The Centre of Gravity series

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The Centre of Gravity Series is the flagship publication of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC) based at The Australian National University. The series aspires to provide high quality analysis and to generate debate on strategic issues of direct relevance to Australia. Centre of Gravity papers are 3,000-4,000 words in length and are written for a policy audience. Each Centre of Gravity paper includes at least one policy recommendation. Papers are commissioned by SDSC and appearance in the series is by invitation only. SDSC commissions four to six papers in any given year.

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The Centre of Gravity Series is edited by Dr Andrew Carr, Senior Lecturer at the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre. He has published widely on strategy, middle powers and Australian defence policy. The COG series was created to improve the conversation and engagement between academic and policy communities. It also aims to draw attention to the most significant strategic questions facing Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Any comments or suggestions about how to improve the series or topics of particular interest are warmly welcomed. Dr Carr can be contacted on:

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Chris Barrie retired in 2002 after 42 years in the RAN, ending in four years of service as the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF). Since then he has worked on strategic leadership issues as consultant, teacher and mentor at Oxford University, the National Defense University in Washington DC, and at the Australian National University. At ANU Chris is Chair of the London Foundation, and a Director in the Tuckwell Foundation. He teaches on campus and at the Australian Command and Staff College and has facilitated induction courses for new APS entrants into the Department of Defence. He has also co-facilitated executive education courses for the National Security College on risk. He is Chair - PTSD Australia New Zealand, which has launched FearLess Outreach to assist all Australians and New Zealanders who have post traumatic stress or live with people who have it.
When we began planning this special edition in late 2019, mobilisation seemed a topic still well over the horizon. By mid-2020 the Australian Defence Force has already been called out for two national emergencies (the bushfire crisis and COVID-19) and the threat of a third strategic emergency looms.

In an authoritative study of how wars are won, military historian Cathal Nolan shows that most conflicts, especially those involving the great powers, are decided by exhaustion and attrition. Despite 'The Allure of Battle', it is not military genius, new technology or perfect tactical manoeuvres that decide the fate of nations; it is the slow, grinding down of forces and the question of who can remain on their feet.

This is not a type of conflict for which Australia is well-prepared. At just 25 million people, we are one of the smaller countries in the Indo-Pacific, with the size of our population and armed forces ranking between 55th and 60th worldwide. Yet our geographical burden is high, with the sixth largest landmass, and a claim to ten per cent of the world’s surface once our ocean territory is taken into account.

Nor does Australia have recent experience with mass civic contributions. Over the last half-century, the ADF has earned a reputation as an elite fighting force, built on rigorous standards of entry, professionalism, training and a technological edge. The risk here, as Nathan Finney writes, is that this force risks becoming a ‘glass cannon’, with one powerful punch but not much behind it.

With traditional ways of growing our strength such as economic development and migration taking a heavy hit due to the pandemic, it is urgent that Australia reconsiders how to use the resources we already have to achieve our security and well-being.

We need to consider how we can protect our people at home from climate change and disorder, how we can address regional instability and disaster relief, and if need be, how we can sustain and endure if a major war occurs in our region. It may be that we will need to do all three at the same time.

If we look to the first half of the 20th century there is, as Peter Layton shows, a long history with useful lessons about how to mobilise and prepare. The memorials to ANZACs across the country should remind us of the volunteer spirit and what Australians are willing to do in a crisis.

Mobilisation is not the same as self-reliance. It will require working with allies, sometimes with difficult trade-offs. As Zach Lambert shows, with some deliberate foreplanning, especially in concert with the United States and South Pacific, we can improve our mobilisation and sustainment capacity in mutually beneficial ways. The Department of Defence and ADF are already deep into thinking about how mobilisation can occur. Such a conversation, however, cannot stay within the boundaries of Russell. The public must be part of this discussion. It is they who must be defended, their resources which will be taxed and they who will be mobilised, perhaps even against their will, in our hour of need.
Placing the public at the centre of the mobilisation discussion, as Chris Barrie shows, requires rethinking notions of service and citizenship. It may lead to quite dramatic changes in the relationship between our people and our government. It can only work if the public understands and supports these changes. They must therefore be brought into today’s conversation on how we are preparing for a more difficult tomorrow.

This is an important Centre of Gravity paper. It meets the aim we set when we established this series: to examine the big strategic questions facing Australia and the Asia-Pacific. We are proud to release it, and hope that these authors’ thoughtful contributions will help inspire a broader public debate on these issues. The very future of our society may well depend on getting it right.

Dr Andrew Carr
Editor, Centre of Gravity Series

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Fresh Perspectives in Security
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Paul Dibb, Richard Brabin-Smith and Brendan Sargeant

Past National Mobilisation Insights: Supply Chains, the People and Supporting Great Power Allies
Peter Layton

Executive Summary

National mobilisation involves marshalling national resources to defend the nation and its interests. It purposefully shifts the boundary between a society’s defence and civilian sectors in favour of the former.

Examining Australia’s earlier national mobilisations can usefully raise less apparent issues. Supply chain experiences during both World Wars suggests evaluating the optimum balance of future investment between merchant shipping, building naval warships and repairing ships. Mobilising the people during time of war requires taking a strategic approach as the failure of the second conscription referendum in 1917 highlights.

Australia’s support for great power allies differed sharply between the two World Wars. In World War One, Australia supported its great power ally by supplying armed forces; domestic industries were irrelevant. In World War Two, the situation reversed. Australia’s domestic industries significantly supported its great power ally who suggested reducing Australia’s armed forces so as to bolster domestic production.

Policy recommendations

Australian defence strategies, and accordingly the ADF’s force structure, need to be designed cognizant of national mobilisation possibilities. Such planning must consider the impacts of allies including: impairing Australia’s ability to import from, and export to, the global market; creating a shortage in merchant shipping availability; and denying access to timely supply of offshore military equipment.

The basing of US armed forces in Australia in peace or war will influence Australia’s national mobilisation capabilities and capacities. Discussions need to begin on US needs of Australia’s national support base to determine their nature, scale and feasibility and their impact on the ADF.

Mention national mobilisation and the mind instantly imagines smokestack factories and immense industrial complexes mass-producing tanks, aircraft and warships. There is some truth in such mental images but there is much more to national mobilisation as Australia’s experiences in the first half of the twentieth century attest. These include supply chain troubles, a significant social mobilisation failure and variations in supporting great power allies. Considered broadly, our history offers many useful insights when thinking about national mobilisation today.

In military doctrines, national mobilisation is often described as marshalling national resources to defend the nation and its interests. It is a whole-of-society activity that purposefully shifts the boundary between the defence and the civilian sectors in a society in favour of the former. Crucially both sectors are interdependent, informing and shaping each other; Defence defends using the workforce, wealth and weaponry provided by the civilian sector in accord with the mutually agreed national defence strategy. Importantly, any national mobilisation will also try to access the very large global market place.
Mobilisation is not logistics, aptly described in Henry Eccles’s seminal work as: ‘the bridge between our national economy and the actual operations of our combat forces in the field’. Logistics transports and distributes the products of mobilisation to the forces in the field. Logistics runs from the factory gate to the frontline whereas mobilisation is everything before the factory gate.

In national mobilisation timing is everything. If defence strategies envisage short sharp wars, national mobilisation must occur in peacetime. During the long Cold War when warplans envisaged Soviet mass nuclear attacks early in a crisis, national mobilisation was only possible or useful pre-war.

In contrast, if defence strategies plan on long conventional wars then national mobilisation during the war could be the key to winning. The balance of mobilisation can be more significant than the balance of power. Who can win the last battle becomes more important than who fires the first shots. Germany’s defeat in both World Wars is an exemplar of this; brilliant military campaigns initially could not substitute for inadequate and late national mobilisation.

National mobilisation can appear a daunting and perhaps bewildering topic. However, the three areas discussed here – supply chains, social mobilisation and allies – can provide a feel for the issues involved. They can help policymakers appreciate the scope of the national mobilisation problem and its magnitude but also reassurance in that their predecessors have faced such issues before. Past success and failures can act as useful guideposts on the national mobilisation planning path.

Supply Chain and Shipping Predicaments

At the start of World War One, Australia was an integrated part of a globalised world. Some 40% of Australia’s GDP was accounted for by its imports and exports, as it is now. Amongst imports impacted by the war were hospital drug supplies as many came from Germany. The United Kingdom (UK) with limited stocks prohibited exports of aspirin, antipyrin, chloral, veronal, urotropine, salvarsan, surgical dressings and bandages. In terms of exports, there were worries over Australia’s food supply. Decisions were made that most staples would only go to the British Empire, to the chagrin of farmers denied more lucrative markets.

The most significant problem however was merchant shipping. British and neutral merchant shipping was quickly taken under UK control leaving little spare capacity for Australian exports or imports. Prime Minister Hughes realising the financial damage, pleaded with the UK and in exasperation bought fifteen tramp steamers. These returned to UK control when it bought Australia’s wheat crop for the remainder of the war (The money was paid regardless of whether the UK sent shipping to collect the wheat or not. In the end it didn’t, leaving the harvest to the vermin).

The underlying difficulty was that Australia was too distant. Steaming times to and from Australia were very long when compared against Canada. It was not just a shortage of ships but rather the number of voyages a ship could undertake in a certain time that was crucial. Merchant shipping to and from Australia remained severely limited for the whole war.

One of the flow-on impacts was that expanding local manufacturing proved difficult given the impossibility of importing any but the most urgently required machinery. The shipping problems were compounded by UK and US machinery manufacturers being fully committed to higher priority customers and markets. During World War One, machinery of any sort was practically un procurable by Australia from overseas.

This was all at sharp variance with the strong pre-war expectations that Australia would be a main support base for the defence of Empire. In reality, in this role distance made Australia strategically irrelevant.
World War Two initially appeared a rerun although Australia was now industrialising and noticeably larger in population. To solve the merchant ship shortage this time round, Prime Minister Menzies’s government decided to build nine 8-10,000 ton merchant ships in Australia. The orders for the ships were spread across the country to expedite production and create multiple suppliers but developing the numerous shipyards involved took time. Under separately negotiated contracts, the Government provided a small financial grant to each shipyard and then loaned the reminder required to improve them. Each ship was then built under cost-plus-fixed-fee contracts, with a fixed fee paid as a profit or management fee over and above the production cost.

While the capacity for hull construction proved comparatively easy to organize, marine engines presented problems. Such engines were not large and had been built in Australia before but that capability had faded away. The small residual expertise allowed only half the requirements of the shipbuilding programme to be met. New government investment was necessary to rebuild the requisite engine manufacturing capacity.

In late 1941, and under threat of Japanese invasion, merchant ship construction was suddenly overtaken by a greatly increased demand for repair and maintenance. National priorities shifted to first repairing naval vessels, second repairing merchant vessels, third new naval construction and then lastly new merchant ship construction. The situation became pressing as Japanese submarine attacks on Australian east coast shipping intensified.

Ship repair speed became crucial. A Controller of Repair was appointed under the Director of Shipbuilding to ensure ship repair work was prioritised, cognisant of the disruption to ship construction. The major repair deficiency was in skilled labour availability. About 1000 extra tradesmen were required, most of them in smaller ship repair firms. Problems also arose from the lack of adequate docking facilities for larger vessels and machine tool deficiencies.

