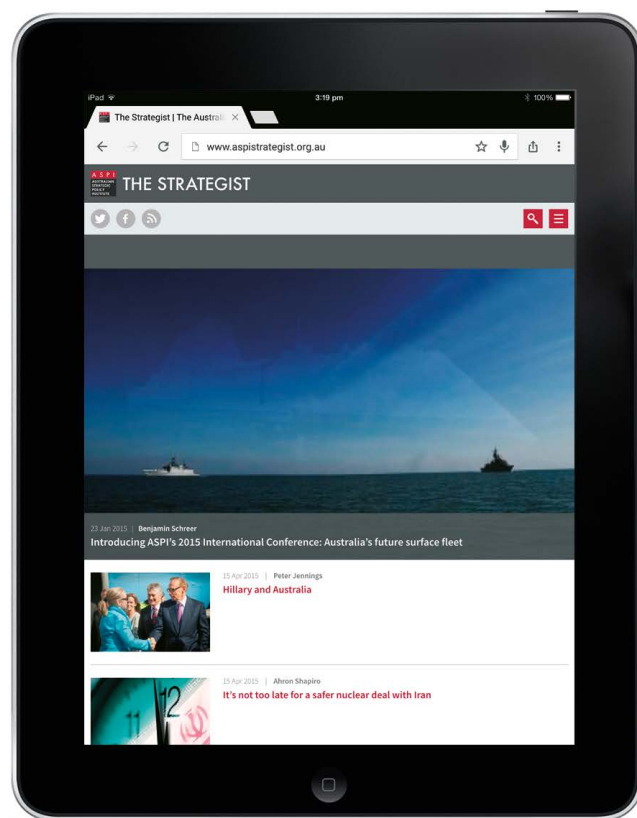
WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGY?



Stay informed via the field's leading think tank, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

BLOG

ASPI's blog, **The Strategist**, delivers fresh ideas on Australia's defence and strategic policy choices as well as encouraging discussion and debate among interested stakeholders in the online strategy community. Visit and subscribe to an email digest at www.aspistrategist.org.au. You can follow on Twitter (@ASPI_org) and like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ASPI.org).



Supported by

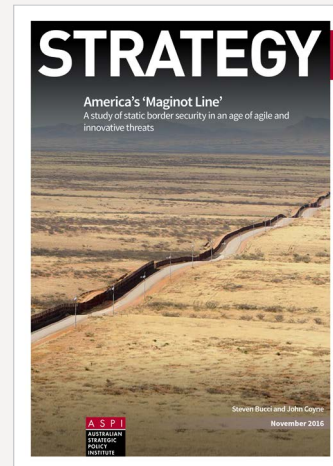
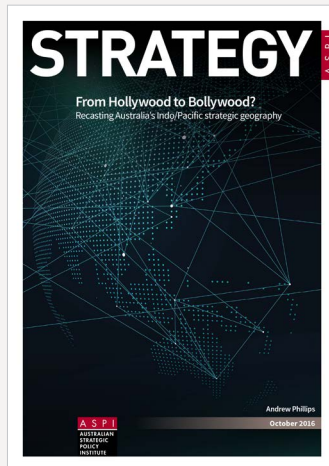
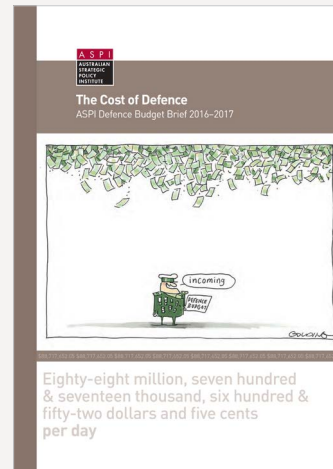


Raytheon
Australia



To find out more about ASPI and membership go to www.aspi.org.au or contact us on 02 6270 5100 and enquiries@aspi.org.au.

Some previous ASPI publications

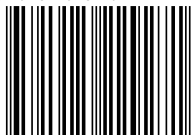


Defence White Papers at 40

The Defence White Paper brought down earlier this year (DWP 2016), the seventh of its kind, appeared shortly before the 40th anniversary of the first, which was tabled in parliament by the Defence Minister, James (later Sir James) Killen, in November 1976. For a governmental practice as for an individual, a 40th anniversary is a good time to stand back and assess the past, present and future. How is it that Australia managed for the first 75 years after Federation without a Defence White Paper and then produced seven in 40 years, the last three within seven years? How have the White Papers evolved over this time? What do they now achieve, and for which constituencies? Are they still a worthwhile tool for good governance, or might there be better ways of achieving their purpose that are more appropriate to the demands of the 21st century?

This paper looks in some detail at the context in which the first and second Defence White Papers (DWP 1976 and DWP 1987) were produced. It then surveys the next five more briefly, before making some proposals for the future.

ISBN 978-1-925229-27-1



9 781925 229271 >