

# “Top Down” Planning and Joint Doctrine:

Australians leading  
American column,  
Northern Territory.

## The Australian Experience

U.S. Army (AI Chang)

By THOMAS-DURELL YOUNG

In terms of defense planning, Australia is a paradox. Though located in a remote region of the world, Australians do not in general draw a sense of security from their geographic isolation. There are no land boundaries, and regional threats since World War II have been distant or sporadic. Nonetheless Australia’s anxiety over its exposed position proves that a country does not need an identifiable threat to consider itself insecure. For example, while sufficiently removed from the frontline in the Cold War, Canberra was a staunch “blue force” during the period of superpower confrontation; indeed, with shared experiences of many wars

and a resilient alliance, it has retained a close security association with the United States.

Australia is the world’s most urbanized society with the overwhelming preponderance of its populace in the southeast. Yet it is the climatically inhospitable, underdeveloped, and resource-rich north and northwest that have been receiving attention from the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Geostrategic realities and recent experience have combined to produce an advanced defense planning system. Many post-Cold War difficulties facing Western militaries—such as developing capabilities-based planning systems and achieving greater jointness—have tested defense leaders in Canberra since the early 1970s. What initiated the change in thinking was the official recognition in 1972 that Australia had no threat against

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Combat Camera Imagery (April Alexander)

F-111 arriving in Darwin for Pitch Black '93.

which to plan. To its credit, the defense establishment developed a top-down, threat-ambivalent planning system and force development methodology. One outcome of this approach has been to foster *jointness* by linking joint doctrinal development to strategic guidance. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear that commanders not only know ADF joint doctrine but actually use it.

While the U.S. Armed Forces have now adopted jointness as a formal discipline of study and have tomes of doctrine, comparative literature on joint matters is limited. Thus the Australian experience warrants examination. This article analyzes two key elements of Australian jointness: defense planning/force development methodology and the development of joint doctrine. A description of the evolution of Australian defense policy will place these two systems in context. Whereas it would be imprudent to claim that the Australian experience is applicable to other defense establishments, the processes underlying its elements should be of interest to U.S. planning and doctrine communities.

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### Defense Policy

For those unfamiliar with Australian defense, *Defending Australia 1994*, a white paper issued by the previous Labor government, is the latest iteration of a policy which has enjoyed general support across the political spectrum since 1972. In that year the ruling Liberal-Country Party coalition (the Liberal Party being “conservative” in Australia) issued the first formal white paper on defense. Significantly, the *Australian Defence Review* argued in favor of a defense policy of self-

reliance in light of the impending withdrawal of the British from the Far East, the Nixon Guam Doctrine, and evident failure of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

The policy was further elucidated and with stronger language in the Liberal-Country Party coalition government’s *Australian Defence, November 1976*. Reliance on allied military assistance in the event of a direct threat to Australia would no longer be assumed, thereby giving impetus to developing a balanced, more self-sufficient force. The apotheosis of self-reliance was reflected in *Defence of Australia 1987*. For the first time, the concepts of “self-reliance” and the “defense of Australia,” with an endorsed national strategy and policy guidance to help implement them, became more than mere terms. A strategy of “defence in depth” was adopted to direct ADF development. Specific strategic guidance followed in 1991 and set the priorities for improving ADF capabilities to operate in the north by increased force presence and facilities for deployments.

The 1994 paper further acknowledges the new regional challenges involved in their pursuit and “defence in depth” has become “depth in defence,” thereby providing a more holistic approach employing all national assets, as opposed to its earlier more limited definition.

One discernible change in previous policy is an acknowledgement that ADF must be more capable of carrying out missions outside of the defense of Australia. However, force development will still be guided by the defense of Australia, with capabilities for regional engagement, peace-keeping, and external deployment being considered tangentially. The 1993 *Strategic Review* made no mention of “Australia’s area of direct military interest,” which had been given considerable prominence in *Defence of Australia 1987*. This concept had utility in the 1980s in shifting the focus more firmly from filial protection by “great and powerful friends” to the peculiar needs of Australia’s defense. The job done, and with growing engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, limited boundaries were discarded as strategic and force development tools. One result of Canberra’s policy of “regional engagement” was the ground breaking December 1995 security pact with Indonesia.

