NEWS
President's Column – Michael Hough

OPINION
Editorial: Strategic challenges ahead for Australia – David Leece

INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS
The 2020 Sir Hermann Black Lecture
A year of crisis: climate, coronavirus and China
– Hervé Lemahieu

The three challenges with the greatest bearing on Australia’s security and prosperity each came to a head in 2020, viz. climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and China. The world has become poorer, more dangerous and more disorderly. Post the pandemic, Australia’s ability to project itself globally will start with its strength and vitality at home. Its favourable geography gives it the potential to become a leader in renewables. Given our geopolitical challenges, this is a strategic imperative. Yet, for now, the gap between reality and expectations has never been greater.

The Australian Defence Force’s response to the bushfire and COVID-19 crises of 2020
– Kathryn Campbell

The Australian Army’s 2nd Division is responsible for leading domestic operations and did so during the 2020 bushfire and COVID-19 pandemic crises. The Division’s commander describes the Australian Defence Force’s joint response to the two crises, the command and control arrangements, and interactions with civilian agencies and the wider community. Concurrently, the Division continued to fulfil its other operational and readiness training responsibilities.

Improving resilience in Australia – Keith Suter

Over the past century, economic theory and public policy based thereon has oscillated between big and small government, with economic rationalism now the driving force. Unintended consequences, including an unequal society, have resulted. New thinking is required informed by scenario planning. Using the latter, we could plan for the future knowing we could cope with whatever it might hold.

CONTRIBUTED ESSAY
Forward operating bases: is there a place for them in Australia’s new defence strategy?
– David Leece and Ian Wolfe

Australia’s defence posture has been refocused on our immediate region, but with the intent of holding any potential enemy forces as far from the Australian mainland as is practicable. A similar strategy in World War II saw Australia deploying operating bases in the Indonesian-Melanesian archipelago. This paper examines that experience, compares more successful with less successful uses of forward bases [Norfolk Island is used as an example of the former], and seeks to draw enduring lessons from that experience for Australia’s current defence.

BOOK REVIEWS
An Australian band of brothers: Don Company, Second 43rd Battalion, 9th Division: Tobruk, Alamein, New Guinea, Borneo by Mark Johnston – reviewed by Marcus Fielding

Pathfinder, ‘kriegie’ and gumboot governor: the adventurous life of Sir James Rowland AC, KBE, DFC, AFC by Air Marshal Sir James Rowland and Dr Peter Yule – reviewed by Bob Treloar

China’s grand strategy and Australia’s future in the new global order by Geoff Raby – reviewed by David Leece

China as a twenty-first century naval power: theory, practice, and implications by Michael A. McDevitt – reviewed by Ian Pfennigwerth

FRONT COVER:
Commander of Joint Task Group 629.4, Colonel Graham Goodwin CSC, speaks with South Australia Police during a visit to a border crossing checkpoint in Renmark, South Australia, during Operation COVID-19 Assist. Major General Kathryn Campbell describes the operation at pp. 10 – 13. [Photo: Department of Defence].
I want to recognise both the significance of our journal to the central task of the Institute, which can be paraphrased as "to inform and promote debate about defence-related issues", and thank and honour the significant editorial team who work under our Journal Editor, Dr David Leece AM PSM RFD ED, and whose names are listed in column 1. The consistently excellent quality of our journal is a true highlight, and in my term as President, I am committed to ensuring that our journal continues to both flourish and evolve.

We have been publishing the journal online and available gratis to a global audience since March 2008. Over the last 13 years, the rapid acceptance of online-based activities has led to United Service becoming more widely accessible and its papers are now being downloaded by readers on every continent. Global search engines quickly draw the global community’s attention to the ideas and issues included in our journal, and we now have the opportunity to seek contributions and viewpoints from a much wider cohort of potential readers and contributors.

The journal, however, faces challenges. We need to improve the journal’s value proposition to ensure its continuation and growth. We need to ask how we can better develop the journal so that it appeals to younger client groups raised on a social-media based (as distinct from a print-based) relationship with publications and ideas; build trust relationships with serving Australian Defence Force members so more of them contribute to the journal; better engage with the Department of Defence and the network of defence industries such that they come to support the Journal as an asset; and better engage with university and professional groups who can contribute to the defence debate.

We also need to ask how we should work with the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies–Australia and its state-based constituent bodies and with our fraternal United Service institutes in the United Kingdom, India and Canada so as to attract both interest and support from these national and international defence networks.

Clearly, we need to maximize the use of current technologies and systems so United Service reaches all who are willing to engage with us. I look forward to the challenges of retaining and improving our journal. I invite your suggestions for improvement and/or your involvement. Please contact me on mhough5@gmail.com.

Michael Hough
Strategic Challenges Ahead for Australia

This issue of United Service contains the 2020 Sir Hermann Black Lecture (pp. 4-9) in which Hervé Lemahieu reviews Australia's major strategic challenges of 2020: climate change; the COVID-19 pandemic; and China, including its competition with a diminished United States. These challenges will persist for the foreseeable future.

Other papers in this issue expand on these themes.

Major General Kath Campbell explains (pp. 10-13) that the Australian Army's 2nd Division now has responsibility for leading domestic operations and did so during the 2020 bushfire and COVID-19 pandemic crises. She describes the Defence Force's joint response to the two crises, including interactions with civilian agencies and the wider community.

Dr Keith Suter (pp. 14-16) considers the related issue of improving resilience in Australia. He explains that economic theory and public policy based thereon has oscillated between big and small government, with economic rationalism being the driving force latterly, leading to an unequal society. New thinking is required informed by scenario planning which would enable us to plan for the future and cope with whatever it might hold.

Two book reviews address China. In China's grand strategy (p. 25), Geoff Raby describes China's global ambitions, its grand strategy and the limitations that China faces, which will make its global ambitions very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. It cannot yet compete against the United States in 'hard power' (coercion/warfighting) and lacks 'soft power' (persuasion). So, it is exerting 'sharp' power, including political interference abroad, investments in overseas assets, cyber warfare and other 'grey-zone' activities.

A contrasting picture of China's hard power emerges (p. 26) from Rear Admiral Michael McDevitt's book, China as a twenty-first century naval power. McDevitt shows that the People's Liberation Army–Navy (PLAN) has been dramatically transformed into a modern naval force to rival and to challenge any other. China's warships are not 'coming', they are already 'here'.

Comment

China now is seeking forward operating bases (ports/airfields) around the Indian and South Pacific Oceans from which it can project its new maritime power. Of particular relevance to Australia, while Papua New Guinea (PNG) has invited Australia and the United States to upgrade the Manus Island patrol boat base, it has invited a Chinese company to upgrade the Manus airfield (Shugart 2020).

In response to China's increased interest in our neighbourhood, Australia has launched a 'Pacific step-up' – an increase in aid funding for Pacific nations (Foreign Affairs 2017); and has refocused its defence posture on its immediate region with the intent of holding any potential enemy forces as far from the Australian mainland as is practicable (Defence 2020: 21).

Leece and Wolfe (pp. 17-23) explore whether, as part of Australia's refocused defence posture, there might be a place for forward operating bases in the Indonesian-Melanesian archipelago. They conclude that forward bases may prove difficult to protect in a future conflict. If protectable, however, such bases would enable the range of our combat aircraft and proposed precision strike missiles to be extended further into our region.

In breaking news, Chinese interests have signed a memorandum of understanding with PNG to build a 'fishing factory' on Daru Island in the Torres Strait, 200km from the Australian mainland (Tingle 2020) and a second Chinese company is negotiating to build a seaport, an industrial and business zone, a resort and a residential area also on Daru (Whiting 2021). China's interests in Daru, though, may be more strategic than commercial (Tingle 2020; Whiting 2021).

