

INTERDEPENDENCE, ALLIANCE AND THE WINNING EDGE

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The defence of the nation, together with provision of the physical, economic and social security of the citizens, are the central planks that support the legitimacy, credibility and authority of any government.

They are also at the heart of the contract between the people and their government.

We in Australia have been blessed.

Since Federation, our governments have honoured this contract, with varying degrees of success it must be said, as they have balanced the myriad of fiscal, social and political pressures that distinguish modern democracies.

The Great Depression, which had such a terrible impact on the lives of so many Australians, led to an under-investment in national defence capacity in the years immediately before WW2.

But the same cannot be said of the years leading up to WW1, as the newly formed Commonwealth governments grappled with political volatility, the challenges of integrating federal administrative systems, and the monumental task of creating a national identity.

If Admiral William Creswell is the father of the Royal Australian Navy, Alfred Deakin, our second Prime Minister, was its principal architect. It was Deakin who gave early expression to the political philosophy that continues to provide the fundamental *raison d'être* of the national defence enterprise.

Defence, said Deakin, is the ultimate guardian of liberty, the freedom – grounded in the rule of law – that flows from the recognition that each citizen has dignity and value. And, in Deakin's view, any attack on that dignity and value is an attack on the nation as a whole.

While I am generally reluctant to recite lengthy quotes from “authorities”, Deakin’s articulation of the policy underpinnings of the national defence enterprise rings as true today as it did in 1907.

This is what he said in the House of Representatives on Friday 13 December 1907.

If we lost the whole of our financial possessions we should miss them much less than if we were robbed of liberty, constitutional freedom, civilization, and social status.

One hesitates even to consider such prospects, and yet one must recollect that there are grave contingencies to be kept in view, if it be only at the back of our minds. None of us can conceive Australians in serfdom. Or subject to an alien rule.

Although the incredible consequences that would follow from the obliteration of our race and nationality cannot be compassed by the imagination, we can never forget that what we have most to defend first and last is our national life and ideals more precious than life of the breathing frame.

Deakin continued:

What we seek is not the development of what is sometimes termed a military as distinguished from a martial spirit.

What we aim at is the maximum of good citizenship, with the spirit of patriotism as the chief motive power of a civic defence force.

For always, behind the weapons, behind the organization, behind the gun, there is the man. It is in the character and capacity of its manhood that the real strength and energy of resistance of a people must be found. . . .

Let us accept that such muscular phrases may sound chauvinistic today. but there is no challenging the import of Deakin’s words: the moral quality of the people is *the rock* on which national defence stands.

As he proceeded with that speech to the Parliament in 1907, he outlined his vision for the Royal Australian Navy, referring to Australia’s need for a ‘maximum of navalism’. It is a vision that continues to inspire our modern navy. Deakin further emphasised that the sea was the first line of defence, and we in Australia were reliant upon it. He said:

Ours is an island continent, and its best defence will be that which prevents an invader from ever setting his foot upon our shores. ¹

¹ (Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, HoR Hansard, No 50, 1907, Friday 13 December 1907, p. 7510)

Deakin was, of course, providing a contemporary answer to that age-old question “Is there anything for which a nation has the right to spill the blood of its children?” As those of us who might have paid attention at Sunday school would remember, it was the question that confronted Abraham when God demanded the sacrifice of Isaac.

As Genesis 22 tells the story, God let Abraham off the hook because he was obedient and had faith—He had shown his fear of God; for which he was willing to sacrifice his only son. These days, would God personally intervene and put the same question to any one of us? But the thing that does justify the expenditure of blood and treasure in our democratic society is our regard for any attempt to constrain the personal liberty of our citizens, because that is what defines us as citizens.

Deakin got it !

He also understood implicitly that there is a community that shares these values. While, in 1907, that community, from an Australian perspective, was the Empire. In present-day terms it is the community of democratic nations that place the individual liberty of their citizens – expressed in the rather formal phrase “the rule of law” – at the centre of their political values.

These values, I might note, inspired the overwhelming support of democratic nations for the United States as it confronted the horror of 9/11, and what drove Prime Minister John Howard to invoke ANZUS in support of the US for the first time in the Treaty’s history. So how do the values translate to my business, as an Armed Service of the government?

The great theorist of war Clausewitz, tell us that war is always the continuation of policy by other means. The policy in question, of course, is the policy of domination, the policy of the expansion of national power, the policy of the enslavement of other peoples and the policy of expropriation of their national treasure.

And the means to achieve that, of course, is armed force. Clausewitz, postulates that defence is the stronger form of war. His argument is that, when a nation is under attack, it has the

united political, moral, emotional and economic strength of the citizens to act to protect the freedom of the people.

Clausewitz is right.

But his argument has an interesting consequence: because defence is the stronger form of war, it must remain at the forefront of national policy if it is to provide the constant reassurance that democratic peoples demand if they are to go about their ordinary occupations and build both national strength and national resilience.

Now the world community of nations is constantly changing. While we might all search for constancy, order and predictability, the fact is that there is an intrinsic randomness at play in world affairs.