In late 1942 a new shipbuilding demand emerged. The US armed forces started placing large orders under reciprocal aid for small watercraft of various types. By mid-1943 these orders amounted to some 5,700 craft with 1,000 more ordered by the Australian Army. Compared to large shipbuilding, small watercraft were a quite different undertaking, not requiring massive equipment, dry docks or large slipways and suitable for construction by small contractors. In the event, only some 2,400 were delivered. About 3000 Australian civilians operated the US Army’s small watercraft in logistic roles in northern New Guinea’s shallow waters and beyond.
Moving to today, any national mobilisation will need to cope with and adjust to significant import and export restrictions. Allies have their needs too and may prioritise them. Stephan Frühling frets that in a future conflict, allied demands for guided weapons might see Australia miss out on resupply. His argument can be extended across all Australian resource needs. Pre-war discussions with allies and friends, especially America, is needed to understand the scale of the problems and possible ways to address them.

External resources are only useful though if they can be accessed. Australia is expending considerable effort building warships able to defend the sea lines of communications (SLOC). World War One experiences raise questions over whether merchant shipping will be available to make use of such SLOCs even if they are safe. Great powers might again seize centralized control of allied and neutral shipping for the greater good, leaving Australia short. Might Australia be better placed strategically, if investments were made in domestic industries able to manufacture critical items instead of in the warships to defend the merchant ships bringing such items from overseas? Such a question is a difficult one but national mobilisation history suggests it is worth carefully analysing.

The question rests on the kind of war anticipated. World War One and the 1939-41 period saw wars conducted at great distance leaving Australia at the end-of-the-line and unimportant to great power allies as a supply base. In such circumstances, merchant shipping for Australia may become as important as naval combatants. The balance between investing in merchant shipping and warships may need evaluating.

On the other hand, if it’s a close-in, knife-fight-in-a-telephone box scenario akin to 1942 then ship repair becomes the critical capability needed, not new ship construction. Getting warships back into the fight quickly could be operationally essential. In thinking from a national mobilisation viewpoint, less examined issues arise about where to best invest: merchant ships, building warships or ship repair.

**A Great Social Mobilisation Failure**

By 1917, World War One was going badly for Australians with no end in sight. In this time of general gloominess, Prime Minister Hughes decided to hold a second conscription referendum. Better considered than the first, the second plebiscite was necessitated by long-declining monthly voluntary enlistment rates that made sustaining the AIF Divisions in France difficult. To mobilise the people, the government’s strategy sought legitimacy for its actions and crafted a strategic narrative.
With legitimacy, people will at least passively support government directions and accept demands made on them. Importantly they will not act against the government, instead generally ‘policing’ individuals to conform.

The government strategy was to deepen and then exploit the sharp identity divide in Australian society between loyalists and everyone else that had been created during the first conscription referendum debate. The proof of loyalty was to be pro-conscription. To strengthen the loyalist identity in comparison with other groups, attacks where made to weaken those sections of Australian society deemed outside the norm. Hughes declared these included: “the unworthy, the selfish, and anti-British,…reckless extremists, peace cranks, dis-loyalists, and pro-Germans.” This grouping was then extended to include Irish Catholic Australians, trade unionists and Queenslanders in general.

Irish Catholics were excluded being presumed to hold Republican-sympathies, trade unionists as they opposed conscription being worried about losing employment rights, while Queensland was considered ‘ripe for revolution’ given Premier Ryan’s anti-conscription speeches and eggs being thrown at Hughes in Warwick. The later event famously led to the AFP as Hughes believed the Federal Government now needed a police force. Hughes also used the Censor to prevent publication of anti-conscription tracts while the Special Intelligence Bureau (a forerunner of ASIO) harassed anti-conscriptionists.

The Federal Government never developed a compelling argument that could appeal to all Australians. This deficiency was remarkable given the overwhelming majority held very pro-British Empire opinions. The real question for most was whether military recruitment should be compulsory or voluntary, not their loyalty to the Crown.

The government complemented its legitimacy claims with a strategic narrative. Such narratives provide an interpretive structure people can use to make sense of historical facts, current problems and emerging issues. They feature a consistent logic chain that appeals to both people’s rational and emotional cognition.

The government’s strategic narrative held conscription was necessary as voluntary recruitment had failed, principally because of ‘a systematic campaign of poisonous doctrines insidiously disseminated throughout the country’.

The anti-conscription argument countered the strategic narrative directly and indirectly. Directly in arguing that official statistics indicated there were already sufficient recruits enlisted to sustain the AIF for another year, that America’s entry into the war meant allied troop numbers were no longer an issue and that Australia had done more proportionately than other allied countries. Indirectly in arguing that Britain’s proud liberal tradition privileged liberty and abhorred coercion; conscription was the way of continental despotism. Loyalty to British ideals demanded a ‘no’ vote.

The referendum was defeated with 54% voting against and so the AIF ended World War One as the conflict’s only all-volunteer force. The government’s social mobilisation strategy failed but left Australian society sharply divided on sectarian and labour movement lines. In the succeeding interwar years of large-scale economic turmoil this proved a bad foundation to have deliberately built.

Future national mobilisations will again need to call on the people for support. Unlike during World War One however, the marshalling of the Australian people may be contested not just from within but also from without. Foreign powers might now try to deliberately prevent national mobilisation by meddling in Australian society using digital technology. Australians are now closely linked to others around the globe exchanging words, data, images and videos at near-real time. Last century’s distinctions between the domestic and the international have vanished.
This shift to a more contested social environment reflects a revitalised appreciation of the importance of a nation’s societies to the nation’s ability to defend itself. The ‘people’ are now becoming reconceptualised as a centre of gravity that may be exploited by others to win future conflicts, potentially without any fighting at all. An adversary may now seek to mobilise Australians for their own purposes.

In future national mobilisations, Australian governments will need to actively build legitimacy and devise convincing strategic narratives. Prime Minister Howard could use the national authority his eminent position granted him to gain the people’s support for the 2003 Iraq intervention. A future Prime Minister will operate in a much more ideationally contested space and need to work to gain social mobilisation. The Hughes’ Government’s failed conscription referendum campaign offers insights into what not to do.

**Supporting Great and Powerful Allies**

In 1915-16 considerable effort went into investigating gun and shell manufacturing. The UK was requested to help develop gun manufacture in Australia but lacked the spare capacity to assist. Shell production began but by then UK industry was in full-rate production and unnecessary. Behind these attempts lay a more fundamental problem. Wars beget innovation; gun and shell design were continually rapidly evolving. Australia was simply too distant to keep up with technical changes. By the time items manufactured in Australia reached the frontline they would be obsolescent or even unusable.

If Australians could not make munitions themselves however, they could work in the factories of those who did. The UK was particularly short of manpower with some arguing 1,000 Australian tradesmen were more valuable than another battalion of infantry. Under an organized Australian government program, some 6000 Australians eventually worked in UK defence industries.

In World War Two Australia took a very different tack to supporting its partners. In early 1942 the Government declared ‘total mobilisation’; Darwin was bombed the next day. Australia’s national mobilisation however was not to be solely for Australia. It also became a major supplier of foodstuffs, materials and manufactured products to support US forces. This was the less-remembered second half of the US Lead-Lease program: reciprocal aid. Countries given Lend-Lease equipment were expected to reciprocate, giving goods and services in return. The generosity of Lend-Lease was intended to be mutual and only agreed to by a dubious US Congress with that understanding. It is plausible a future US Congress may feel the same.

After Pearl Harbour elevated Australia’s place in US strategic thinking, mutual aid between the US and Australia quickly grew. An effective and efficient division of labour developed that produced a high degree of supply complementarity. It made little military or economic sense for the US to ship to its forces in Australia those goods and services that could be produced and procured locally. By the end of 1942, Lend-Lease added about 7% to Australian domestic supply of goods and services, while reciprocal aid absorbed about 5% of Australian domestic production of goods and services.

There was a clear need to coordinate Australian and American logistics, production and resource management. The Allied Supply Council reported directly to Prime Minster Curtin and the Commander-in-Chief, US General MacArthur. It assessed Australian Lead-Lease requests against manufacturing items in Australia. In a similar vein, the Allied Works Council organised the extensive construction program underway in Australia for both nations’ armed forces. This program involved the 65,000-strong Australian Civil Constructional Corps.

**Australia’s national mobilisation was not to be solely for Australia.**
By mid-1943 it was apparent that reciprocal aid, combined with the increasing supply demands of Australia’s armed forces, was significantly stretching what total mobilisation could deliver. Australia’s over-commitment of manpower to the armed forces in the difficult year of 1942 was now preventing adequate production for US armed force requirements. A growing uneasiness developed that Australia might need to choose between ending the war as a fighting ally or as a general supplier of goods and services.

In late 1943, the War Cabinet decided 40,000 men would be released from the armed forces and munitions production for redirection towards food production and other priority requirements. Official War Historian, Paul Hasluck, considers the Cabinet’s national mobilisation decision flawed because it never answered the key grand strategic question: “what can Australia best do to help win the war.”

Hasluck’s question remains pertinent to any future Australian national mobilisation, especially when in coalition with a great alliance partner. If like the UK in 1914-18, they seek soldiers then Australia’s national mobilisation might focus on getting the most out of its workforce. Exporting workers now seems improbable, even if current Australian defence spending funds today’s US arms production workers.

The mutual aid case suggests a different path for great power support. In 1943, the US argued Australia was the natural supply base for the Pacific region. Australian production capabilities were developed specifically to meet a wide range of US armed force’s needs. With more manpower these capabilities could operate to full capacity. In the end, Australia resisted such entreaties, choosing a middle way that fully satisfied no one.

The issue arose again in August 1951. In the event of major war, the US expected Australia to feed one million US servicemen in the Pacific in addition to deployed Commonwealth forces, the UK and parts of Western Europe. The Menzies government equivocated but re-jigged national development and included such notions in the 1956 War Book, the most recent Australia has produced.

Such ideas have modern echoes. Stephan Frühling suggests encouraging the greater use of Australia by US forces as a main support base including shaping Australian defence industry for this role. Such a return to reciprocal aid may be problematic given Brendan Thomas-Noone’s observations that the US defence export control regime seems unattracted to developing Australian defence industry’s technical capabilities.
Perhaps inadvertently, the US may already be shaping what type and scale of reciprocal aid Australia could provide in a future conflict. This could be gradually shifting Australia more towards the general goods and services supplier function than is sought. Moreover, such shaping might over time adversely impact the overall ability of the Australian national support base to sustain the ADF in both peace and war.

**Conclusion**

National mobilisation is a large and complicated issue that effects the whole of a country. Achieving perfection is improbable given there is never enough time, the adversary is always taking counter-responses, international circumstances are fluid and domestic society is forever dynamic.

The historical examples discussed speak of other times and relate to different circumstances. Even so, if earlier national mobilisations were troubled by supply chain dilemmas, social mobilisation and supporting great power allies, future ones may also. As in 1914, Australia is integrated into a globalised world; the need to gain active public support for military actions is ever present; and concern over alliance burden sharing appears enduring.