The outcome of the United States presidential election and transfer of power to the incoming Biden administration are not addressed in this issue. Suffice to say, the actions of the outgoing president, Donald Trump, who incited thousands of his supporters to invade the United States Capitol building on 6 January 2021 with a view to overthrowing the election result, while ultimately unsuccessful, strengthened America's autocratic opponents, disheartened its democratic allies and left America deeply divided along partisan lines. It is difficult to see how the United States can recover domestically and regain its international standing in the short term.

RAAF Centenary

Finally, to mark the centenary of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 31 March 2021, we include a review (p. 24) of Pathfinder, 'kriegie' and gumboot governor, a part autobiography/part biography of Air Marshal Sir James Rowland, sometime bomber pilot, test pilot, aeronautical engineer, RAAF chief, state governor, and university chancellor.

David Leece*

References


*Dr David Leece, editor of United Service, is a member of the Institute's Special Interest Group on Strategy. These are his personal views.
The 2020 Sir Hermann Black Lecture

A year of crisis: climate, coronavirus and China

A paper based on a presentation to the Institute on 22 December 2020 by

Hervé Lemahieu
Director, Power and Diplomacy Programme, Lowy Institute

The three challenges with the greatest bearing on Australia’s security and prosperity each came to a head in 2020, viz. climate change; a novel coronavirus pandemic; and China. The world has become poorer, more dangerous and more disorderly. As we emerge from this crisis year, Australia’s ability to project itself globally will start with its strength and vitality at home. Its favourable geography gives it the potential to become a leader in renewables. Given our geopolitical challenges, this is a strategic imperative. Yet, for now, the gap between reality and expectations has never been greater.

Key words: 2020; Australia; Australia’s potential; China; climate change; COVID-19 pandemic; renewables.

The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies has long been committed to promoting Australia’s national security, so it is a pleasure and a privilege to be with you again, this time to deliver the annual Sir Hermann Black Lecture in which the year just concluding is reviewed.

There is a quote often attributed to Vladimir Lenin which goes: “there are decades when nothing happens, and then there are weeks when decades happen”. That phrase is resonant when looking back at 2020. A year that has been memorable for all the wrong reasons. Suffice to say, it is a bewildering time to have to try to make sense of the world. In the broadest possible terms, governments and societies, almost without exception, faced a perfect storm of public health, economic and strategic challenges in ways few could have imagined a year prior.

I do not wish to provide an exhaustive account of events in 2020 but rather to interpret three key challenges that came to a head this year with the greatest bearing on Australia’s long-term security and prosperity. Australia’s crisis year was dominated by three Cs: Climate change; COVID-19; and China, of whose ire we bore the brunt.

All three challenges present non-traditional security threats for Australia. Nevertheless, disparate as the nature and root causes of these issues are, the way in which we respond to them will set the terms of our future security and prosperity. We now navigate a world that, in the words of the Prime Minister, has become “poorer, more dangerous and more disorderly”.

In January, Australia was devastated by bushfires – a grim reminder of the challenges presented by climate change. At the same time, a new and deadly virus, COVID-19, was spreading from Wuhan to the world. And, amid the global pandemic, our relations with our most important economic partner deteriorated to their lowest point since Australia’s establishment of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1972.

1. Confronting Climate Change

Let me begin by jogging your memory with the bushfire crisis that tore through the country in early 2020. As we marked Australia Day in the smog, few could dispute that the Lucky Country was looking decidedly less lucky. We had a good claim to being the advanced economy most ravaged by climate change this year.

Our global image also took a big hit. Pictures were broadcast across the world of blue skies turned blood red, of world-class beaches converted into evacuation zones, and of eucalyptus forests transformed into killing fields for millions of native animals. The outpouring of sympathy and international solidarity reflected the fact that, in the eyes of the world, this disaster struck at the heart of the Australian way of life.

The American Dream is fuelled by the innovation of Silicon Valley, the Chinese Dream is about lifting millions out of poverty. But Australians can boast of a unique relationship between their quality of life and the nature that surrounds us. That is the Australian Dream.

1Email: Hlemahieu@lowyinstitute.org
2The Sir Hermann Black Lecture is named in honour of Sir Hermann David Black AC, Chancellor of the University of Sydney from 1970 – 1990, an economist and current affairs commentator, who delivered the final lecture of the year entitled “The Year in Review” to the Institute in the 1970s and 1980s.
3Coronavirus Disease 19 is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Of zoonotic (animal) origin, it causes upper-respiratory tract infections in humans and is one of three novel zoonotic coronaviruses to jump from animals to humans this century. It emerged in humans in late 2019 apparently in Wuhan, central China, and by early 2020 had reached pandemic proportions globally.
This soft power helps fuel the success of our tourism industry, our agricultural exports, our foreign policy and even our demographic destiny – as we seek to attract the world’s best and brightest to immigrate to our shores. The environment, the natural beauty of this island continent, goes to the heart of our global identity and appeal.

The damage done, however, was not simply to our environment. It was also to our reputation as a middle power with global sensibilities. The international media was quick to make the link between the bushfires and our domestic rancour on climate policy. Whether we liked it or not, the cat was out of the bag. Global coverage of the crisis brought home the point that our visibility as a nation is far larger than our 1.3 per cent contribution to global emissions. In fact, the greatest self-deception has come in allowing ourselves to think of Australia as a bystander when we have become a central player in the world’s most pressing long-term crisis.

We sometimes hear the argument that actions from individual countries such as ours, on their own, will make little difference to global warming. But if all countries that individually produced less than 2 per cent of global emissions said they were too small to do anything, a third of the world’s greenhouse emissions would go unchecked. That is why we have global agreements. This is also where the United States election result may well have the greatest ramifications for Australia’s foreign policy. The incoming Biden administration has pledged to re-join the Paris Agreement and almost certainly has Australia in mind when calling on other countries to make more ambitious national pledges.

The debate on climate change moved fast in the last few months of 2020 and is about to get faster. It is not an exaggeration to say that the next conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow in November 2021 will be one of the most consequential international summits in history. All our major trading and strategic partners – such as the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Japan, South Korea, and even China – have now committed to net zero carbon targets. Net zero emissions by 2050, not so long ago considered to be a radical proposition, has become the entrenched middle ground or centrist stance in global climate discussions.

Where is Australia in this debate? Notably absent. But there are signs Canberra is recognising it can no longer be such an outlier. Short-termism on climate policy, apart from anything else, has the potential to drive a wedge between ourselves and our most important diplomatic allies at a time when we have never had greater need of them.

2. Managing a Global Pandemic

Which brings me onto the second global challenge, one that will surely come to define the year 2020 in the history books. The irony is that it took an international public health emergency to recover our global standing following the bushfire crisis. The performance of the superpowers during the novel coronavirus pandemic was unimpressive. Both the United States and China have emerged diplomatically diminished from the global crisis. By contrast, smaller, more agile nations like our own have generally fared much better (Figure 1).

Countries such as Taiwan and New Zealand (top right quadrant of Figure 1) that handled the pandemic most effectively also registered the greatest gains in their international reputation. The opposite can be said of countries who have struggled to contain the spread of the pandemic, including the United States, Russia, Indonesia and India (bottom left quadrant).

China (bottom right quadrant) presents a notable exception to this overall trend. Beijing was judged by regional policymakers to have effectively contained the spread of the virus at home but also registered a marked deterioration in its reputation abroad. The same authoritarian instincts that enabled the government to ruthlessly suppress the pandemic also created alarm globally. This is apparent in allegations that China may not have been forthcoming with information at critical early stages of the crisis, and in the subsequent rise of a more strident diplomatic tone – China’s so-called wolf-warrior diplomacy – directed at multiple countries including Australia.