While it may appear that Australian planners have long been blessed by policy consistency, this is not so at the implementation level. Between the 1972 white paper and its 1987 counterpart, defense planners lacked adequate guidance from political authorities. It took the publication of the *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities* in 1986 by Paul Dibb, a consultant to the minister of defence, to move the government to articulate and sanction an official strategy. The 1987 defense white paper offered thorough guidance in which Canberra

HMAS Dubbo and  
HMAS Fremantle  
during Kangaroo '95.



U.S. Marines preparing  
to jump with Australian  
paratroops.

Australian Defence Public Relations (Gary Ramage)

Australian Defence Public Relations (K. Piggott)

stated national security aspirations and announced a strategy of “defense in depth.” Importantly, this paper also had the effect of limiting force structure planning specifically to the defense of Australia.

**Defense Planning**

Australian defense policymaking has four major steps. First, planners consider geopolitical and geostrategic factors such as the proximity of states, population centers, terrain, infrastructure, et al. Overall, planners face defending an island continent distant from other countries, having a vast and climatically inhospitable north with a limited population base and infrastructure. On the positive side, Australia has a formidable “air-sea gap” between its coast and the archipelago farther north through which an attacker would have to pass.

Second, the defense establishment develops appreciations of regional military capabilities in being as well as prospect. These are not official threat assessments but rather surveys of regional defense capabilities.<sup>1</sup> As such, there is no consideration of, or judgment on, the motives or intent of regional countries. An appreciation of a nation’s geographic setting and the military capabilities of regional states informs judgments on warning time and defense preparation requirements.

Third, these findings suggest what is credible and what is not in the form of “contingencies.” For example, an invasion or conquest of Australian territory would be too demanding on enemy combat, combat support, and logistics elements. Japan might have thundered on the northern coast during World War II but never realistically looked like conquering the country.

On the other hand, while no motive or intent for conflict at any level can be perceived, prudence demands the ability to meet feasible contingencies, now called “short-warning” (rather than the earlier low or escalated) conflicts.<sup>2</sup> The scale and intensity of short-warning conflict could range



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from small raids to larger protracted operations, still a demanding prospect in the sparse tracts and remote waters of the far north.

Contingencies are not used for formal threat-based planning but as a baseline against which defense capabilities can be weighed. Credible contingencies have a direct influence on developing ADF capabilities to meet conflicts that could arise in the near term, and the defense expansion base (reserve forces and defense industrial capabilities) for conflicts that would take longer to develop.

Fourth, planners generate five and ten-year plans based on realistic financial guidance set by the government. This provision grew from a failure to garner the appropriations which the Dibb review and earlier white papers assumed.

This planning process produces the following conclusions:

- Australia possesses a natural and formidable air-sea barrier.
- There is no identifiable country with the intent or ability to threaten fundamental national interests, let alone national security (that is, to launch and sustain a lodgement on Australia).
- Certain countries do possess some capabilities which could be employed against Australia, and their acquisition of more threatening weapon systems could be countered by increasing ADF capabilities.
- Nevertheless, in the short term and without expansion, such capabilities could only generate conflict well short of major attack or invasion.
- As a consequence, Australia will protect itself through a strategy of depth in defense.

These conclusions equal a net assessment and establish requirements for a standing force structure and defense base. The assessment has the following implications for defense policy:

- In light of Australia's threat-ambiguous environment, sophisticated intelligence gathering and assessment capabilities are crucial to providing sufficient warning to allow an appropriate political response.
- Inhibiting incursions and monitoring sovereign territory and seas require refined air, maritime, and ground surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities suitable for peacetime and wartime.
- Priority must be directed to meeting short warning-time conflict.

These processes establish a practice by which defense officials can delineate ADF missions without accentuating implausible threat scenarios. This is not always easy since it requires clear policy and consensus on key areas in the defense community. The system has provided planning with stable direction to develop force structure for the defense of Australia in a top-down manner.