Australia's future national mobilisation needs are uncertain. The past can only suggests ways that national mobilisation might be undertaken, offering up numerous possibilities and options. For the nation's defence forces though there is more certainty: if another war is fought, national mobilisation to some degree will be necessary. This is a future that can't be avoided. There is no alternative.

**Policy recommendations**

- Australian defence strategies, and accordingly the ADF’s force structure, need to be designed cognizant of national mobilisation possibilities. Such planning must consider the impacts of allies including: impairing Australia’s ability to import from, and export to, the global market; creating a shortage in merchant shipping availability; and denying access to timely supply of offshore military equipment.

- The basing of US armed forces in Australia in peace or war will influence Australia’s national mobilisation capabilities and capacities. Discussions need to begin on US needs of Australia’s national support base to determine their nature, scale and feasibility and their impact on the ADF.

**Endnotes**

3 Conscription Policy: Announced by Mr Hughes, *The Argus*, Tuesday 13 November 1917, p. 5.
4 *Ibid*.
Executive Summary

- Australia is facing a period of increasing geopolitical uncertainty, particularly concerning the defence alliance with the United States. The Australian Defence Force cannot assure national security without support from the United States.
- Planning mobilisation and scaling activities are Australia’s most cost efficient and timely hedging strategy to reluctance to act by the United States. Through planning for these actions, Australia will identify the key risks and opportunities that exist within Australian industry and harness them to provide an increased value prospect to support the alliance with the United States, increasing the likelihood of their assistance.
- Three areas of planning are critical: industry and the development of sovereign capabilities linked to an accessible allied military industrial complex; major systems and the availability of equipment to replace initial losses and raise additional units; and human resource management. Proposed avenues for investigation will be outlined throughout this paper.

Policy Recommendations

- Investigate sovereign capabilities for investment beyond those organically required by the Australian economy but which would provide outsized benefits to the alliance military industrial complex, and develop a Sovereign Industrial Capacity Building Plan.
- Explore scaling and replacement mechanisms for key capabilities such as cyber units, long range fires and exquisite platforms, and have these mechanisms coordinated closely throughout government. Develop an outreach program with the private sector to integrate scaling mechanisms with the development of sovereign capabilities at the small to medium business level.
- Reinvest and expand Defence Cooperation Programs throughout the South Pacific and review military service options for citizens of those nations, including paths to immigration.
- Expand officer recruitment and investigate assisted separation and reserve transfer options for junior officers as part of the Defence Strategic Workforce Plan 2016-2026, with the purpose of enabling mobilisation and scaling to occur in-extremis.

Increasing geopolitical uncertainty has prompted Australia to reinvest in the national security apparatus. The result: the most expansive investment in the Australian Defence Force in modern history, with over A$270 billion committed to defence capability over the next decade. However, the majority of this commitment concentrates on platforms to be delivered in future decades, such as the Future Submarine Program. This has created critical capability gaps in the short term, encompassing capabilities like long range fires and air defence.
Australia is now in a difficult position. In the event of a serious conflict, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) would have an unavoidable reliance on international allies for the defence of Australian interests. In the words of Senator Jim Molan, ‘We have concentrated on butter, confident that the United States would supply the guns.’ While there is a deep and abiding defence relationship between Australia and the United States, political decisions in the United States are increasingly characterised by the ruthless application of policies that serve their own national advantage.

This often will not align with Australian national security interests. For example, the October 2019 move to withdraw United States forces from Syria showed a willingness to abandon a much smaller and reliant force with little warning and potentially catastrophic results for the smaller party. This is a wakeup call for alliance maintenance. This is not a peculiarity of the current Trump administration, it is a manifestation of contemporary United States public sentiment. It is advisable to see this as the norm, rather than the exception—for example, the first military action involving the United States and Australia, the Battle of Hamel, was almost undone at the final moments by the withdrawal of promised American troops.

It is now critical for Australia to demonstrate strategic value to the United States, as well as develop the cultural, industrial and diplomatic connections maintaining the alliance. Australia must also investigate hedging strategies to ensure national security for a time where United States support does not arrive. Typically, these strategies are extremely expensive; involving investment in Research and Development, purchase of new platforms and costly investment in technologies that may soon become obsolete.

The world is increasing uncertain; Australia cannot afford to accept the strategic risk of a protracted or unplanned mobilisation process in the event of a crisis. The Department of Defence must prepare alternative strategies that hedge against these risks. Clear, well-articulated plans to mobilise an ADF response would create additional government policy options. Mobilisation planning identifies national enterprise outputs that can be provided in extremis to give credibility to political responses. This concept holds a stigma for both sides of government—it brings the mass deployment of light infantry divisions in world war conflict to mind. This stigma is harmful to national security, as developing the mechanism to conduct mobilisation is an effective ‘break in case of emergency’ strategy that does not require intolerable levels of investment. For example, European nations in 2015 reinforced their mobilisation mechanisms as a response to Russian aggression in the Ukraine, providing an example of how to develop effective mechanisms that reassure increasingly concerned populations they will be defended against unwarranted aggression. A mobilisation plan provides the framework to consider what elements of national power are worth developing in extremis, while only having to implement the framework if required. This guidance needs to be able to be communicated to a Defence industry in an open and unclassified way that does not damage operational security. Mobilisation planning will also demonstrate Australia’s strategic value to alliance partners—that we are resilient enough to survive some level of regional conflict without immediately calling on the alliance.

Mobilisation planning will demonstrate Australia’s strategic value to alliance partners.
If mobilisation planning is considered a bridge too far, or is too complex to achieve, Australia must at least develop detailed plans to scale up the force – the process of steadily and rapidly raising and deploying specific capabilities, rather than the wholesale mobilisation of the force and subsequently the nation. For example, a rising cyber security threat in the region might necessitate the rapid development of several deployable cyber warfare units in a short period. A scaling plan would enable the ADF to scale up in response to security requirements in a controlled and proportional way that could be funded without the exceptional means generally required by mobilisation.5

A significant benefit of scaling forces is that it enables operational commanders to achieve national objectives by accepting calculated risk. Operational military leadership are fundamentally and personally committed to the safety of the Australian people, both writ large and those under their command. To enable them to accept risk, they need to know that follow on forces exist and that risks can be taken without ‘betting the farm’ as Nathan Finney examines in his Centre of Gravity paper in this edition (see page 24).

Both mobilisation and scaling mechanisms require the same nine fundamental inputs:

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<th>Industry</th>
<th>Supply</th>
<th>Command and Control</th>
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<td>Major Systems</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Facilities and Training Areas</td>
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<td>Personnel</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Collective Training</td>
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While mechanisms to utilise all nine inputs are required for any mobilisation or scaling plan, three are key to enabling a timely response and I examine them in detail in the paper to follow.

First and most critical is industry and the development of sovereign capabilities linked to an accessible allied military industrial complex. Underinvestment and a lack of awareness of the relationship between industry and military capability has been a notable failure of Australian policy – for example, industry has only been included as a fundamental input to capability for Defence from 2016.6

Closely following industry is major systems – the availability of equipment to replace initial losses and raise additional units. This is historically the focus of Defence policy, with approximately 30% of Defence funding committed to major platform acquisition over the last decade.7

Finally, whilst unmanned and autonomous systems continue to promise to provide the mass required by modern combat operations, personnel are currently and will likely remain the primary capability in generating lethal force.8 A flexible and effective mechanism for harnessing Australian human resources cannot simply iterate on what has been done before and expect to be able to dramatically mobilise or scale Australian forces.

All three areas are underpinned by the requirement for Australia to cooperate with both the United States Government and the defence resource base that provides for it. Diversification into the European Union could help to offset reliance issues, but in the end, Australia’s security depends on materials generated by the United States defense industry. Cooperation instead of competition, at the allied-governmental level, is the name of the game.

Industry, Sovereign Capability and Investment

There are certain capabilities that are so critical to national security they must be regulated or supported above what would otherwise be accepted in a free market economy. These capabilities include the manufacture of explosives, weapons, platforms and electronics that may require replacement in a conflict situation, but which cannot be imported for geostrategic, economic or political reasons. These capabilities, which provide political freedom of action and operational advantage, can be grouped under the term ‘sovereign capabilities’ and are critical to any scaling or mobilisation activities.
Australia has serious issues with sovereign capability. A Harvard study from 2019 found that Australia has very limited economic complexity, relying on mineral exports and education. The chief economist of Industry Super Australia stated that the study demonstrated ‘Australia is effectively a quarry and has an underperforming tertiary sector and little else’. Australia was grouped with Turkmenistan, Cuba and Qatar for economic complexity. This study recommended a ‘strategic bets approach’ as Australia will not naturally diversify, but must coordinate at a strategic level to generate growth.

National security is particularly affected by this lack of industrial capability and the requirement to coordinate investment at the governmental level. In 2019 Australia became the second highest importer of weapons in the world whilst dropping to twenty-fifth in exports. Only one Australian company, Austal, was in the top one hundred weapons producers in the world. There are two approaches that should be considered in developing defence industry capabilities – the first being deeper integration with the United States defense industry, and the second being the targeted scaling of Australian sovereign capabilities.

The lack of industrial capability is a concern for the alliance with the United States, with unprecedented measures such as the critical minerals partnership already being implemented. Australia appears as a valuable customer but not a partner. The scale of Australian defence exports to the United States mean that the United States loses very little if Australian suppliers are removed from the market, and in times of crisis there is little motivation to support a customer that may no longer be able to pay. This is not unwarranted caution – in World War II, the Commander-in-Chief General Blamey stated that reciprocal Lend-Lease program commitments were being abused by the United States to gain political capital and should be immediately reviewed.

Noting this political reality, Australia must take action to tie itself more closely with American supply chains. This would ensure Australia provides a value prospect to the United States defense industry that makes protecting the supply chains important. It also provides a claim to access finished products such as advanced weaponry and platforms. There are multiple opportunities for this investment. Australia possesses many of the critical minerals that are required for United States sovereign capabilities – for example, magnesium for defensive flares or rare earth metals for advanced electronics. As outlined previously, with minimal diplomatic intervention Australia is being considered part of this supply chain. Another approach is to actively campaign for maintenance functions within the global supply chain for United States weapons systems. For example, Australia recently confirmed a reciprocal maintenance program for the C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft, operated by both nations. If this was able to be replicated for other platforms, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, this would provide significant reassurance that alliance actions would be considered.

Australia appears as a valuable customer but not a partner.
The second and mutually supporting approach is to develop Australian sovereign capabilities. This is a complex topic, because it is difficult to identify what precisely should be supported – should it be a specific platform or a general industry? It is also a long-term exercise in national resilience that must involve industry partners rather than governmental control, noting the value of market driven industry policy. As such, some guiding principles should be adopted. The first is to encourage the upgrade of capabilities that already exist within the economy; creating ‘value added’ products such as electronic componentry for defence purposes in addition to exporting rare earth minerals in their raw state. For example, Australian built guidance units added to United States produced missiles is a capability well within the capacity of Australian defence industry. In private industry, this process would require Australia to identify ‘unique attributes’ or ‘core competencies’ in industry, then apply resource and expertise to develop them. Some of these core competencies are obvious, like mining and medical tooling, whilst others are less so – for example, Australia has a strong electrical machinery industry that could be repurposed to electronics manufacture – but these need to be identified and developed through a formal process. This diversity would provide avenues to generate industry resilience—the capacity to quickly recover from disruption—and additional capacity for any mobilisation plan.