Australia’s success in managing the pandemic has certainly improved our international reputation, but it has also come at a steep price: we effectively have had to cut ourselves off from the world. The long-term consequences of this will be pronounced.
Australia is one of the few advanced economies to benefit from both high productivity and a growing working-age population. This places us in a veritable ‘demographic Goldilocks zone’. Yet, our net migration intake – which has historically accounted for the lion’s share of our population growth and been an impetus for economic growth – has declined to negative levels for the first time since World War II due to border closures. This will have adverse implications for our fundamentals as a young and growing middle power. By some estimates, Australia’s population is projected to be more than half a million people smaller in 2022 than would otherwise have been forecast in the absence of the pandemic. The failure to reverse this trend in the next few years would result in a smaller, poorer and ultimately less secure nation – a potential pitfall of which we will have to be incredibly mindful.

As we take stock of the direct and indirect consequences of COVID-19, it is worth reminding ourselves how this colossal global failure arose in the first place. It was the international politics of the pandemic, as much as the virus itself, that proved our collective undoing. The pandemic was no ‘black swan’. In September 2019, an expert panel convened jointly by the World Health Organisation and the World Bank warned of the ‘very real threat’ of a global pandemic. This was not the first such warning. Presciently in that case, the experts noted that ‘a lack of continued political will at all levels’ to prepare for a global health emergency would cost the world economy up to 4.8 per cent of global GDP (GPMB 2019). That estimate looks to be on target when looking at the economic fallout of COVID-19. The World Bank now estimates a 5.2 per cent contraction in global GDP in 2020 as a direct consequence of the pandemic (World Bank 2020).

It begs the question, what went so catastrophically wrong? Such a failure in human behaviour is literally the stuff of novels. Few have written so vividly about the human condition in fevered times as did Albert Camus. The existential philosopher’s 1947 novel, La Peste, tells the story of how townspeople in a French-Algerian city face up to a plague, both literal and allegorical (Camus 1947). Camus’s explorations of human behaviour are no less apt today. As in the novel, only now on a world scale, a disease burst forth from nature to mock our human pretences. COVID-19 unleashed a man-made pandemic of disinformation, blame and confrontation that tested social cohesion and globalisation to its core.

The coronavirus held up a mirror to our societies, exposing their competing structures, vulnerabilities and political priorities. The West clearly struggled to come to terms with the challenge at the outset. But if leaders in Europe and the United States were unprepared for what hit them, it is in part because they watched the epidemic grow with extraordinary indifference. As Italy’s death toll to the coronavirus overtook China’s in March, the pendulum swung quickly from complacency to pandemonium.

To use another analogy, if this pandemic is given the logic of war, then it also cascaded into civil war. It was no longer a question of borders between countries, but within them and between individuals. There was an unsettling symmetry, for example, between the United States and China using the coronavirus as a geopolitical football and shoppers engaged in toilet paper brawls in shopping centres across the world. Countries and people alike betrayed a zero-sum understanding of the crisis.

In Australia, the general tone of politics changed under the weight of this emergency. We saw a gear shift in the response to the virus at an earlier point on the curve than in many other countries. We were able to leverage both the good fortune of geography and good policy to produce results.

It is critical now that we seek to salvage the situation not just dometistically but at the global level. This is a moment to re-imagine our foreign policy, foreign aid and, above all, how we invest in and engage global institutions. Co-operation on shared challenges must co-exist with competition and strategic rivalry in a divided world. Otherwise, like a contemporary Tower of Babel, globalisation, from which we have gained so much, stands to collapse under the weight of its complication.

3. Dealing with China

Now, enter the elephant in the room, and the third of Australia’s three-pronged challenges of 2020: managing our China relationship in the face of Beijing’s growing assertiveness.

The principal effect of the pandemic has been not so much to bend or to reshape history as it has to accelerate history. The things that were happening before, the trends that were gathering storm, only became more intense. The standout example from Australia’s perspective is the near complete breakdown in our diplomatic ties with China. The deterioration in our bilateral relationship was put on fast forward in 2020, culminating in Beijing imposing unprecedented sanctions and tariffs on key Australian exports.

Here again there is far too much ground to cover in one lecture. So I will reflect on one of the principal lighting rods, which was the call in April by Australia’s Foreign Minister, Marise Payne, for an independent inquiry into the origins and handling of COVID-19. It is a useful case in point because the aftermath neatly encapsulates the fault lines in interpretation for how to deal with an abrasive China.

Many see the flare-up of trade tensions with China as proof that we paid too large and unnecessary a price for being among the first to push for an international investigation. For others, Beijing’s economic retaliation vindicates the principle of standing up to a bully, alone

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*A ‘black swan’ is an unpredictable event beyond what is normally expected of a situation. It is characterised by extreme rarity, potentially severe impacts, and popular insistence it was obvious in hindsight.*
Dealing with China at the World Health Assembly

The fact is what happened at the World Health Assembly in May had little to do with either of the superpowers. Both Washington and Beijing wrote themselves out of global crisis leadership. At the same time, Australia and the European Union successfully steered a resolution through the World Health Assembly calling for an independent review into the handling of the coronavirus pandemic. And they did so with the largest number of co-sponsors in the 70-year history of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and amid the most protracted great power stand-off since the Cold War.

Herein surely lies a foreign policy lesson. The government learned from its initial call for an inquiry that there was little to be gained in throwing rocks solo into the international arena. After flirting with the Trump administration's all-out assault on the WHO, Canberra toned down the rhetoric and reassessed its position.

In my opinion, the initial controversy has gone too far in obscuring what was subsequently achieved. The end result remains one of Australia's standout diplomatic triumphs in 2020. While a United States blame game undercut the world's reasonable case against China's handling of the pandemic, Australia sponsored a proactive resolution and built international support behind it. The review promises to examine both the origins of COVID-19 and the role of the WHO. The global health body's handling of the pandemic will be open to scrutiny, but the organisation's centrality to global health policy has not been undermined. That was a key achievement.

The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response will give us a first draft of the history of the COVID-19 virus, with a substantive report due in May 2021. While we await those results, we can already be sure of three things:

- First, the vote at the World Health Assembly illustrates that, when they work together, middle powers can forge global consensus even in a contested and dislocated international system.
- Second, and importantly for Australia, it shows that it is possible to influence China's behaviour when we have strength in numbers. Beijing's eventual accession to the motion was not a fait accompli from the outset. To the contrary, it chose, on the eve of the resolution carrying, to be among the last countries to sign on. To oppose the motion would have been a bad look and bound to fail.
- Third, in having succeeded in getting a review across the line, we prove to ourselves that the China challenge, while significant, is not one Australia need always face alone, or yet so severe that it must subsume all our global interests.

Certainly we benefitted from the support of others. The European Union has heft in the international system and was crucial to achieving what we did. But Australia is nimbler and moves more easily in its relations with Asia. We used these complementary advantages to the best possible effect and for the broader global good.

Dealing with China in the Indo-Pacific Region

The same logic has to apply in our own region. Canberra should prioritise an outward-looking and ambitious Indo-Pacific strategy rather than risk withdrawing into a pessimistic and defensive posture vis-à-vis China.

Our strategic circumstances, while critical, are also dynamic. Australia was one of only three countries to defy a race to the bottom and improve its regional standing in the Lowy Institute 2020 Asia Power Index (Lemahieu, with Leng 2020). The two others to do so were fellow middle powers, Vietnam and Taiwan. While they are all very different countries, the performances of these three powers illustrate, in their own ways, how the future is likely to be defined by a form of 'asymmetric multi-polarity'. All three must contend with the consequences of fading United States strategic predominance and unusually difficult relations with China. But when neither the United States nor China can establish undisputed primacy in Asia, the actions, choices and interests of middle powers become more consequential. They will make the marginal difference.

In that sense, the pandemic creates an opportunity to rethink and step-up our regional diplomacy. This can be done by committing to a post-COVID-19 recovery strategy for Southeast Asia in addition to aid efforts already underway in the South Pacific. Succeeding in our regional engagement also will require a clearer differentiation in our objectives: building a strategic and military counterweight to China through partnerships with India, Japan and the United States, on one hand, and co-operating with a more diverse set of middle powers in shoring up the rules-based regional order, on the other. By this I mean working with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping.