There is ambiguity in global political affairs, and discontinuity and unpredictability characterise the strategic environment in which governments create their defence policies. Most of us prefer simplicity and clarity. Yet the curious fact is that ambiguity and discontinuity actually provide us with critically important opportunities that go to the heart of strategic policy making.

War is a fundamentally human activity: people make war. So those of us who understand the inherent strength of a defensive strategy also understand that the warmongers also prefer simplicity and clarity.

And that is where they are most vulnerable, because we can exploit that preference by maximizing their uncertainty. We do that by leveraging ambiguity and discontinuity for our own strategic ends.

We play with the minds of our adversaries. That, fundamentally, is how we go from values to war. Central to the Australia's naval strategy is the RAN's ability to conduct both defensive and offensive operations in delivering the defence policy of the government of the day.

I noted earlier that defence is the stronger form of war. For the nation's defensive systems to have effect, however, we need to be able to force an adversary to pause and reflect. We need to be able to create uncertainty in the adversary's mind.

We do this by being able to sanction errors of decision and judgment through the use of offensive lethal force, where the consequences of error are seen in the destruction of the adversary's operating systems. And while we will always seek to leverage the ambiguity of our force disposition by forcing the adversary to ask "where the hell is he" and "will he or won't he", the fact is that we must be able to deliver lethal force if the adversary makes the wrong choice.

I've said this before and this is precisely what I mean by decisive lethality: lethality that both sanctions a wrong decision and forces the decision-maker to step back.

Whether that decision to step back is a result of deterrence or of applied lethality makes little difference. It is the ability to act offensively that actually makes the difference—The best defence is a good offence!

Some defence planners view defence and offence as the ends of a spectrum, where defensive capabilities are cranked up and supplemented to deliver lethal force. I do not see it that way.

The RAN is a system where all the elements are mutually and systemically reinforcing. It is a system that delivers a critical effect – defeating the adversary through the application of decisive lethality.

For that reason, I see defence and offence as planning and operating dimensions within which the entire system delivers the government's strategic intention. What this means is that decisive lethality is central to the strategic posture of the RAN.

The corollary of this is that, without the ability to deliver lethal force that determines strategic decision-making, a navy can be little more than a border protection force or a coast guard. While modern navies have plenty of ambition, the fact is that none of them can single-handedly maintain ubiquitous sea control. The best that a modern navy can do on its own

account is to deny the adversary the ability to operate in specific areas. And that denial is delivered by means of decisive lethality.

As I said earlier, strategic offensive capabilities are central to the nation's ability to wage war, and those capabilities provide the lethality that is so central in war to both deterrence and to prevailing in the contest of minds.

But while the RAN can deliver decisive lethality, it is, like all comparable navies, unable to do so in every possible operational circumstance.

Good targeting and the premeditated use of ambiguity and deception serve to maximize uncertainty in the mind of the adversary. But the fact is, however, that the forces that deliver lethality cannot be everywhere, and the adversary is able to break out.

To complicate the adversary's decision space, those exercising strategic command need to generate distributed lethality, as the US planners describe it. And that is done through alliances and coalitions.

If decisive lethality is the fulcrum of war, distributed lethality is the panoply of war, to use the expression of the nineteenth century US politician and constitutionalist, William Whiting.²

This brings me to the central concepts of Interdependence: Alliances and partnerships.

The community of western nations emerged from the Cold War with a sense of strategic vindication and a strong sense of relief. Our governments immediately began harvesting the "peace dividend", channeling spending away from defence and into the national social and physical infrastructure.

² [William Whiting, *War Powers under the Constitution of the United States* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1871), p. 143]

The focus of strategic planning moved from collective defence to national defence. Alliances, of course, stayed in place, while unwieldy treaties such as SEATO and CENTO had already fallen into abeyance. We all hoped that we would never again need to prepare for all-out war.

But here again hope triumphed over experience. Through the nineties, we saw a number of peacekeeping operations in Kuwait, Angola, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, the Balkans and East Timor, to name just a few. These operations demonstrated yet again that the prevention of war, the enforcement of the peace and the maintenance of stability are cooperative endeavours. And, as I mentioned earlier, 9/11 saw the community of liberal democracies come together in ways that were unprecedented.

In the twenty first century, the world community faces international terrorism on a scale that was unimaginable in the twentieth century.

The long engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan have seen the liberal democracies come together in coalitions that are focused as much on national security as they are on global security, the return of stability to Iraq and Afghanistan and the defeat of terrorist groups.

For Australia, our traditional alliances have strengthened in the last decade or so. Our long-standing relationships with the UK, the US and New Zealand have provided the springboard for our cooperation with NATO partners.

And in Asia, our relationships with Malaysia and Singapore, along with the Asian partners of the US – Korea, Japan, Thailand and the Philippines – have diversified and strengthened in ways that were inconceivable a decade or so ago.

We are increasingly aware of the interdependence that is central to the ability of modern states to manage their broader regional and global security interests.

The emergence of new strategic players, changing strategic balances and the shifting kaleidoscope of interests and aspirations is creating a multidimensional strategic environment where new forms of partnership and cooperation emerge to address the protection and promotion of common interests.