Once these have been identified, the second principle is investment in the trades required to enable these industries, to retain a sustainable workforce for expansion of manufacturing. This would create a strong base of expertise in the population, and enable the industry to scale if required, dramatically reducing the time to covert to military production. This may have significant costs unless it can be made economically sustainable in the long term, so incentivised partnerships with private industry are critical to any workforce changes. For instance, the Government recently announced a shipbuilding contract with Austal for the specific purpose of providing economic stimulus. There are significant benefits to developing manufacturing in Australia beyond the military applications – the availability of a workforce with high technological affinity at the lowest levels enables the integration of automation and bespoke engineering near manufacturing locations. For example, Daikin specifically collocates their electrical engineering and manufacturing in both Australia and the United States to ensure precision and end-to-end control of the process. It also enables a reduction in currently high (and increasing) business management and logistics costs. The key enabler of this approach is a Sovereign Industrial Capacity Building Plan, and the rapid application of funding to this plan. This plan should be shared with industry but must be dictated by the national security apparatus – every industry can argue they are critical to national security, but not all can be held as sovereign capabilities. This plan should also link to any mobilisation or scaling plans, as the aim must be to generate those platforms and capabilities critical to enabling military activity.

**Exquisite Platforms**

Both the United States and Australia have trended towards expensive, highly capable platforms for the delivery of defence effects over the past two decades. These include platforms such as the $3 billion Air Warfare Destroyers, the $1.5 billion Landing Helicopter Docks (LHD) and the $124 million per-unit F-35 Joint Strike Fighters – a commitment that incidentally some in the Air Force are now questioning due to its lack of deep strike capability and significant delays. This also include expensive and classified high-tech proprietary network capabilities that are beyond all but the most advanced economies.

These exquisite capabilities are highly effective and efficient methods of delivering military power, but come with significant disadvantages – they are practically irreplaceable in the short term, with multi-year acquisition processes, and their cost and small numbers restricts their use in open warfare to the most cautious generals and the most certain of situations. While survivable exquisite platforms are clearly the most economical method for prosecuting conflict other than open war, in a fight against a near peer protecting these platforms becomes a high priority – to the potential detriment of national security objectives. This becomes even more important with exquisite proprietary network systems, where disruption reduces the effectiveness of all other platforms across the organisation.

Any plan to scale military platforms must accept a lower level of capability.
It is practically impossible to scale up exquisite platforms quickly – the complexity of the system and reliance on global supply chains means than in times of significant conflict, building more is a highly uncertain endeavour. In previous conflicts the national support base had the sovereign capabilities to repurpose and create more platforms, but as described the industrial base is no longer sufficiently developed to enable this repurposing. It is likely that these platforms, once lost, are irreplaceable. Plans to scale up military platforms cannot rely upon exquisite platforms at their centre, or on platforms that have similar capabilities. Any plan to scale military platforms must accept a lower level of capability within the confines of the existing national or allied industrial base and be able to trigger national repurposing or access allied support with very little notice.

There are two approaches that might be pursued to enable a mobilisation or scaling plan and limit the impact of irreplaceable exquisite platforms. The first relies upon efficiencies in planning – operational plans that maximise the effect exquisite capabilities have, only sacrificing them for massively disproportionate gain. This requires significant refocus on operational planning and battlefield visualisation systems and the integration of large-scale expert systems to provide critical information to commanders in the fastest and most intuitive manner possible. Australia is already world leading at integrating operational planning and battlefield visualisation tools, however, these systems are ‘developing’--at best--and certainly not at a level where they are an effective way to ensure survivability of exquisite platforms.

A second approach would have the Australian Government investigate what third and fourth generation platforms might be rapidly obtained from politically guaranteed suppliers, or rapidly manufactured within alliance structures. Australia needs to be realistic about what scaling up the force means – it will not have the time nor resources to train a fully professional and exquisitely equipped military such as the current standing force. It must be acknowledged that the use of third or fourth generation platforms will cause more Australian casualties in any conflict, and they would be utterly outclassed by current fifth generation capabilities. However, quantity has a quality of its own, and with a dwindling pool of exquisite capabilities, a choice between something and nothing is worthy of consideration. For example, there are missions that do not require a Joint Strike Fighter but would benefit from a light attack turboprop aircraft – a situation the United States has been working on for the last three years.

If Australia decided to source platforms externally, the first step would be to conduct market research on what platforms are available for immediate purchase. This should include reserve and war stock held by allies such as the United States and United Kingdom. This presents several difficulties however – in the event these platforms were required by Australia, it is likely other purchasers would require them. It would require a significant amount of money to be made immediately available, and present significant logistic burden in moving and supplying the platforms, noting the tyranny of distance that Australia experiences. It would also be highly difficult to integrate these platforms with the rest of the existing force, noting that Australia has a history of heavily modifying off-the-shelf purchases. Perhaps most importantly it would guarantee a reliance on importing platforms, leaving Australia’s national security plans in the hands of others. Australia has experienced this uncertainty before; in World War II it was decided to raise an armoured division to defend against Japanese invasion – certainly the greatest threat Australia has experienced. Despite three years of effort, almost no suitable platforms could be found to equip the division, either from the United Kingdom or the United States.
Australia should also explore the development of third or fourth generation platforms that can be effectively constructed within the industrial base, and the dissemination of the plans for these platforms to industry partners. This does not necessarily require the manufacture or storage of large numbers of these platforms, but prototypes and test runs should be considered. They may include the development and prototype of conversion modifications for readily available civilian equipment such as aircraft and shipping. This could be modelled on existing conversion programs such as the Royal Australian Air Force electronic warfare conversion of the KA350 King Air. This option should also cover electronic network systems, as alternatives take decades to develop and commercial off-the-shelf options may be the only possible options. These networks would need to be hardened and improved with military grade encryption to make them viable, and a program of industry cooperation to explore options would significantly reduce this liability if it was required rapidly.

Human Resources

Without the ability to operate platforms effectively, scaling and modernization are meaningless. Generating mass in an affordable way is the greatest challenge of modern military forces. Australia is currently focusing efforts on investigating human-machine teaming through advanced interdependent robotics and grey zone capabilities in cyber warfare and information operations. Whilst these are highly promising – particularly for the professional and exquisitely equipped standing force – they are unproven and vulnerable to sweeping strategic moves to counter them, such as electromagnetic pulse weaponry or weaponised computer viruses like the NotPetya virus. Australia cannot ignore the possibility of a conflict before these technologies are fully developed and must consider the most abundant, proven and effective resource available to us – human resources.

Humans have significantly more autonomy and versatility than robotics and can be supplied and taught with far less investment and time. They also have the benefit of operating truly autonomously. One important restriction is supply. ADF predictions are that only 13% of the recruiting demographic of 17-24-year-old Australians are eligible and have propensity for military service, equating to 350,000 people annually. However, these Australians are also sought after by emergency services, professional private employment streams and other government service.

The normal model to access large numbers of human resources is conscription, where multiple approaches exist, from the ongoing United States plan to reintroduce a national draft system under the Selective Service System to the compulsory military service of the Republic of Korea. However, this has always been a politically sensitive subject in Australia – the five times conscription has been introduced have resulted in significant domestic opposition. There are two alternative methods to access human resources in a mobilisation or scaling plan that could be considered.

The first option is based on immigration and collective security in the region. Australia as a nation has benefited greatly from immigration. It allows the country to maintain growth rates and it brings a diversity of experience and culture to Australia. These benefits extend to national security – for example, Australia regularly allows foreign officers to transfer laterally into the ADF. Whilst it might be
worth discussing a direct trade of citizenship for military service, it may be more useful to draw on the Commonwealth model used by the United Kingdom. There are currently between 1800 and 2000 Fijian soldiers serving within the British Armed Forces. These forces provide significant remittances back to Fiji and are a source of pride to the Fijian Government.

Given the obvious wisdom of Australia refocusing its attention on South Pacific friends and allies, offering the opportunity for citizens of these countries to serve within the ADF would be a simple first step to expanding forces. The logical expansion of this would be to offer citizenship or permanent residency following a specified period of service. It would have the ancillary benefit of tightening relations with Pacific neighbours through cultural integration and increasing overall collective security within the region. This collective security concept has significant merit, with the most notable benefit arising from integrating recruitment policy with existing Defence cooperation activities. For example, in the currently Defence Cooperation Program model in Papua New Guinea, there are Australian officers and warrant officers directly integrated with Papua New Guinean military units, as well as Australia funding both infrastructure developments and some direct funding to units. Papua New Guinean officers are also trained in Australia. This model has analogues, albeit to a lesser degree, in other regional partners including the Philippines, Fiji and in the recent past, Indonesia. In Fiji for example, Australia’s commitment to assist funding the Blackrock peacekeeping training facility presents a significant opportunity for further cooperation. One option may be to increase the exchange of military officers and soldiers to dramatically higher levels, embedding Fijians within the ADF and Australians within units training for peacekeeping deployment in Fiji. If widely implemented across the South Pacific region, this could provide the basis for a regional security framework based on peacekeeping operations, freeing Australian forces, and more importantly human resources, for high end warfighting by generating force mass within and designed for the region. With a minor increase in the funding and support provided to these programs and the potential for our neighbours to earn a place in Australia, the potential security benefits are significant.

The second and potentially complementary option is building redundancy into the Australian officer corps. This would occur by dramatically increasing initial intake of officers, releasing them to private industry, retaining them on an active reserve list and offering them competitive selection for specific but temporary warfighting functions. Australia has highly educated officers in all services — millions of dollars are invested into these junior officers getting them university degrees and the specific qualifications required to become leaders, as well as leaders in the community. These individuals will only become more valuable and scarcer in the future, especially as the skills required by the workforce are becoming significantly more complex. These include cyber warfare, computing, software coding, advanced electronics and networking skills, on top of leadership, management and the technical skills required to operate warfighting platforms. These technology-based skills are difficult to build or maintain within the military, but the Australian population has a high affinity for technology.

The greatest value a junior officer provides is their basic military and leadership training. A junior officer is capable of leading small teams to achieve military outcomes. This training is by design indoctrinated into the force, and when scaling or mobilising new capabilities, it is this training that is critical to rapidly building those small teams. A disproportionate number of junior officers separate from the force after approximately ten years, primarily due to the demanding nature of military service and the lure of lucrative private jobs. This represents a significant opportunity loss, given the investment in these junior officers.
The current retention model relies on offering those officers either opportunities or additional pay and conditions to remain with the force, but this is an expensive and unsustainable solution. Instead, when a highly skilled junior officer decides to separate, the ADF should encourage their future development and education by releasing them with a strong formal recommendation to private industry through an assisted separation process. Once released, they should be retained on an active reserve list in trade for their recommendation and be recalled via a process of competitive selection to solve specific short-term problems for the ADF. For example, if a scaled cyber warfare response was required, rather than attempting to train these people from scratch or take them from private industry this model would provide the leadership to train and develop teams with the cyber skills provided to them by the private sector. The mechanisms for this are simple, utilised in the United States and effective, but require more detailed explanation, including thinking through restructures to the raise-train-function, than is possible here. To enable the planned attrition, a significant increase in numbers put through basic training would be required.