For all its flaws, ASEAN's multi-lateral architecture continues to provide the only viable, broad-based, and suitably non-aligned alternative to a Sino-centric order in the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN's emerging economic architecture may well prove to be the most consequential hedge against Beijing's asymmetric economic clout. The goal, then, should be to help Southeast Asian countries maintain regional balance in the ways they do best: by slowly weaving together a set of rules among diverse actors for the region's economic governance.
One of the silver linings of 2020 has been ASEAN’s successful conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), despite the absence of both India and the United States. RCEP – now the world’s largest free-trade association – is an example of the region’s commitment to strengthening the economic rules-based order.

The success of homegrown multi-lateral initiatives – often in spite of the protectionist agendas of the major powers – will not only be crucial for post-COVID recovery efforts but ultimately offers the most compelling answer to Beijing’s preference for ad hoc bilateral economic diplomacy, as seen in the Belt-and-Road Initiative.

Now you could argue that RCEP has done very little to prevent China from flexing its economic power; from using bilateral trade as a tool of economic coercion for geopolitical objectives. But breaking the spirit, if not the letter, of regional free-trade agreements does raise the stakes and reputational costs for Beijing. You only have to go as far back as 2017, when Xi Jinping proudly positioned himself as the anti-Trump at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He styled himself as the leader of a responsible great power that would uphold the rules-based trading system.

But you cannot have it both ways. Beijing also wants to create a regional economic system based not on rules that apply to everyone, but on its political preferences and interests. That is Australia’s cautionary China lesson for the world.

Australia has appealed to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) over China’s decision to impose huge tariffs on Australian barley earlier this year. That is the logical, responsible and only appropriate way forward. Retaliating with a US-China style trade war would be counterproductive and lead us nowhere. But going to the WTO has real significance. Australia has been an “offensive” litigator only three times in the last 20 years, and never on such an internationally significant case. This ruling will establish whether China meets its core obligations as a WTO member.

In many ways, the WTO ruling could be the trade law equivalent of the case brought by the Philippines against China under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. That case successfully challenged Beijing’s nine-dash line in the South China Sea. The ruling in 2016 has been another source of enduring reputational damage for China. It exposes Beijing’s provocations for what they are – illegal under international law – making it that much harder for China to justify its actions as legitimate and exposing hypocrisy.

**Dealing with China in the long run**

There is no question that managing the consequences of China’s rise and assertiveness is going to be the work of this generation. We are living what can best be described as a kind of new Cold War with economic characteristics. But this one is different from the last one in key respects – it is far less rigid, takes place in a world that is far more interdependent, and creates a great deal more grey space in terms of alignments and spheres of influence.

There is going to be hedging, deterrence, and active co-operation with China all happening at the same time. One way or the other, we will have to learn to co-exist with China. We also have to accept that China’s economic centrality in our region will only become more entrenched following the pandemic.

However, we must also take stock of China’s own internal problems and challenges. We can take some measure of comfort from the fact that China is not destined to dominate the world in some kind of unending process of stellar economic growth. In fact, Beijing must contend with protracted problems of debt and demography. China’s workforce is projected to decline by 177 million people from current levels by mid-century. This presages social and economic challenges to come. On top of which, China’s political system still spends more on projecting power inwards, on internal security challenges, than it does on projecting it outwards, on military spending. That continues to be a source of enduring weakness and detracts from China’s global ambitions.

In the medium term, however, we will have to manage our expectations in two ways. First, we may not even have reached rock bottom yet in terms of our bilateral ties. We are likely to see further deterioration after a new law was passed in December giving the federal government the power to cancel international agreements by state governments, local councils and public universities. If, as expected, Canberra uses this to cancel Victoria’s agreement with China on the Belt-and-Road Initiative, Beijing may well retaliate further.

Second, Australian public opinion on China likely will continue its steep decline. That presents a far bigger problem for Beijing that it does for Canberra. However, it does present some challenges in its own right in terms of trying to keep a cool head and not engage in tit-for-tat rhetorical flourishes with China’s ‘wolf warrior’ diplomats, which I would argue lead us nowhere. We will have to maintain a degree of composure in the way that we stand up to China.

**Australia’s Recovery**

To wrap all of this up, perhaps the single most important lesson of 2020 is that the ability to project ourselves globally and to pursue our interests abroad starts with our strength and vitality at home. Australia should be focused on the recovery, adaptation and resilience of its economy and broader society. We will have to pursue trade diversification as a way of lessening our dependence and vulnerability on our most important trading partner. But diversification is not the elixir that it is often made out to be. It will be part of the solution, but building new export markets will take years if not decades.
Which brings me full circle back to where this conversation began. The resilience, prestige and power of countries in the 21st century rests increasingly on their capacity to manage problems such as pandemics, climate change, economic security and sustainable growth. This year, we have proven to do very well at some – if not most – of that. But we have to take stock of where we fell short, how we can improve and what the linkages between these issues are.

The economist, Ross Garnaut, has compellingly laid out Australia’s potential to be an economic superpower of the future post-carbon world (Garnaut 2019). This is a very promising path to greater economic and energy security, sectoral diversification and resilience. Australia’s favourable geography gives the island-continent the potential to become a leader in renewables. In light of our difficulties with China, there is a strategic imperative at play here. An emerging climate race has the potential to generate the same kind of technological and soft power dividends once associated with the space race of the Cold War. The climate race is the new space race.

For now, the gap between reality and expectations has never been greater. Australia trails even certain developing economies – including Vietnam, with a fraction of its landmass – for renewable energy generation (Figure 2). Yet this is precisely the area where we should be developing an industrial base after COVID-19. Once again, our natural environment gifts us with enormous comparative advantages and there are signs that we are beginning to catch up, which will be paramount for our ability to compete in the twenty-first century.

When historians look back on 2020, they will see how the onset of a novel coronavirus rushed in a new global disorder, in a race to the bottom between great powers. But 2020 need not be an enduring turn of fortunes for Australia. And indeed, it has been a year of diplomatic achievement as well. We can make our own luck in this world. We can also shape this post-pandemic world multilaterally – in ways that allow for a degree of stability, a degree of openness, a degree of prosperity, and some measure of rules-based engagement.

Never let a good crisis year go to waste.

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References
Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you during what is a busy, challenging and unprecedented time for the 2nd Division and, indeed, for our whole nation. The Australian Government has asked a lot of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), in particular of the Army Reserve, over the last 13 months. The men and women of the 2nd Division have proved to be an important capability for the ADF and the nation. They have brought their diverse blend of military and civilian experience, skills and insights to help the government respond to two of the most significant domestic crises we have faced. Through the bushfires of last summer and the COVID-19 pandemic\(^2\), Reservists serving across the country have strengthened our connection to community and country.

In this paper, I will discuss the vital role the 2nd Division plays in the integrated defence force. This is reflected in how our people have responded to the challenges of 2020 and how we continue to meet the demands of our strategic environment through our continued transformation. This transformation demands that the Division can navigate significant changes in the way it operates, while we support enduring domestic and international operations, continue daily business and provide world-class training that ensures we can deliver capability across the spectrum of operations from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, to war fighting and security tasks.

**2nd Division’s Role – Domestic Operations Lead**

Firstly, let us look at how the 2nd Division’s role and focus have evolved in the recent past. Transformation is not new to us. From providing a base for mobilisation, to augmenting the Regular Army and through the Ready Reserve Scheme, we have adjusted our structure and focus as strategic circumstances have demanded.