**Force Development**

The process used by the Australian Department of Defence and Headquarters ADF to carry out force development has three stages: strategic concepts, defence force capability options papers, and specific capability proposals, including key capability submissions. The process must be seen as a continuum since distinctions drawn between the stages are somewhat arbitrary.

*Stage 1—Developing strategic concepts.* Guidance identifies likely ADF roles in the defense of Australia. Currently, strategic concepts are written for each of eight roles. The concepts are developed to ensure a joint focus as well as the full and complementary capabilities of ADF:

- intelligence collection and evaluation
- surveillance of maritime areas and northern Australia
- maritime patrol and response
- protection of shipping, offshore territories, and resources
- air defense within maritime areas and northern approaches
- defeat of incursions on Australian territory
- protection of civil and military assets (including infrastructure and population centers)
- strategic strike.

But because these roles are broad, a strategic concept derives a list of tasks including specification, in the greatest possible detail, of task parameters such as rates of effort, location, duration, and sustainability and, whenever possible, initial judgments of task priorities.

Tasks derived from strategic concepts must be identified correctly and comprehensively as they evolve since they form the basis for force development. It must be made clear what is to be done, where, when, how many times, and for how long. Note that strategic concepts do not specify how to accomplish missions.

An update of these concepts over time is envisaged as factors change. Moreover, once all eight have been endorsed they will be supported by environmental (land, sea, and air) concepts and one master concept as a baseline repository for common consideration.<sup>3</sup>

*Stage 2—Defence force capability options papers.* These documents examine the extent to which current and approved ADF capabilities can undertake tasks identified in endorsed strategic concepts. Where tasks cannot be completed to an adequate level, the papers identify broad options for overcoming deficiencies. This drives the system to examine in a joint manner what can be done with existing capabilities and, should deficiencies arise, to determine what capabilities are required for the future.

Australian troops landing from *HMAS Tobruk*.



Australian Defence Public Relations (C. Woods)

Capability options papers are developed to accomplish the following:

- Assess the performance likely from using all existing capabilities.<sup>4</sup> This step establishes the baseline against which the cost of adjustment options will be measured.

- Determine what level of performance is acceptable and the consequences of not meeting that standard; that is, does a deficiency need to be overcome? This analysis must also consider the effects of not completing the tasks. Conversely, surplus capability requires a decision as to whether to reduce structure or shift excess capabilities elsewhere; for example, reserve components.

- Explain how a defense force could reduce the deficiency inexpensively with cost-effective adjustments such as changes in doctrine, training, or command and control.

- If the defense force cannot fulfill a task, this stage will explain ways it can acquire greater proficiency by improving such components as manpower, facilities, equipment, training, organization, etc.

- Estimate level of improvement and likely costs of an enhancement option as well as consequences of not performing to the level judged acceptable.

- Finally, establish force development priorities based on the preceding analyses as well as the best return for expended resources.

While complicated, this process can be summed up as follows:

- Can the identified tasking be done now? (What are existing capabilities and how well can they perform the task?)

- How much is enough? (Identify where excess/shortfall exists and what to do about it.)

- What are the costs and risks?

- What are the preferred generic options?

*Stage 3—Specific capability proposals, including major capability submissions.* Following approval of generic options, the final step before funding approval and acquisition is determining specific solutions and matching resources with force structure requirements. Questions involved at this stage focus on cost, type, and density of equipment required and timing of procurement.

### Joint Doctrine

Just as Australian force development is highly influenced by strategic concepts, so is joint doctrine. In short, endorsed strategic concepts provide the foundation for the development of ADF joint doctrine. So important are these concepts that it is extremely difficult for a service to obtain new capabilities unless it can show that they would directly support existing strategic concepts.