**Conclusion**

Mobilisation and scaling must be considered to provide a hedge against growing uncertainty in the defence alliance with the United States. Australia has fallen short in providing for its own security – and modernisation efforts will not bear fruit for decades to come. If Australia is to present a credible power against external adversaries and ensure the continued participation of the United States in the defence alliance it must take action to provide a true contribution whilst having a plan to actively protect its interests abroad. The ancillary benefits of this planning – additional diplomatic capital, revitalised and expanded Australian industry, additional economic growth and a thriving human resource base provide significant justification for exploring further. If Australia chooses not to take action, it will run the risk of confronting rising powers without the military required to force a diplomatic solution in Australia’s favour in the future. In the words of the former Australian Chief of Defence Force Chris Barrie, ‘history doesn’t repeat, but it does rhyme’. A mobilisation plan will provide the framework to ensure that a credible response can be generated in time.

**Policy Recommendations**

- Investigate sovereign capabilities for investment beyond those organically required by the Australian economy but which would provide outsized benefits to the alliance military industrial complex, and develop a Sovereign Industrial Capacity Building Plan.

- Explore scaling and replacement mechanisms for key capabilities such as cyber units, long range fires and exquisite platforms, and have these mechanisms coordinated closely throughout government. Develop an outreach program with the private sector to integrate scaling mechanisms with the development of sovereign capabilities at the small to medium business level.

- Reinvest and expand Defence Cooperation Programs throughout the South Pacific and review military service options for citizens of those nations, including paths to immigration.

- Expand officer recruitment and investigate assisted separation and reserve transfer options for junior officers as part of the Defence Strategic Workforce Plan 2016-2026, with the purpose of enabling mobilisation and scaling to occur in-extremis.
Endnotes


Executive Summary

- Instability in the Indo-Pacific has increased the possibility that the Australian Defence Force will deploy forces to address acute security issues, whether on the Australian continent in support of national disasters like the recent bush fires and coronavirus pandemic, close to the homeland in places like to Southeast Asia to ensure Australia’s northern flank or to support US-led operations in the South China Sea, or in more distant theaters like Northeast Asia to meet United Nations obligations in the defense of the Republic of Korea.

- The Australian Army has honed its fighting edge through the modernization of technology and training, increasing its operational readiness to be capable of contributing to contemporary strategic challenges. However, mobilisation readiness, the ability to reconfigure itself in terms of scale and scope, has atrophied.

- To determine gaps in force structure and capabilities for expansion, a more robust discussion and analysis must occur between Army and Government.

Policy Recommendations

- Government should re-establish scalability as a core tenet of defence policy as part of the Defence Review.

- Army should establish and rigorously exploit a ‘campaign of learning’ to develop an assessment of its forces and how it can be shaped to scale in the future.

- The ‘campaign of learning’ should include an assessment of the role and function of reserve forces, considering refashioning them based on a balance of current operational need, scalability for conflict, and as a nexus for support to civilian authorities in times of emergency.

- Test the results of this ‘campaign of learning’ through extensive wargaming and live exercises of expansion scenarios, ultimately resulting in the writing of a deliberate and comprehensive mobilisation plan that mirrors full contingency plans.

Regional Instability and Continental Insecurity

There is no shortage of contemporary material discussing the changing balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. The security situation in the region – and the world – is more uncertain than in decades; there is a greater possibility of “great power” conflict, military competition is escalating, the guarantors of the international order are internally focused, and changing climate is adversely impacting the homeland.

These changes increase the possibility that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will be called upon to deploy forces to address security issues, whether in Southeast Asia to ensure Australia’s northern flank or to support US-led operations in the South China Sea, or to Northeast Asia to meet United Nations obligations in the defense of the Republic of Korea. In each of these scenarios, it is likely Australia’s land force will be required. Recent bush fires and other natural disasters, requiring the mobilisation of thousands of personnel from the 4th, 5th, 9th and 17th reserve brigades to support the effort, only add to a feeling of insecurity.¹
Australia’s land force, in the midst of low-level deployment operations, has undertaken successive modernization and restructure programs to rebalance and update its force posture, becoming a more ready, technologically advanced, and self-reliant force. But while Army has honed its fighting edge, increasing its operational readiness, mobilisation readiness needed to reconfigure itself in terms of scale and scope has atrophied.

While the growing risks of conflict are widely recognised, including analysis and planning in Army Headquarters today, not enough thought across Government has gone into how different kinds of conflict will require different kinds of responses from Army. While many acknowledge the likelihood that the ADF may need to expand, little discussion has yet materialized about how that may occur. It is imperative that Australia go beyond merely describing threats or categorizing risk, instead determining how well-prepared Army is to contend with the requirements of major power competition and ‘great power’ conflict in the twenty-first century. The Australian government’s current defence review may address these issues, though previous editions stripped scalability as a core element of defence.

Both recent and the more distant past display policy makers’ flawed assumption that land forces are quickly and easily generated, mostly due to the mythology surrounding the expansion of the military for the First and Second World Wars. However, what those wars actually detail is that neglecting mobilisation capabilities came with risk and a heavy price in campaigns like Gallipoli and Kokoda. Today there is a similar, if not more severe, risk that in the contemporary strategic environment the technologically-sophisticated, small ADF may be fielding a ‘glass cannon’ – a force capable of striking an adversary with force initially, but unable to sustain it or absorb a counterstrike.

While expansion of land forces may seem like a return to the past, the way such a mobilisation would occur in the future - and how it is conducted - is as much a part of modernising the force as the purchase of new equipment and development of new education and training methods. As the late Desmond Ball noted:

Mobilisation is obviously central to both deterrence and combat capability. In deterring enemy actions against Australia, as well as in military operations against that enemy, it is not the force-in-being or the current order-of-battle that is relevant, but the mobilised force with which the adversary will have to contend; the rate at which mobilisation proceeds with respect to any particular contingency is often the crucial variable.
Scalability was a concept at the heart of Australian defence planning since inception. Defence policy since Federation was based on a small, but scalable force model capable of supporting national policy objectives. Since Australia’s last major experience of expanding its land force occurred in its commitment to the Vietnam War, declaratory policy over the ADF’s expansion (or mobilisation) has been understood through a “Defence of Australia” paradigm. Key to this Defence policy, and stated in successive Defence White Papers, is the idea of “warning time,” or the time Government will have to identify a threat to the country and build up its defence forces to address the increased threat. In the critical formula of military readiness – “the relation between available time and needed capability” - Australia has weighted its forces on minimal capability for immediate use, as opposed to building its base for potential capability required in the future. According to some, Australia is in a period of shortened warning time - meaning Australia should be preparing its military forces for a major threat by setting the foundation for its potential power. As detailed by Richard Betts in his authoritative work on military readiness (and the mobilisation of military power), “A state’s first task is to ensure that enough potential capability...[is] a match for its enemy.” However, “current readiness may also limit future military capability,” particularly when considering expansion. As stated by Professor Stephan Fruehling “every dollar spent on current readiness cannot be invested into future capability,” to include what is necessary to scale up the force.

The tradeoff between the efficiency of today’s force versus the needs of tomorrow’s contingencies is quickly emerging in Australian Defence planning. While successive modernization programs have delivered an ever more capable, ready, and efficient Australian land force, growing uncertainty in Australia’s future strategic landscape is also driving a need for both capability and flexibility in force structure options. To achieve this, scalability must become a core tenet of Australian defence policy, including a deliberate approach to defining a credible expansion capability that is supported by a whole-of-government analysis and legislative approach to military expansion.

The Operational Environment and Land Force Requirements

Much print has been spilt on the lethal and contested operational environment that military forces will encounter in future conflicts involving major power adversaries. This future operational environment will be crowded, connected, collective, constrained, and contain lethal characteristics. These larger trends support, and are supported by, technological changes that created ‘Advances in long range precision weaponry, combined with advanced sensor networks, [that] provide the defender the potential to create theatre-sized “no-man’s lands” where attacking forces are exposed to precision weapons and can only operate with a high risk of casualties.’ Such capabilities and their effect on the character of modern warfare will likely result in conflict that will be:

...so destructive...waged at the new speed of human and AI-enhanced interaction, and...at such extended long-ranges that exquisitely trained and equipped forces facing a peer or near-peer rival will rapidly suffer significant losses in manpower and equipment that will be difficult to replace...[because of this] military forces may only be able to wage short duration campaigns before having to replace expensive equipment, and even more priceless personnel.

These trends portend a return to the ascendancy of strategic defence, a concept that many Western militaries continue to ignore as they focus their force design concepts on smaller, more lethal units focused on the offensive. This will lead to rapid escalation of a conflict, where expectation of a quick resolution through a “escalate to de-escalate” approach to conflict materialises. However, as historical experience suggests, the politics of war (and those created by war) often extend conflict beyond the decisive set-piece campaign, resulting in protracted conflict.
A brief look at a plausible scenario of conflict, such as one on the Korean Peninsula that would be exceedingly taxing on Australia and all its allies, helps illustrate the challenge. In such a conflict the following assumptions for Australia providing land forces would likely be valid:

- The United States and other alliance partners are fully engaged and employing all possible capabilities according to previously established war plans, reducing the possibility of much strategic or defence industry logistical or equipment support to the Australian Army; i.e. the US cannot provide more than minimal additional combat vehicles, munitions, etc. to the Australian Army.

- Strategic lift organic to the US is at full capacity due to both non-combatant evacuation of the Peninsula and the flow of combat forces from the US to Korea (to include contracted ocean surface vessels); Australia cannot depend on the use of US strategic lift. Additionally, while the approaches to the Peninsula by sea and air will be congested, they will be largely secure from attack by the time Australia decides to send land forces.

- Australia would provide land forces based on the Plan Beersheba force generation model, i.e. a task-organized force drawn from the “ready” combat brigade with supplementing capabilities from the “readying” and “reset” brigades, the combat enabling brigades, and the 2nd (Reserve) Division.

- The Australian government would take time to decide on a provision of land forces, but once made, it will push for their entry into the conflict as quickly as possible.

- Command and control of committed ADF elements would ultimately belong to the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) (through the Joint Operations Center), reporting directly to the National Security Committee of Cabinet. However, a closer Australian command and control element above the engaged tactical unit of action would be required to act as a land component command to manage integration into allied land forces and Australian enabling capabilities flowing to the Peninsula (e.g. mission command, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), targeting, logistics, etc.). This node would allow Australia to increase land forces in the theater under an indigenous command and control structure, and to be prepared to support forces provided by New Zealand, if required.