Under Plan Beersheba, the 2nd Division’s main effort shifted to providing additional combat capability to the Army’s combat brigades. The Division’s annual focus for the past several years has been raising, training and sustaining a reinforcing battle group\(^3\) to support the ready brigade\(^4\) at a time when operations in Iraq and Afghanistan stretched Army’s capability. The 2nd Division’s reinforcing role made sound strategic sense. It also grounded the Division in foundation war fighting, the core role of any military force and one we retain.

In recent years, the Australian Government has called on the Army and wider ADF to prepare for an increasing range of operational contingencies given growing strategic competition and uncertainty. Our high-readiness, full-time forces must be focused on responding to short-notice contingencies overseas, yet the government still expects the ADF to support the Australian community during natural disasters and other civilian emergencies. With this expectation forecast to grow even more, on 1 September 2019, the Chief of Army formally assigned responsibility for leading domestic operations to the 2nd Division. Our geographic spread and deep community links means this is a mission to which we are uniquely suited. In what has been a year like no other, our lead role in responding to the summer bushfires and the COVID pandemic\(^2\) has shown that this is a mission we can perform easily.

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1\(^{\text{A}}\) A battle group is a unit-sized force, based usually on an infantry battalion, which is augmented by attached supporting arms and services which are under the unit’s command. The actual grouping usually is task-specific.

2\(^{\text{Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It apparently emerged in China in 2019 and reached pandemic proportions globally during 2020.}}\)

3\(^{\text{A battle group is a unit-sized force, based usually on an infantry battalion, which is augmented by attached supporting arms and services which are under the unit’s command. The actual grouping usually is task-specific.}}\)

4\(^{\text{The Australian Army maintains one of its three combat brigade groups ready for combat operations all the time. The ready brigade group is on-call for one calendar year before the duty rotates to its nominated successor.}}\)
**Bushfires**

**Call-out of Reservists**

On 4 January 2020, on advice of the federal government, the Governor-General issued a call out of defence reservists under sub-sub-section 50D (2) (g) of the *Defence Act, 1903* (Cwlth) for continuous full-time service to provide civil aid, humanitarian assistance, medical or civil emergency, or disaster relief, from the date of that order until revoked.

This was the first time in the history of the Commonwealth of Australia that this power had been invoked – the first time reserve brigades had been called out to support a large-scale disaster. It also would be the largest mobilisation of the ADF for domestic disaster relief that Australia had seen. 2nd Division personnel formed an integral part of the ADF commitment, with nearly 2700 reserve personnel responding to the call out by rendering continuous full-time service, with another 940 members serving on part-time training days. The Reserve provided the core of the Defence response. We were joined by 2800 full-time Army and around 1300 Navy and Air Force personnel and 50 representatives from the Commonwealth Public Service. The 2nd Division had provided support to disaster relief in the past, but this was on an altogether different scale.

**Command and Control**

The response to the bushfires would also drive transformation in the command and control of domestic operations. Headquarters 2nd Division at Randwick was established as the national mounting headquarters with the 4th, 5th and 9th Brigades stood up as joint task forces to support state and territory governments. Our role as a mounting headquarters ensured that part-time forces integrated quickly with our full-time (permanent ADF) counterparts, other emergency and public services and, eventually, with foreign military forces. As the operation progressed, we would be joined by contingents from New Zealand, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Indonesia.

**Joint Task Force 1111**

The 9th Brigade-led Joint Task Force 1111 in South Australia is an exemplar of total force integration on operations. It comprised the 9th Brigade headquarters, units from across the state and from Tasmania, as well as the 6th Brigade’s 16th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery. Other crucial support came from the 1st and 17th Brigades and troops from New Zealand. At its peak, the task force in South Australia had almost 1400 soldiers deployed. Only a properly trained military force could have responded as quickly as we did and integrate disparate units into a combined force operating in particularly adverse and dangerous conditions in what our Chief of Army describes as an Army for the nation and an Army in the community.

**Link to Local Communities**

Our reservists provided a crucial link to local authorities and communities in times of need. Private Brody Scott, a specialist driver, is but one example. She was flown in with other combat service support members from her unit to assist the remaining residents of her hometown of Mallacoota in Victoria’s East Gippsland, cut off for weeks by a ring of fire. After a brief reunion with her parents whose home had fortunately been spared, she spent the following weeks undertaking fuel deliveries in Mallacoota in support of the Country Fire Authority and the State Emergency Service. Private Scott said at the time that Mallacoota, even for such a small town, had provided her with every opportunity. Private Scott joined an Army for the nation but she also joined an Army in the community.

**COVID-19 Pandemic**

Just as the demands of Operation Bushfire Assist eased, governments across Australia were taking steps to respond to the growing COVID-19 pandemic. On 27 March 2020, Joint Task Force 629 (JTF 629), based on the 2nd Division, was formed to command the ADF’s contribution to the whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the states and territories. The 2nd Division’s capacity to respond to domestic crises and to command a joint force would consolidate during this operation. Headquarters JTF 629 was, and still is, based on an augmented Headquarters 2nd Division. A significant facilities upgrade, based on the establishment of a 24-hour joint operations room, with modern communication systems and a common operating procedure, has been central to our ability to effectively command and co-ordinate a complex and often highly-sensitive operation.

The JTF was supported by joint task groups (JTGs) in each state and territory which co-ordinated with civilian agencies to deliver the ADF support on the ground. These JTGs were based on our brigade headquarters with additional task groups stood up in both Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

**Supporting Civilian Agencies**

Coming off the back of the bushfires, many of our commanders and headquarters staff were already experienced at working in support of civilian agencies, highlighting yet again the value of our communal links. As is identified in the 2020 defence strategic update\(^\d\) the ADF is required to enhance its support of civilian authorities – doing so is reliant on strengthening partnerships with the authorities in the states and territories.

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\(^\d\)Defence (2020). *Defence strategic update* (Department of Defence: Canberra).
Our support to the COVID response has seen these partnerships mature and deepen on-the-ground over the last seven months. 2nd Division members have supported civilian police manage state and territory borders – in sub-zero temperatures in southern New South Wales; to remote outback areas of South Australia and the Northern Territory. They assisted with planning and logistics, have welcomed Australians home from around the globe, and supported quarantine management and contact tracing.

The very size of the response to Operation COVID-19 has required a significant commitment from the whole of the ADF. Reserve personnel accounted for over 50 per cent of the JTF from March until a surge of personnel into Victoria and New South Wales at the end of June. Over the next 10 weeks, we saw Reserve personnel more than double within the JTF to over 600 by mid-September. As of late October, over 3000 2nd Division members have deployed on Operation COVID-19 Assist on top of the deployment of over 3000 reservists during the bushfires. This is a remarkable achievement, with a majority serving on both operations.

Link to Local Communities

Private Frank Marra from the Northern Territory community of Niu is one of them. Having only enlisted in Norforce7 in September 2019, Private Marra deployed to Kangaroo Island, South Australia, to remove burnt trees and clear footpaths in the national park during the January bushfires. He since has deployed on Operation COVID-19 Assist twice, including: three weeks at a police checkpoint about half-an-hour from his home community; and, later, four weeks on a checkpoint near the West Australian border.

Economic Significance of Reserve Service:

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the most significant economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s and, in some cases, reserve service has provided employment for members who would have otherwise been unemployed or underemployed. As a result of redundancies, layoffs and stand downs, the 2nd Division’s ongoing commitment to Operation COVID-19 Assist will continue for as long as the government requires it. We also are ready to respond to large-scale domestic and regional events ahead of the high-risk weather season concurrent with the commitment to Operation COVID-19 Assist.

Other Operations and Training

Border and Fisheries Protection: The 2nd Division also has not lost momentum in support of other critical operations. We have continued to deploy contingents on Operation Resolute to protect Australia’s borders and maritime interests. The 51st Battalion, The Far North Queensland Regiment, has commanded Operation Overarch, with a continuous deployment since February monitoring the transit of people through the Torres Strait. Further, some 5 per cent of 2nd Division members have deployed on overseas operations so far this year.