Whereas alliances are relationships with “lock in”, these emerging partnerships and coalitions are flexible, adjusting quickly both to problems and to opportunities.

But, from the viewpoint of war fighting, alliances and partnership are the *sine qua non* of distributed lethality. They are the essential precondition for transcending the limits of decisive lethality, driven by national capability, to enable distributed lethality, driven by common purpose.

Strategic commentary abounds with myths. Many of them reflect a naïve linearity of thinking, while others indicate an inability on the part of the commentators to understand the systemic nature of both strategic policy and force posture.

Self-reliance and interdependence do not actually sit at the opposite ends of some kind of polar spectrum, locked in both competition and opposition. Nations spend their money on military systems to meet national objectives. Australia is no exception.

Our force posture is constructed to meet the specific strategic objectives ordained by government. Indeed, if our force posture were not so constructed, we would have a defence capability that consisted of little more than a mish-mash, an untidy kit bag of tools lacking purpose, focus and meaning.

But it is precisely the coherence of our force posture, designed as it is to meet the imperatives of our national strategic goals, that enables Australia to contribute to and benefit from this strategic interdependence.

Strategy, as we know, is ultimately about ends and means. And where “ends” – that is, strategic goals – are shared, “means” enable the cooperation that is increasingly the engine for waging war. And just as self-reliance and interdependence do not exist as polar opposites, nor do “ends” and “means”. They are dynamic coefficients that mutually condition each other in decision-making.

This has a fascinating consequence: interdependence is as much an “end” in conceiving strategic success as it is a “means” for delivering it. It is intrinsic to sound strategy.

By virtue of its history, its tradition, its doctrine and its culture, the Royal Australian Navy is well positioned for the demands of joint and combined operations with allies and partners. Cooperation and interoperability are, as it were, in our DNA as a service.

Because the RAN operates in a global, interconnected environment, our alliances and partnerships are what deliver the distributed lethality that reinforces the strategic effectiveness of our decisive lethality.

I might argue as Chief of Navy, that my workload would be much less if the RAN were designed and structured to meet the more limited purposes of an exclusively national policy. A “go it alone” Navy would be considerably easier to command, not least of all because no consideration would need to be paid to the interests and abilities of others.

But a “go it alone” navy would also be useless. It would be a national albatross rather than a national asset.

Central to my responsibilities as the RAN capability manager is the need to ensure that the RAN can interact with like-minded navies at the policy, planning and capability levels. This is no simple task, but it is one that the ADF is actually very good at, but there is always a need to improve.

It may seem slightly odd to some that “relationship management” would rank so high on the priorities of someone responsible for ensuring that the navy can fight wars.

The development of trust and confidence, however, goes to the heart of the ability to deploy distributed lethality – to the heart of the ability to deny the maritime spaces to a would-be adversary. We often talk about this in terms of “interoperability” – the capacity to achieve similar goals employing similar capabilities. If only it were so simple.

Modern military relationships focus as much on policy and doctrine as they do on operational techniques and tactical manoeuvre. While integrated command, control, communications and intelligence systems are the Holy Grail for many naval planners, their effect depends on the clarity of leadership intentions and the compatibility of doctrine – the principles upon which the navy operates as a war fighting system.

As Clausewitz famously noted, war is “foggy”. In a world where “fuzzy logic” is actually helping us to limit the consequences of uncertainty, it is hardly surprising that fixed systems, rigid thinking, inflexible rules and uniform procedures do not drive interoperability in contemporary and prospective circumstances.

But where interoperability is based on the clarity of the goal and shared attachment to a common purpose, diversity in capabilities is no longer a showstopper. Indeed, capability diversity may well provide the additional force flexibility that takes “playing with the adversary’s mind” to new heights.

So, the strategic challenges facing modern governments are enormous. The apparently chaotic nature of power shifts, related as they are to economic cycles, the forces of nationalism and ideology, the quality of international leaders and the resilience of communities, imposes extraordinary burdens on national leaders.

In microcosm, the recent Greek debt crisis illustrates how uncertainty can work to threaten the destruction of a national economy and the destabilization of the entire economy of Europe. Yet leaders recognized the need to support interdependence.

If, in times of crisis, interdependence is so important, how much more important it is in times of opportunity. And, despite all the problems the international community is currently facing, there is enormous opportunity.

Interdependence affords both leaders and planners a significant asset in the long-term enhancement of national, regional and global security, so long as they use it as a multiplier of national strategic capacity.

In 1907, Alfred Deakin saw interdependence in terms of Australia’s place in the Empire, and its particular relationship with Britain. Yet he recognised interdependence for what it was – a fundamental strategic asset for those nations that put the value and dignity of their citizens at the centre of their national political, economic and strategic enterprise.

I suspect that he would applaud those of his successors who have held a similar view and who have worked to deliver the range of alliances and partnerships that, for Australia, define our strategic interdependence, at the same time securing our strategic independence.

For independence and interdependence are, as Deakin so clearly recognised, two sides of the same strategic coin.

Thank you.