Based on the assumptions of this scenario, the assessed requirements for Army to support likely Defence commitments would be significantly larger than any recent Army operation, even beyond Operation Astute in 2006. Based on the Army’s existing force generation model, it is conceivable that the Australian Army could commit up to a single combat brigade to ground operations in a particular scenario. Additionally, due to the distance to the combat theater, the reduced ability of allies to provide sustainment for Australian forces, and the level of intensity of the conflict requiring heavily armored and lethal forces, major sustainment and combat gaps currently exist in Army. However, the nature of the contingency operation and the composition of the committed force would drive how well Army’s existing force generation model could accommodate the requirements to generate new forces whilst sustaining its committed force.
Noting the growing potential of high threat, near-peer conventional combat operations, the choices open to any Australian government are currently limited, as it is managing on-going military commitments whilst expanding the force to mitigate the risks associated with major power conflict. Once the “ready” brigade is committed, the majority of the combat equipment, transportation assets, and sustainment capabilities would be committed, reducing the ability of Army to deploy additional forces, unless as replacements for already committed units.

**Scalability Gaps**

As seen in such a scenario, there are three specific capability gaps that exist today in Army that can and should be addressed to increase the ability to scale for a future conflict: strategic lift, strategic sustainment, and armor.

**Strategic Lift**

To address shortages in strategic lift that would be required to project land forces in the region, the ADF should conduct robust exercises to assess how many and what types of air and sea lift capabilities could provide enough of an offset to global strategic lift (largely provided by the US) and still allow Australian forces to project power throughout the Indo-Pacific, including up to Northeast Asia. The two Canberra Class Amphibious Assault (Landing Helicopter Dock) Ships (LHD) procured by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and used by Army amphibious forces is a start to providing such strategic lift, as are eight current in-service C-17 and other air mobility platforms. However, an assessment should be conducted to determine whether the ADF should purchase more capability, taking into account if and how civilian contracted container ships would be a viable option. Work could also be undertaken to examine the existing and future opportunities for equipment storage and facilities use across the region to support larger scale commitments of ADF elements. The outcomes of such reviews should be incorporated into consolidated scalability planning, including in pre-conflict contracts, shared facility arrangements with other countries or other agreements that would provide that capability for the ADF in the time of war.

**Strategic Sustainment**

The ability to sustain ADF forces at distance from Australia is severely lacking. This not only includes the force structure and war reserve stocks (fuel, ammunition, packaged foods, and other basic military supplies), but the capability to get the supplies to troops in the field. It is unlikely Australia will be able to provide all such stores for long periods of time so far from the continent. However, pre-conflict arrangements could be made to detail what will be provided by the ADF, and where Australia would need support from its allies. For example, the ADF could focus on the development and storing of packaged foods and normal military materiel (construction, etc.), while preparing agreements with the US to provide additional NATO standard ammunition and military-grade fuel for Australians supporting US operations on the Korean Peninsula. More work on the force structure, materiel, contracts, and other elements of strategic sustainment should be done as a part of experimentation, exercises, and planning for scalability. This could include more emphasis on sustainment force structure than is currently the case, trading some active combat elements to better balance for a sustainable force over time.

Once the “ready” brigade is committed, the majority of the combat equipment, transportation assets, and sustainment capabilities would be committed.
Decisions must be made today and incorporated into overall mobilisation planning to ensure expansibility for the modern battlefield.

There are some mitigations that could be addressed to increase the Army’s offensive and defensive capabilities when it comes to any adversary’s armored forces, including increased investment in anti-tank guided munition systems and training tank hunter-killer capability. This would improve the ability of Australian forces to penetrate enemy forces or increase allied momentum on the ground, as well as allow Australia to hold ground against enemy armor. However, decisions like these must be made today and incorporated into overall mobilisation planning to ensure Army has the forces – whether as deployable armored units, as units falling in on equipment that may or may not be available, or as dedicated anti-armored units – to address this type of battlefield. The choice will also drive the selection of the appropriate sustainment and lift discussed above.

Improving Scalability – ‘A Campaign of Learning’

One of the most important aspects of preparing Army to scale for contingencies is increasing its resilience. Against certain contingencies such as the one detailed above, the ADF is potentially a one-shot ‘glass cannon,’ capable of providing high-end capability in either short-duration force packages, or very limited on-going force packages. The first step in providing greater choices and improving the Army’s capability to scale in a sustained manner is to conduct a ‘campaign of learning’ designed to identify requirements and gaps, model scenarios for testing, write an expansion plan to capture current capabilities, conduct experimentation and exercises to test possible solutions, and feed the results back into capability, force structure, and policy development.
Assessment of Gaps in Capabilities and Force Structure for Scalability

Army, in coordination with the Vice Chief of the Defence Force (VCDF) Group through its Force Design function, should initiate a ‘campaign of learning’ to pull together a process to assess scalability. Such an initiative should focus on identifying stakeholders and developing a roadmap that seeks to balance existing requirements against the demands of both modernization and expansion capabilities. This broad staff estimate should detail the ability of Army to recruit, train, equip, and support a force larger than its current configuration.

Any such initial assessment should also seek to analyse the optimal weight given to balancing the regular force requirements to support both existing operational commitments and small contingency responses, against its capacity to simultaneously expand the force. A key element of this ‘campaign of learning’ should be to address the role and function of the reserve force. These forces need to be refashioned into three key functions to leverage skill sets, their part-time status, and better ties to civil society. These could include a role in augmenting active forces and rounding out their formations with both maneuver and specialist support. This is the main role the current reserves play, and should not be discarded, but rather rationalized to ensure best fit for both current operations and future conflicts.

A second role should be one that focuses reserve forces on mobilisation and providing a strategic reserve that can grow to meet any conflict, small or large. This has historically been the role of a reserve component in Australia, and one that is critical to mitigate risk in the increasingly uncertain strategic environment. The majority of the current reserves could be re-missioned to focus on this function, providing the basic infrastructure to expand, whether as additional trainers at schools or as a basis of command and staff for additional force structure to fill in time of war – a “skeletal organisation.”

A third role should leverage the tight tie the reserve has with larger Australian society across the continent to train and maintain a small portion of the force as a “Civil Support Corps,” whereby small units in more rural communities across the country are trained to support civil authorities in times of emergency. These personnel could be younger and older than typical soldiers and require minimum training, but could provide needed manpower support to prevent, recover from, or maintain security in times of civil strife caused by natural or man-made disaster, such as the recent bush fires. Such a delineation of roles, tightly integrated into the current active force, could reduce the current training and equipping gap between active and reserve forces by better prioritizing distribution of training and equipment, while focusing reserve forces that need little training or equipment on their functions. Lessons from the bush fire call-out would be ideal in helping to develop functions and capabilities for such a force.

Scenario Modeling to Drive Experimentation and Exercises

To support the ‘campaign of learning,’ a realistic but challenging scenario should be developed to stress and test Army’s capability to scale for a large conflict. This scenario should be created in coordination with all Defence stakeholders, creating buy-in from the beginning to ensure a credible and useful scenario, as well as support for the results of the exercise conducted based on its parameters. The scenario should focus on ways to test the gaps and seams identified at the beginning of the ‘campaign of learning,’ as well as experiment with new approaches to expansion, sustainment, power projection, force structure, and capabilities.
Write an Expansion Plan and Wargame

Once a scenario is established, Army should write a deliberate and comprehensive mobilisation plan. This plan should mirror full contingency plans, to include details on numbers of troops required for expansion, installation expansions to meet their lodging and training, required transportation and sustainment assets, and timetables for growth. A basis for this work might include concepts from the US Army’s Mobilization System and their Time Phased Force Deployment Data (TPFDD) from contingency planning to rationalize and test force flow.22

Based on such a plan, Army should exercise the plan against a scenario, much as it currently does operational plans in exercises like Hamel and Talisman Sabre. These exercises could utilize live, virtual, and constructive aspects to incorporate institutional players, operational headquarters, and even tactical or corps training units to assess all aspects of a mobilisation. Such a comprehensive exercise would force decisions on key strategic issues in real time, such as force structure or balancing the reserve and active forces, thereby reducing a ‘kick the can’ attitude as the exercise is assessed upon completion.

Refine Requirements, Force Structure, and Planning to Address Results

Based on the results of testing the plan against a scenario, Army should develop solutions to better meet identified requirements and unfulfilled gaps. Some could be instituted by Army alone, but those that require overall governmental support should be addressed through normal processes, including providing plans and requirements to Senate Estimates, and incorporating them into White Paper discussions.

Conclusion

Australia must re-establish scalability as a core tenet of defence policy, including as a necessary Army capability. As a government report recognized following operations in East Timor, “The Army’s ability to generate additional force is a significant element of the capability we believe it should have.”23 In fact, a large portion of that report focused on the ability of Army to expand if required, including as a measure of deterrence. If an adversary knows a force is a “glass cannon” without the ability to scale to meet a threat, there is little to deter them from adverse actions.

Policy Recommendations

- Government should re-establish scalability as a core tenet of defence policy as part of the Defence Review.
- Army should establish and rigorously exploit a ‘campaign of learning’ to develop an assessment of its forces and how it can be shaped to scale in the future.
- The ‘campaign of learning’ should include an assessment of the role and function of reserve forces, considering refashioning them based on a balance of current operational need, scalability for conflict, and as a nexus for support to civilian authorities in times of emergency.
- Test the results of this ‘campaign of learning’ through extensive wargaming and live exercises of expansion scenarios, ultimately resulting in the writing of a deliberate and comprehensive mobilisation plan that mirrors full contingency plans.

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Endnotes


2 Mobilisation readiness is a term used by Richard K. Betts in Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995). It will be described in more detail throughout the paper.


15 Much recent discussion on this issue has been undertaken within the Nuclear posture discussions but has growing applicability to conventional conflict between major powers, see Mark B. Schneider “Escalate to De-escalate” in Proceedings Magazine, February 2017 Vol. 143/2/1, p. 368.


17 See, for instance, G.L. Cheeseman, “Army Force Development,” in Desmond Ball & J.O. Langtry, eds., Problems of Mobilisation in Defence of Australia (Manuka, AUS: Phoenix Defence Publications, 1980), p. 32; “...political considerations alone would result in government delaying for as long as possible any decision to mobilise and so the actual time available to increase force capabilities could be quite small.”


20 The idea of a Civil Support Corps (or Civil Defence Corps) is nothing new and is discussed from time to time in government and defence circles. It was even recently recommended in a massive ‘tweet’ as a part of a plan by Dr. Mike Kelly, an MP representing Eden-Monaro, New South Wales: <https://www.twitter.com/com/show/in/1sr42ls>. The Australian Army Research Centre is optimally positioned to conduct such a study, and something I recommended at the outset: <https://twitter.com/NKFinney/status/1213580011216736256>.” Knowing the great leaders and researchers in that organization, I know there will be many great outputs from their analysis.


Executive Summary

❖ The challenges we face, from bushfires, pandemics, climate change and a changing regional order – based on population – will require more from our society and our defence forces than current levels of voluntary service can meet.

❖ Australia has a long history of service schemes. Many have been unpopular because they were selective, unfair and often tied to unpopular military conflicts overseas.