War Fighting

While disaster relief operations have captured our focus this year, we continue to prepare for war fighting. The Division will continue to raise, train and sustain a reinforcing battle group to pair with the full-time ready brigade in 2021. Battlegroup Cannon, based on the 11th and 13th Brigades, will partner with the 3rd Brigade during Exercise Talisman Sabre, the major combined exercise with the United States in 2021.

Domestic Security

In recent months brigade-based assurance exercises have been conducted to practise the skills and procedures needed to support domestic security operations, another complex and demanding mission for which we are responsible.

Family, Employer and Community Support

As ever, the ability of the 2nd Division to serve on operations has been underpinned by support for our soldiers from their families, employers, educational institutions and local communities. As but one example, only with continued support from his employer, the Australian Submarine Corporation (ASC), could Sapper Ethan Cotton of the 10th/27th Battalion, The Royal South Australian Regiment, have deployed on Operation COVID-19 Assist following his involvement in Operation Bushfire Assist. Sapper Cotton joined ASC under the postgraduate programme as an engineer and has never looked back. He is pleased to say that the company encourages its reservists to stay actively engaged and professionally trained. Whether it be small businesses in regional communities, large private employers, or government departments, without that support we could not generate the capability that we do.

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1North-West Mobile Force, an Army Reserve regional force surveillance unit headquartered in Darwin and dispersed throughout the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia. It focuses primarily on coastal surveillance.

1Another Army Reserve regional force surveillance unit focused on coastal surveillance, this one based in far-north Queensland (Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria) with its headquarters in Cairns.

7Army Reserve regional force surveillance unit focused on coastal surveillance, this one based in far-north Queensland (Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria) with its headquarters in Cairns.
Training Innovation

COVID-19 has challenged us to think of different ways to deliver training outcomes. The 8th Brigade's innovative approaches have ensured our initial employment training has continued in addition to courses at Kapooka. We ran the part-time recruit course with the Training Block 1 of the officer training course for the first time in Queensland in order to negate the need for interstate travel and quarantining. Running course modules back-to-back and in home locations where possible has also reduced travel requirements and effectively fast-tracked training while working within government restrictions. We have still managed to achieve about 90 per cent of our directed training requirement.

Indigenous Training

We have continued to be an exemplar of training transformation and the wider Army continues to look closely at our flexible models of training delivery. We also have been able to continue the Army Indigenous development programme in the Northern Territory. This is a pathway for Indigenous Australians who wish to join the Army, but who do not meet the general entry standards. Run by the Regional Force Surveillance Group, this training forms a major part of Defence's commitment to the Australian Government's whole-of-government strategy of “closing the gap”.

The Short-term Outlook

In the short-term, the 2nd Division will continue its transition to a military force able to conduct foundation war fighting, while re-posturing to support the Australian community during natural disasters and other emergencies as the ADF's domestic force of choice. It will progressively reorganise to focus on key outputs, like liaison with emergency services and generating the capabilities needed for the high-risk weather season and domestic security incidents – each task having its own intricacies, risks and challenges.

The 2nd Division will also retain the responsibility for the reinforcing battle group and support to specified operations. This is a positive change for the Division which will see exciting developments in a number of areas. In Western Australia, we have been growing our cavalry scout capability as well as our engineers. The recent appointment of a special forces officer at Headquarters 13th Brigade also will provide new perspectives and opportunities to increase co-operation with full-time units in Western Australia. We also have committed to the ongoing development of Army's total workforce system.

Conclusion

2020 has reinforced the value of a diverse workforce when solving complex problems. The integration of full-time and part-time members at all levels, including in operational command positions, has enabled Army to support the community in overcoming unprecedented challenges. Our integrated workforce leverages part-time skill sets, frees up capacity in critical areas and enables knowledge transfer across the organisation. The end result is a more capable Army.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you just some of what the Australian Army Reserve and the 2nd Division in particular has been doing in this most challenging of years. The future of the 2nd Division is increasingly operationally focused and integrated as part of the joint force. Integrated not only with the Regular Army as we continue to generate warfighting capabilities for overseas operations, but through the establishment of a JTF for commanding both full-time and part-time joint forces on domestic operations, we also will be working ever more closely with emergency services in the states and territories. As a result of our successes in 2020, we have proven this capability and won the trust of government and the community. We can expect an increasingly demanding but rewarding future.

The Author: Major General Kathryn Jane Campbell, AO, CSC, a citizen soldier, is commander of the Australian Army’s 2nd Division, which contains most of the Army’s reservists. She is the first woman to be appointed to the role. In civilian life, with a background in public policy and programme management, she is a career public administrator who has led two Commonwealth Government departments. She is currently Secretary of the Department of Social Services (2017 to date) and previously was Secretary of the Department of Human Services (2011-2017). She was commissioned into the Royal Australian Signals Corps in 1990 and her subsequent military career has included command of the Sydney University Regiment (2007-2009), the 5th Brigade (2014-2016), deputy command of Joint Task Force 633 in the Middle East in 2016, and now command of the 2nd Division (December 2018 to date), including during the 2020 bushfire and COVID crises. For her command of the Sydney University Regiment, she was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross in 2010. She was appointed an Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia in 2019 for distinguished service to public administration through senior roles with government departments, and to the Australian Army Reserve. [Photo of General Campbell: Department of Defence]
As a strategic planner and commentator, I have been drawn to the issue of resilience via several routes. Firstly, I have been a member of the The Club of Rome since 1991, the global think-tank which helped trigger the global environment debate in 1972 when it published its report, *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972).

I also have been an economics commentator concerned about ‘new right economic rationalism’ and the continual focus on the ‘bottom line’, which could obscure security issues, such as the risks of disruption to just-in-time supply chains, and the erosion of food security by opting for cheaper food imports.

As a political commentator, I have been concerned about post ‘9/11’ (11 September 2001) terrorist attacks; and as a social commentator/educator, I have addressed ‘fragility’, mental health and issues such as well-meaning ‘helicopter parents’ eroding the personal initiative of their children and making them overly anxious.

I have served as a consultant to an oil company for whom I reframed the issue of inadequate infrastructure as a security issue – noting that Australia is not honouring its international obligations about maintaining oil reserves, not least for national defence purposes.

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These various lines of work, in turn, have led me to scenario planning and thinking about the future. Inevitably, this has led to despair at society’s unwillingness to think about the unthinkable, and so we continue to be taken by surprise, such as by the severity of the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

What then is resilience? As defined by Rodin (2014: 3), “Resilience is the capacity of any entity – an individual, a community, an organisation, or a natural system – to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience”. There is no one single key to guarantee resilience. Indeed, resilience may be difficult to identify in specific situations. We can improve resilience in Australia, but I doubt that we can make a “resilient Australia” as such, because of all the emerging issues that can impact resilience, such as climate change.

As noted above, I have tackled resilience in a number of situations. There are various levels at which it can be analysed. In this paper, I will provide some recommendations for action as a basis for debate: from ways of looking at the world; to the technique of scenario planning.

**Economic Thinking**

It is an oft used aphorism that “a fish does not know that it swims in water”. In like fashion, people take the economic and social context for granted.

The Great Depression of 1930s led to a new role for government and the emergence of “Keynesian economics”, named after John Maynard Keynes, who argued that unemployment was a government responsibility (and not just an act of nature like floods). It followed that government should intervene in the economy and led to United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal policy and the invention of the modern United States presidency. As World War II was drawing to a close in 1945, the Australian Government even successfully argued that a task for the new United Nations Organisation should be to work for full employment.

Shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, though, a small group of academics was to change economic thought in the western world. In 1947, in Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland, this group, including Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman and Karl Popper, reacted against the growth of government, particularly as a result of two the World Wars and the Great Depression. The Mont Pèlerin Society had little confidence in government. Its members believed that self-interested greed in the market would be moderated by the invisible hand of market institutions and would generate benefits for all. Their philosophy was “leave it to the market” – which came to be referred to as economic rationalism.