Joint doctrine must demonstrate how ADF is capable of performing the missions described by strategic concepts and has thus become more influential. For instance, while responding to an inherently low “force-to-space ratio” through a series of command reorganizations, ADF has had to become more proficient in joint operations. Consequently,

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all exercises are joint. The capstone ADF Publication 1, *Doctrine*, has become umbrella guidance for the three services, to which their own doctrines must conform. The services have come to accept joint doctrine as a useful means to achieve the often elusive goal of jointness, noting, however, the important role of each service’s professional doctrinal sources in influencing joint culture.

As concepts mature, joint doctrine increasingly flows from and supports specific concepts. ADF joint doctrine thereby provides methods by which the services can support national strategy. Although the individual services previously found it difficult to demonstrate that they could execute strategic concepts separately, joint doctrine combined with emerging operational concepts provides integrating and rationalizing guidance.

Lastly, joint doctrine will help the commander, Australian Theater, and his one geographic and three environmental component commanders to assess and demonstrate command preparations to accomplish missions stipulated in the Headquarters ADF *Master Task List*, as well as respond to the *Chief of Defence Force’s Preparedness Directive* (on readiness levels and resource allocation).

Joint doctrine is drafted at the ADF Warfare Centre by teams of field grade officers from all services with recent operational experience. The centre, organized in 1990 from two joint warfare schools, is chartered to develop and teach joint doctrine, manage the ADF exercise analyses plan, and maintain a data base for post-exercise analyses. It is concerned with developing and validating joint doctrine on the operational level. Consequently, the centre does not normally develop tactical level doctrine, which is done by the individual services in accordance with joint doctrine.

Valid joint doctrine must address strategic concepts when it is drafted. Once completed and vetted, doctrine is reviewed by the Joint Operations Doctrine Group which is comprised of service representatives, joint commands, Headquarters ADF, and other interested parties. Draft doctrine is then staffed through the services. Agreement to publish is reached by consensus. The tendency to water down joint doctrine which can arise in the United States during consensus-building is largely mitigated in Australia because the process is focused on strategic concepts during the early stages of development and throughout the coordination phase.<sup>5</sup>

Once endorsed, joint doctrine is validated for relevance and utility through the observation of joint and combined exercises by the ADF Warfare Centre. The assistant chief of defence force (operations) sponsors such observation visits, thus ensuring the involvement of Headquarters ADF in the review. Any observed inadequacies can result in a doctrinal review. In this manner,

there is a routine method of ensuring that doctrine remains relevant to operators in the field.

Post-1972 defense gave Canberra a twenty-year head start in planning to operate jointly in a threat-ambiguous regional environment. Moreover, geostrategic realities, financial exigencies, and defense guidance forced ADF to take jointness seriously. This is not to suggest that the Australian model is either perfect—it is evolving—or appropriate for other countries. Australia clearly enjoys a unique strategic culture.

What is relevant are the methodologies and systems outlined above. Developing a planning process that translates national policy and strategic guidance into overarching concepts, capability options, and principles to govern force employment should not be discounted. Given shortcomings in current joint strategic planning within the Pentagon, the Australian experiences could hold answers for improvements in the U.S. planning system. Thus, in an era of financial penury in many nations, and recognizing that future operations will require joint capabilities, a study of Australian defense planning and joint doctrine could reveal what will and what will not work. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> While defense officials emphasize that these appreciations are not threat assessments, references to “intelligent adversaries” and Australia’s “favorable security environment” presuppose a threat, however ill-defined. Officials respond that their methodology does not allow threats to overly influence their force development methodology.

<sup>2</sup> Levels of conflict include low-level, escalated low-level, and more substantial conflict. Escalated low-level conflict is defined as an “attacker supplementing or substituting unconventional tactics and forces with military units prepared to confront our forces direct.”

<sup>3</sup> As further feedback, an operational level concept for the defense of Australia will produce the “warfighters’ view” and improve interaction of the separate service planning for all eight roles or combinations of them.

<sup>4</sup> Concept papers make assumptions on actual geographic locations, frequency, intensity, and currency of significant conflict periods similar to two MRCs and the win/hold/win judgment.

<sup>5</sup> For a critique of the U.S. doctrine development process, see Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr., and Thomas-Durell Young, *Strategic Plans, Joint Doctrine, and Antipodean Insights* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1995).