❖ This paper proposes the AUSS+IE scheme (Australian Universal Service Scheme plus Individual Expectations), however it must first be openly debated and considered by the whole community. No viable scheme can simply be adopted overnight.

Policy Recommendation

❖ Begin a national debate on the nature, form, requirements and incentives for a universal service scheme.

Introduction

It was in a provocative keynote address at Navy’s Sea Power Conference in 2006 that I first put forward the idea that a debate should begin in Australia to consider the merit of introducing some sort of universal service scheme for young Australians. This keynote address was based on ideas that I thought we should be working on to adapt to a different future.

I had reached this finding about a universal service scheme after I had been able to think more deeply about some of the more intractable problems that had confronted the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in the last decade of my service. In terms of intractability no problem seemed more “wicked” at the time than recruiting the number of quality people we needed for an all-volunteer ADF.

Three years later in the first Festival of Dangerous Ideas, at the Opera House in Sydney, I expanded on this theme by delivering a more detailed paper titled “Bring Back Conscription”. But, in fact, the paper was not about conscription; it was about promoting the idea of an Australian universal service scheme! It laid out early ideas for a scheme to include all young Australians that was very different to a conventional conscription model.

With the sudden onset of a predictable and virulent covid-19 pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, following the horrible bush fire season that began in September 2019, the lack of preparedness, fostered by the blindness of governments to heed decades of warnings, has been unacceptable. This position, which placed such a heavy burden on our health and first responder communities, cannot be allowed to continue. The wake-up call we are currently experiencing must be a strong case for change as we face the predictable threats from more pandemics and other consequences of global warming in the future.

Fourteen years ago an Australian Universal Service Scheme was put forward simply as a ‘good idea’. The case for a debate today looks so much more urgent. There is now perceptible pressure to make a start with an action plan as we confront a global situation that has overturned nearly all our comfortable assumptions about Australia’s place in the future world.
My own enlightenment began at a breakfast given by the Australian Government in honour of the President of the Swiss Federation, during the Sydney Olympics in September 2000. In conversation H.E. President Albert Oggi told me that he would return to Switzerland within two weeks to undertake his annual national service obligation. I wondered why a busy Head of State would feel compelled to undertake a national service obligation and asked him about it. He explained that as a proud member of the Swiss community he accepted this on-going obligation. He added that in his view “our national service makes us Swiss”. This conversation made an indelible impression on me. It caused me to think differently about our personnel problems and what a similar “service” obligation might mean in Australia. Could a successful national service scheme make us feel “more Australian”?

Unfolding Story

Why is a debate about a universal service scheme critically important?

When I first launched the idea of universal scheme there was media interest in it. In fact, this issue was the only one that attracted nation-wide commentary. For days I found myself fending off accusations of “inappropriateness”, “stupidity” and even “living in cloud-cuckoo land” as a few Vietnam War veterans and some other uninformed commentators told their respective audiences that I was “crazy”. They said the public would never stand for it given the unpopularity of the 1960 and 1970s era conscription scheme. But, none of them bothered to ask me what I thought.

These negative comments were mistaken because conscription was not my intent. The well-rehearsed negative responses to my idea demonstrated the extent of the political polarity that exists in our community. Many people have strongly held views about the concept of compulsory military service, both positive and negative. This would make the overnight introduction of any scheme involving compulsory service almost impossible to achieve in the absence of an overwhelming threat.

I did not advocate any particular scheme because I thought we should establish the benefits of a universal service scheme first, and then weigh up options as to how to best proceed. We would need to canvas a range of options and involve the community in assessing them. It could be a major point of difference between a new scheme proposal and conscription that a “universal service scheme for young Australians” creates incentives to obtain volunteers, rather than using the legally binding compulsion.

The incentives, and the work, would have to be attractive to young, energetic Australians who have a lot to offer, as well as rewarding. It would also be important to remunerate participants properly so the scheme could not be viewed as providing “cheap labour”. Nor should participants feel that they waste time and energy carrying out menial tasks.

Another important point I made in 2006 was that if our young adults were taking “a gap year” between leaving high school and entering university then they could surely undertake some form of universal service. Now, I believe this thought gained some traction; it may have been the origin of the ADF’s gap year scheme that was launched 18 months later.

Since 2006 these ideas have been discussed with a dozen small groups of young Australians. It was surprising to find that many of our Generation Y youngsters were not instinctively opposed, provided the scheme involved everyone. On this basis I gained the impression that there could be good support in the community for a universal service scheme.
For most of my service career, and beyond it for some time, I had advocated for an all-volunteer force.

Change of Mind

In 2006 there was almost no discussion about the reasons why I thought we should consider getting into this debate. This probably reflects the hysteria that surrounds this topic. Previous national service schemes were initially, or had become, unpopular for several different reasons. The schemes featured either selective service or unpopular military commitments overseas, or both as in the case of the Vietnam war.

For most of my service career, and beyond it for some time, I had advocated for an all-volunteer force. I had made arguments in favour of an Australian style all-volunteer force to military and governmental leaders in countries that used conscripts. The strength of my argument about the benefits of an all-volunteer force was based on professional standards and professionalism, the relationship of these matters to the ethos of the force, and the imperative that governments must constantly strive to make service in the military attractive to obtain quality recruits and retain highly skilled personnel. I believed these were all cogent issues provided that an all-volunteer force meets satisfactorily the demands of the time.

There are three important reasons that underpinned my change of mind about universal service.

Key questions were:

• What would it take to have a mixed volunteer and conscription-based force that is as capable as it needs to be?

• How could we build a scheme of National Service in which the participants do not regard it as a waste of their time and effort?

• How would a National Service scheme make us feel Australian?

Answers to these questions should form the basis of a work-in-progress contribution to a community debate.

A Look Back in History – Australia’s Long Experience with Compulsory Service

Conscription is based on the use of involuntary labour, from a defined sector in society. Customarily, it attaches to service in the armed forces, but in a few countries, conscripts are also used for community service as an option for conscientious objectors.
There are many countries that preserve the possibility of conscripting forces in the law for use in time of war and during crises. Australia is no exception. Since Federation, our leaders have considered compulsory national service for military purposes on several occasions. Sometimes, though thought was also given to the use of universal service schemes. Far from a radical change or desperate scramble only in war, Australia actually has a long history with broad service schemes, though in a variety of designs.

**Universal Training (1911-1929)**

Between 1911 and 1929 Australian males aged between 18 and 60 were required to serve in militia service within Australian and its territories. The Defence Acts of 1903 and 1904, empowered the Australian Government to call up ‘unexempted’ males in time of war. The Defence Act in 1909 made training and service compulsory in time of peace. Over the 18 years this scheme was in vogue it had a chequered record of success. The junior cadets were abolished in June 1922. Universal military training and the holding of military camps was suspended from 1 November 1929, pending a general review of defence policy.

**Conscription (1916 and 1917)**

During the First World War Australian voters were asked in October 1916, and again in December 1917, to vote in referendums on the issue of conscription. While universal military training for Australian men aged 18 to 60 had been compulsory since 1911, these referendums if carried, would have extended the obligation on all unexempted males to serve overseas.

**The 1916 Referendum**

Australian troops fighting overseas in WW1 enlisted voluntarily. As the scale of Australian casualties on the Western Front became known, and no quick end to the war seemed likely, the number of men volunteering has fallen steadily. In 1916 it was argued that Australia needed to provide reinforcements of 5500 men per month to maintain its forces overseas at an operational level. Prime Minister Hughes decided to hold a referendum to obtain community agreement to requiring men undergoing compulsory training to serve overseas. The referendum was defeated with 1,087,557 voted in favour and 1,160,033 against.

**The 1917 Referendum**

In early 1917 Britain sought a sixth Australian division for active service overseas. To meet this request Australia had to provide an additional 7000 men per month. Volunteer recruitment had not improved so on 20 December 1917 Prime Minister Hughes put a second referendum to the Australian people. This proposal was different to the 1916 referendum question. This referendum question proposed that voluntary enlistment should continue, but any shortfalls would be met by compulsory reinforcements of single men, widowers, and divorcees without dependents between 20 and 44 years of age. These men would be called up by ballot. The referendum was defeated with 1,015,159 votes in favour and 1,181,747 against. Both these referendums were divisive politically, socially and within religious circles. The decisive defeat of the second referendum closed the issue of conscription for the remainder of this war.

**The Outbreak of World War II and Compulsory Military Training**

On 20 October 1939, a decade after the government had abolished universal military training, and six weeks after Australia had entered World War II, Prime Minister Menzies announced the reintroduction of compulsory military training with effect from 1 January 1940. The arrangements required unmarried men turning 21 years in the call up period to undertake three months training with the militia.

On 15 November Menzies announced in Parliament that the War Cabinet had determined that the militia forces needed to be kept at an adequately trained strength of not less than 75,000 men. He added: “there is, I believe, a growing recognition of the fact that military training for the defence of Australia should be a normal part of our civic life, and that if it is to be just and democratic, it should be made compulsory.”
Opposition Leader and leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), John Curtin, voiced opposition in Parliament to this declaration by the Menzies Government and reiterated ALP opposition to compulsory military service overseas. Later in the World War II, as Prime Minister, and faced with the growing threat to Australia in 1942, Curtin sought to amend the ALP platform to allow members of the militia to serve overseas. On 5 January 1943 the Federal Conference of the ALP passed the following resolution:

“That, having regard to the paramount necessity of Australia’s defence, the Government be authorised to add to the definition of the territories to which the Defence Act extends the following words: ‘and such other territories in the South-west Pacific Area as the Governor-General proclaims as being territories associated with the defence of Australia’.

On 26 January 1943 the Curtin-led War Cabinet approved a bill to give effect to this motion. The consequent Defence (Citizen Military Forces) Act provided for the use of Australian conscripts in the South-Western Pacific Zone (SWPZ) during the period of war. The Act also provided that this approval would lapse within six months of Australia ceasing to be involved in hostilities.4

**National Service (1951–1959)**

After 1945 in the context of the intensification of the Cold War and the declaration of war in Korea, the Menzies government sponsored the National Service Act 1951 requiring the compulsory call-up of men turning 18 on or after 1 November 1950, for service training of 176 days.

Trainees were required to remain in the Reserve of the Commonwealth Military Forces (CMF) for five years from the initial call-up date. The compulsion was only for registration. The call up for national service training was selective. Between 1951 and 1959 over 500,000 men registered and some 227,000 men were trained. In 1957 national service with the Navy and Air Force was discontinued. Registration remained, but the intake to the Army was cut to a third by instituting a ballot for selection. National Service call-ups were terminated by 1960.5

**National Service (1965–1972)**

In late 1964 Cabinet decided to introduce a compulsory selective National Service scheme. In announcing this decision in Parliament Prime Minister Menzies referred to ‘aggressive Communism’, developments such as ‘recent Indonesian policies and actions’, and ‘a deterioration in our strategic position’ as influential.6 The Government had concluded that Australia had inadequate manpower for defence and aimed to increase Army strength to 33,000 men by the end of 1966 using national service.