By the early 1970s, there was a perceived failure of...
Keynesian thinking. The resulting vacuum was filled by economic rationalism as evidenced by the policies of Conservative Party Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979 in Britain, Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1980 in the United States, and Labor Party Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1983 in Australia – different political parties and social philosophies, yet reading off the same economic policy script.

By the 1990s, a ‘new right’ form of economic rationalism was emerging. It since has come to be characterised by:

- down-sizing of government by outsourcing government functions and services to the not-for-profit or the for-profit sectors, or their outright privatisation;
- just-in-time supply lines;
- elimination of redundancy (‘fat’) in systems leaving nothing to fall back on should things go bad, such as in the current United States public health crisis over the COVID19 pandemic – very different from United States situation in World War II (Goodwin 1994); and
- an attitude that the “poor have too much money and rich don’t have enough”.

As a consequence of these policies, we demonise the poor and provide tax cuts for the rich leading to a growing gap between rich and poor and, importantly from a national security perspective, a growing risk of social instability.

Indeed, the next battleground may well be the global supply chain which has been spawned by these policies and has enabled them. The COVID crisis has revealed that it is unwise to place so much reliance on China as the ‘factory of the world’. As India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi, recently observed, the COVID pandemic has shown that China cannot be trusted. It follows that we should engage in trade arrangements based on ‘trust’ and not ‘lowest cost’ as the obsession with ‘low cost’ has made us vulnerable.

Given that there is a need for a resilient global supply chain, is there scope for a new trade alliance between India, Japan and Australia? Japan is supplier of world-class technology and is the world’s third-largest economy; India has a large, well-trained workforce and surplus productive capacity; and Australia has an abundance of natural resources. Importantly, all three are flourishing and stable democracies.

**Complexity Theory: the Next Big Theory?**

Complexity theory is not a new idea. Indeed, it grew out of the systems thinking of the 1960s and the problems revealed by The Club of Rome’s report on *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972) which estimated that the planet would run into environmental and resource issues around 2040.

The concept of ‘Blowback’ is relevant here. Blowback, traditionally, has been viewed as a political concern. A classic example is the arming of the Taliban in Afghanistan by the United States Central Intelligence Agency in the 1980s in hope that they would create a Vietnam-type quagmire for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Unfortunately for the United States, after the Soviet withdrawal, an offshoot of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, turned on the United States – most notably on 11 September 2001 when New York and Washington were attacked.

Blowback as a concept is now being applied to environmental issues. For instance, good global economic growth is now leading to resource scarcity, environmental pollution, ecosystem destruction and biodiversity loss. The planet is richer than ever before in economic terms and yet our civilisation is in its greatest danger from the effects of technological progress, industrialisation, economic growth, population growth, pandemics and climate change. Some of humanity’s greatest achievements seem to be posing the greatest threats to humanity’s ongoing existence on planet Earth.

Indeed, the father of chaos theory, the mathematical concept which informs much of modern meteorology and other fields of science, Edward N. Lorenz, posed the intriguing question to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1972: “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?” (Lorenz 1972). While Lorenz’s concepts are frequently misapplied, especially outside the natural sciences, political scientists, historians, environmentalists and others are becoming interested in complexity theory and are seeking to apply such concepts even to the rise and fall of empires.

Complexity theory is looking for the hidden structures that are contained within apparently chaotic situations. Problems tend to be interdependent and not resolvable by ‘reductionist’ study via individual academic disciplines. So, researchers need to work together across disciplinary lines, look for the connections and accept that results/findings are probable rather than certain. All life on Earth survives via complex adaptive systems comprised of many components and many individual agents; many are non-linear with multiple feedback loops; interventions can lead to unintended consequences; yet the systems can be robust and resilient, even if change does not lead to an equilibrium state, and they may even have an underlying simplicity.

In a social context, a successful company is a complex adaptive system, as are cities and regions. Therefore, be aware of the rise of complexity theory. New paradigms do not necessarily suddenly burst upon the world; a new paradigm may emerge slowly and without much publicity, much as economic rationalism itself emerged as a political idea in the 1970s. Listen for the faint signals of change as people look for alternatives to economic rationalism.

**Thinking about the Future**

I would like to suggest three ways of thinking about...
the future: predicted futures; preferred futures; and possible futures.

Predicting the future involves assessing say a technological capability and its current rate (trajectory) of improvement and then combining current capability with trajectory to predict where it will be in say five years. An example is Moore's Law – the observation and projection based on manufacturing experience that the number of transistors in an integrated circuit will double about every two years. Another example is the time (four years: 2002 - 2006) over which artificial intelligence developed to the point where it could consistently beat the world's best chess players.

Using preferred futures, instead, starts not from where you are now but from where you would like to be in say five years and then building a bridge from there back to where you are today. An oft-cited example is the pledge by United States President, John F. Kennedy, in 1961 to put a man on the Moon by the end of the decade.

In contrast to both the foregoing, possible futures involves scenario planning – envisaging a spectrum of possible futures, assessing their probability and effects and then developing contingency plans based on the more likely and/or more concerning possibilities. Envisaging a spectrum of possible futures necessitates thinking beyond the limits of current paradigms and world views (‘outside the square’), not only to likely or to preferred futures, but to unlikely and undesirable ones as well.

Scenario planning

Like complexity theory and chaos theory, scenario planning is not new. Indeed, it has evolved into a sophisticated technique over some five decades from when it was first used in the private sector by Pierre Wack at Shell, London, during the 1973 OPEC oil crisis. Other notable contributors were Clem Sunter, who worked on ‘high road/low road’ scenarios in South Africa in the early 1980s; and Peter Schwartz in 1984 at Stanford Research Institute. Schwartz was advising on wargaming scenarios and the possibility of young hackers accessing United States military super-computers and creating a World War III situation.

The technique of scenario planning now involves several steps. The first is to decide on the basic ‘question’ and interview relevant experts. One then looks for the two main drivers of change in this instance, be they social, technological, economic, environmental or political factors (usually summarised by the acronym STEEP). Two or four scenarios (never three) are then produced, which are next discussed with ‘remarkable people’/‘lateral poppies’. Part 1 of the process then concludes with creating indicators and contingency plans for each chosen scenario.

Part II of the process involves wider evaluation and promotion of the chosen scenarios. This involves first engaging in strategic conversations on the scenarios and ‘talking them up’. A report or other document which explains the scenarios and their development is released and may be followed by determined implementation of the indicators and contingency plans accompanied by sustained advocacy for them.

Scenario planning is not so much about getting the future right as to avoid getting it wrong. It encourages us to think about the unthinkable; to look at current events with different eyes; to ‘see’ trends that are currently ‘invisible’ (they are there all right – it is just that we are not noticing them); and to develop contingency plans. While we may not be able to predict the future, we can plan for it and we can embrace it with confidence knowing that whatever the future may throw at us we can cope with it.

Conclusion

Resilience is acquiring greater saliency, but we still have a long way to go. Improving resiliency in Australia will require new mindsets, from how we raise children to how governments enter into contracts and run the national economy. Resiliency in its own right should be a topic for risk committees and boards and all other organisations – we need to ‘talk up’ the issue. More long-term thinking is required at political and strategic levels, not merely a focus on the short-term.

The Author:

Dr Keith Douglas Suter is a consultant on strategic planning and a futurist. His first doctorate was in the international law of guerrilla warfare and his second in the economic and social consequences of the arms race. He is a resident foreign affairs correspondent for Channel 7 (Australia) TV's Sunrise programme and is a regular speaker on the corporate lecture circuit. He was awarded the Australian Government's Peace Medal in 1986 (The International Year of Peace); and was appointed a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2019 for "significant service to international relations, and to the Uniting Church in Australia".