The National Service Act 1964, required 20-year-old males to serve in the Army for twenty-four months of continuous service (reduced to eighteen months in 1971), followed by three years in the Reserve. The Defence Act was amended in May 1965 to provide that conscripts could be obliged to serve overseas. In March 1966 Prime Minister Holt announced that National Servicemen would be sent to Vietnam to fight in units of the Australian Regular Army.

Between 1965 and December 1972 over 800,000 men registered for National Service. Some 63,000 were conscripted and over 19,000 (just under one third) served in Vietnam. Although registration was compulsory, a process of selection by ballot determined who would be called up. Two ballots were conducted each year. The ballots selected several dates in the selected period and all males with corresponding birthdays were called up for national service.

From 1966 opposition to conscription swelled and was often enmeshed with opposition to Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Evasion of national service was common. Some cases were prosecuted and led to much publicity. National service was a significant issue in the Federal election campaigns of 1966, 1969 and 1972. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) consistently opposed it and became committed to recalling troops from Vietnam.

Australians do not seem philosophically against conscription, but rather are concerned with problems of implementation.
After the election of an ALP government in December 1972 Prime Minister Whitlam was quick to announce the end of ‘peace time’ conscription. National Servicemen who did not wish to complete their term of service were discharged immediately. While conscription was abolished by law in 1973, the Defence Act 1903 as amended, retained a provision that it could be reintroduced by proclamation of the Governor-General. In 1992 the Defence Legislation Amendment Act further provided that any such proclamation is of no effect until approved by both Houses of Parliament.

Conscription is a complex matter. There are good arguments for and against the proposition. Nonetheless, on looking more deeply at the issues of concern in Australia’s history they often do not seem shaped philosophically against the concept, but rather on practical problems with implementation. Perhaps the major reason conscription has been opposed in Australia is requiring non-volunteers to serve overseas.

Today

It is now 37 years since we last had any experience with a scheme involving compulsory service. This short record of Australia’s experience with universal service and conscription suggests that we should not repeat past mistakes. Australia’s circumstances today are quite different. We depend on finding volunteers for a highly professionalised ADF made up of full-time and part-time servicemen and women. The question for today is will this be sufficient for our future needs?

Population Dynamics

When looking at Australia’s future needs an important question is about Australia’s strategic positioning in our region. The basic building block on which to frame an answer to this question is regional population dynamics. There are trends that may threaten Australia’s position in our region as a significant, developed country of substantial influence. This position will be difficult to sustain unless we adopt some different approaches.

Expected global population growth over the next 30 years will shape outcomes. By 2050 median population growth will produce a world population of 9.7 billion people according to a 2019 UN Report⁷. One third of these people will live in China and India - a population of about 1.5 billion in each. Indonesia, our near neighbour, is estimated to have a population of about 360 million. Yet, in Australia our population is likely to be about 39 million – the size of numerous mega-cities in China and India.⁸

As a large island continent Australia’s population density in 2050 is estimated at 4 persons per square kilometre, unlike Singapore where density will be nearly 9,000 or China at nearly 28,000 persons per square kilometre⁹. Population density matters. These dynamics will shape our future. They threaten the Australian lifestyle that we enjoyed over the last century as well as our ability to use influence and regional acceptance of our leadership to foster the kind of region we would like.

The leadership Australia used to provide on climate change matters has been surrendered slowly over the last two decades. For many countries in our region a gap has been created that is likely to be exploited by China. Decisions in other countries about who to look to for advice on important issues will be made in those countries. In the past we were endowed with the good luck to enjoy a significant economic advantage and the ability to bring to bear high quality leadership. Imagine how things will change when the living standards of our region continue to rise, and our competitiveness shrinks.

In addition, there will be significant shifts in Australia’s own population dynamics. By 2050 22% of our population will be aged over 65. In 2006 only 13% of our population fell into this category. There will also be only 2.7 working-age people (15-64 years old) to support each older Australian.¹⁰ One in eight Australians will be in the 20-29 years age group.¹¹

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Australia’s population density in 2050 is estimated at 4 persons per square kilometre, unlike Singapore where density will be nearly 9,000 or China at nearly 28,000 persons.
There has been by 2020 – and likely to continue – a decline in the number of volunteers who contribute so much to our society. In many walks of life, such as emergency services, bushfire fighting, surf life-saving, meals on wheels and so on we depend on volunteers to make up for a shortfall in government services. Looking back on media coverage of the recent summer of bushfires one can see that many rural firefighters, who are volunteers, are not young!

This perspective on population dynamics indicates that we probably need a new approach to our workforce planning. The creation of new, more effective ways to use the talents of the nation to remain a credible country in our region seems critical.

A Bleak Picture?

Our country has a bleak future unless we can do something to arrest these forecast trends. We now hear that many older Australians are concerned that grandchildren will be living in a world that cannot offer the same or better rights and privileges that attach to being Australian. It would be a huge failure of our imagination and our leadership if we could not assure our offspring of a wonderful life.

By December 2005 it was evident that we needed a hard look at solutions to solving the dilemma of ‘what to do’? That is when that conversation with The President of Switzerland in September 2000 had its impact. I began to look at the possible benefits of a universal service scheme for all young Australians that could meet demands for work where market forces cannot meet demand. A suitable scheme could be used for the ADF, or fill gaps in the provision of critical support services from an insufficient workforce, or a lack of volunteers.

Volunteerism in Australia

Volunteers in Australia contribute a significant amount of work as a supplement to paid work in government, commercial, and not-for-profit organisations. The record of volunteer community support varies over time. A survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers for Volunteering Australia revealed several issues that limit the effectiveness of volunteers to make up shortfalls in services that are provided through paid employment. Examples where volunteers really matter are manifest in times of disaster management and the provision of follow-up support to communities following specific disasters.

It is a legitimate question to ask whether a dependence on volunteers is an appropriate response as we look forward over the next three decades. The problem compounds when considering the significant challenges to our way of life. For example, we could consider last summer’s bushfire season as defining the limits to the contribution that can be provided by volunteers. It may be that governments sometimes depend too much on charitable and noncharitable-but-motivated volunteers to fill gaps in the services they provide. It should be of concern that volunteer organisations such as rural firefighters in several States were not able to bring to the Federal government’s attention their priority concerns for a forthcoming bushfire season in 2019.

Good Reasons for a Universal Service Scheme?

First, looking at the new entrants to our work force as an indicator of the available personnel for a scheme we can estimate that if we required people aged 18 to 28 to serve, on average by 2020 there would be about 15,000 people to be administered by the scheme, presuming that ongoing service was required for one year. If two years service was required then about 30,000 people would have to be administered. This does not seem to be an impossible task though it will take special attention to make sure that administration is of the highest quality.
We can think of this pool of people available to undertake a wide range of tasks within a defined envelope of service needs. I can foresee demand for service support in the defence force, within the emergency services, in support of remote communities, in care of the aged, and as field support for overseas aid work. I am sure my list is not exhaustive and there would almost certainly be requirements that have escaped my imagination.

A tremendous benefit of the universal service scheme is that numbers will be more readily definable and there will be a significant possibility of building citizenship benefits with some young people. So what sort of a scheme do I have in mind?

AUSS+IE (Australian Universal Service Scheme plus Individual Expectations)

What sort of scheme should we look at? For a start there ought to be some ground rules. Here are some suggestions:

- First, all young men and women should serve – no exceptions. This was a critical point in the focus group discussions. Unlike the selective national service of the Vietnam War days in this scheme everyone eligible should serve. Options must be included for people who are differently abled because many of them will want to serve too!

- Second the labour provided should be properly rewarded. AUSS+IE should not be a source of underpaid labour. During the early years of the gap year scheme participants were paid $AUD 40,000 – not bad money.

- Third, the new scheme must be flexible – it must enable those that have priority studies and other important objectives to achieve them. We could consider offering different benefit packages to properly recognize and compensate those people who want to undertake the more demanding tasks, such as military service.

- Finally, and above all these things, we ought to have a unique scheme that makes us ‘Australian’ - whatever we would like that to mean.

These points are sufficient as a basis to begin a debate on how AUSS+IE could operate.

Other ideas that could be included are:

- To retain as much flexibility as possible a suggested start must be made no later than age 25, preferably much earlier but not before the age of 18.

- Service would attract points – much like the points scheme we use to open a bank account. Let us say that over a certain period of service successful participants will accumulate 1000 points in their service. Service points can be accumulated over a period of say ten years. And the points may be accumulated doing different tasks.

- If a points scheme is adopted, people who accumulate all their points and reach successful completion may continue to serve if they wish. Frankly it would be a key measure of success in the scheme to measure the number of people who continue in service because they like the reward of doing something very useful for the community and participation in the networks they have established.

I have called these initial ideas the “Australian Universal Service Scheme plus Individual Expectations (AUSS+IE)”. I think AUSS+IE underlines the importance we should place on being able to meet the expectations of the individual. While I offer the AUSS+IE as a possible scheme I do think that only through a comprehensive, community-wide discussion would we obtain a truly outstanding scheme.
People may wonder what would happen if some young Australians do not want to participate in the scheme or fail to accumulate the necessary number of points. The scheme should be about encouragement. If encouragement fails, incentives can make a big difference. For example, we might require a successful completion of AUSS+IE for the issue of a passport for those Australians who are over 35 years of age. Second, we could offer the cancellation of all HECS debts for those who have accumulated their 1000 points.

In spite of attractive incentives there might still be some people who do not wish to participate in AUSS+IE. I can see that there might become an issue of those who shirk the obligation being carried by those who serve. Perhaps, there ought to be some appropriate financial sanctions. A five percent taxation levy seems a practicable incentive to be imposed till such time as the necessary points have been achieved, or to apply for a fixed period after reaching the mandatory start date.

The Need for a Debate

There is a great deal of work to be done to define a new universal service scheme and then get it up and running. We risk failure if we do not get it right. That is why the idea is so dangerous. This paper is not arguing in favour of beginning AUSS+IE or any other scheme that we can devise overnight. But it is in favour of doing whatever it takes to have a scheme fully functioning by 2025 – that is only 5 years away. By 2025 the pressure will have increased as we respond to the challenges to position our country in 2050, when the world and our region will look and feel different. The need for debate is urgent.

The views of all Australians who take the challenge seriously are welcome. Why cannot we have a scheme that is universal, especially Australian, and one that meets the needs of our community.

This scheme must be unique, drawing on all available resources for inspiration. It must be applied universally for our young men and women. Participants should be properly rewarded and their work highly valued. Above all it needs to offer a flexible and adaptable approach. The scheme proposed is labelled AUSS+IE (Australian Universal Service Scheme).

In Australia we have the intellectual capacity to develop such a scheme - if only our leaders and the community would commit to it. This is a debate we need to have because it is time to throw out the challenge to our leaders to take it up. Our positioning in Asia-Pacific 2050 may depend on it!

Is this a truly dangerous idea whose time has come?

### Policy Recommendation

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- Begin a national debate on the nature, form, requirements and incentives for a universal service scheme.

### Endnotes

7. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2019
8. Ibid
10. According to the 2015 Intergenerational Report at Table 1.3 the figure is about 23 million working people to support 8.3 million older Australians.
11. ABS Population Projections data series 32220, Table b9 – middle scenario.
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