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van Cuylenburg, Hugh (2019). The resilience project: finding happiness through gratitude, empathy and mindfulness (Random House: North Sydney, N.S.W.).
A principle of the defence phase of war is ‘defence in depth’, i.e. defending key terrain as far forward and to the flanks of one’s main defensive position as is practicable via disposition of forces and firepower, with a view to surveilling one’s approaches, gaining early warning and time/space for manoeuvre, and imposing delay and attrition on the enemy before he reaches the main defensive position (Australian Army 1977: 8-2).

China now has a ‘blue water’ navy able to rival any other, including that of the United States (McDevitt 2020). It also is seeking forward operating bases to extend the reach of its maritime power. It has already established military bases in the South China Sea and at Djibouti (Gulf of Aden), and is using its Belt-and-Road Initiative to upgrade strategically-located ports/airfields around the Indian Ocean and South Pacific where the host nations agree – bases which could quickly be upgraded from civilian to military use should the need/opportunity arise. These include port/airfield redevelopments in Papua New Guinea (PNG) at Wewak, Kikori, Vanimo and Manus Island (Shugart 2020). In late 2020, China signed a memorandum of understanding with PNG to establish a ‘fishing factory’ on Daru Island in the Torres Strait, some 200km from the Australian mainland, despite the absence of commercial quantities of fish in the area (Tingle 2020).

In response, Australia has launched a ‘Pacific Step-up’ – an increase in aid funding for Pacific nations (Foreign Affairs 2017); has refocused its defence posture on its immediate region with the intent of holding any potential enemy forces as far from the Australian mainland as is practicable (Defence 2020: 21); and reached agreement with PNG and the United States to upgrade the Lombrum Naval Base on Manus Island (Shugart 2020).

It is timely, therefore, to consider what role operating bases deployed forward of, and to the flanks of, the Australian mainland might play in our future defence. In this context, it is instructive to revisit our World War II experience. This essay will provide geostrategic context for, and examine the effect of, establishing forward operating bases in the archipelago to Australia’s north and east during the war. It will seek to establish what worked well and what was less successful, and then draw enduring lessons from that experience for Australia’s current defence.

World War II
During the 1941-1945 war in the Pacific, forward operating bases were established by the Allies for a range of purposes, the most common of which was to protect vital strategic assets, such as ports and airfields, either from capture and use by the Japanese or for use by the Allies as bases from which air, naval and amphibious power could be projected into Imperial Japan’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and eventually towards the Japanese homeland (e.g. Wigmore 1957: 59).

From Australia’s perspective (Horner 1982: 51-57), the British naval base at Singapore was viewed as the main operating base for Australia’s forward defence. Under Imperial defence arrangements, Singapore was to be defended by the Royal Navy. In the event, while there was a miscellany of British, Dutch, American and Australian warships in Singapore in late 1941, some under repair, the intended British Eastern Fleet was unable to be assembled and sent to Singapore as, two years into the war, the Royal Navy had suffered heavy...

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1 The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was intended to be a self-sufficient bloc of Asian and Pacific nations led by Japan and free from the rule of Western powers. It would provide the raw materials needed by Japanese industry. Initial occupation of territory in China began in 1931. Its other intended territories in east and southeast Asia and the Pacific were occupied in the three months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941.

2 British and Australian strategic perspectives differed. What Australia viewed primarily as forward defences for Australia, the British viewed as bases for the east-flank protection of the Indian Empire (which included Burma). Any benefit to Australia’s defence was secondary.
losses in the Atlantic and Mediterranean and most ships still operational were required for higher-priority duties elsewhere in the Empire.

At the last minute, Britain did manage to send Force Z comprising two capital ships – HM.S Prince of Wales, a battleship, and HMS Repulse, a battlecruiser – and four destroyers to Singapore under the command of Admiral Sir Tom S. V. Phillips – it arrived there on 2 December 1941. The intent had been to include an aircraft carrier in Force Z, but the nominated carrier ran aground en route and could not be replaced. On 8 December, Force Z was sent north into the South China Sea to intercept a Japanese fleet thought to be carrying a force to invade northern Malaya. It failed to find any Japanese fleet and, during its return to Singapore, Force Z was attacked by Japanese land-based aircraft and the two capital ships were sunk. No. 453 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, comprising ten Brewster F2A Buffalos, was on standby to give Force Z air cover, but its assistance was not requested until an hour after the Japanese attack had commenced. By the time the Australian planes arrived in the area, the battle was over.

As a consequence, the Commander-in-Chief British Far East Command, Air Chief-Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, now had at his disposal in Malaya only a land force comprised mainly of the pre-war colonial garrison and a small air force (four fighter and eight bomber squadrons) equipped principally with obsolescent pre-war aircraft with which to oppose the state-of-the-art Japanese Oscar and Zero aircraft. The land force was moderately reinforced during 1941, including with two infantry brigades of the 8th Australian Division (Horner 1982: 56). [The division’s third brigade, the 23rd Infantry Brigade, initially was retained at home for Australia’s immediate defence.] The British-Indian-Australian land force, while comprised mainly of well-trained professional soldiers, lacked combat experience and would prove no match for the battle hardened professional jungle fighters of the Imperial Japanese Army. When the Japanese invaded Malaya on 8 December 1941, the two 8th Division brigades and Australia’s two fighter and two bomber squadrons contributed to the British Empire’s delaying defence of the Malay peninsula and the subsequent battle for Singapore Island, which fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 (Wigmore 1957: 137-391).

As well as relying on Singapore, Australia established two lines of forward posts, an outer line running from Singapore, through the Dutch East Indies to New Britain and an inner line running from Darwin, through Papua and the Solomons, and thence down the east flank to Norfolk Island. Islands containing vital assets were garrisoned by small infantry-based forces to protect the assets against raids and the bases were linked by coastwatchers on other islands to form a chain of observation posts. This was barely adequate for the assigned task but was the best Australia could do at the time, especially as it had three infantry divisions deployed in the Middle East (Wigmore 1957) and its naval units were still largely integrated with those of the Royal Navy in 1941.

During 1941, the 23rd Infantry Brigade was deployed forward of the Australian mainland into the Dutch East Indies and Australian New Guinea both to provide early warning of the Japanese approach to the Australian mainland (a forward observation line) and to defend strategic infrastructure as follows:

- **Gull Force** – 2/21st Australian Infantry Battalion Group, tasked with defending the harbour and large, bomber-capable airfield on Ambon (Wigmore 1957: 418-441);
- **Sparrow Force** – 2/40th Australian Infantry Battalion Group, tasked with defending the port and the airfield at Koepang, Dutch Timor (Wigmore 1957: 466-494); and
- **Lark Force** – 2/22nd Australian Infantry Battalion Group, tasked with defending the port and airfield at each of Rabaul (New Britain) and Kavieng (New Ireland) (Wigmore 1957: 392-417).

The fate of this outer line of bases, and, indeed, of the Dutch East Indies and Australian New Guinea, was sealed when a hastily assembled fleet of 14 Dutch, American, British and Australian warships, including HMAS Perth (a light cruiser), was decisively defeated by the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942. HMAS Perth, along with USS Houston (a heavy cruiser), survived the initial battle, but was trapped and sunk by the Japanese in the Sunda Strait on 1 March 1942 (Wigmore 1957: 496-508).

Among the problems now faced by Australia’s forward operating bases was that they were too dispersed to be mutually supporting, they had no effective air or naval support on call, and they were severely challenged logistically. Further, each lacked the combat power to resist the combat power that the Japanese could concentrate against them individually whenever Japan so chose – Japan could, and did, pick them off at will.

The inner line of operating bases established on Australian territory experienced a more propitious fate, e.g. at Darwin (Wigmore 1957; McCarthy 1959), Port Moresby (McCarthy 1959), Milne Bay (McCarthy 1959: 147-192) and Norfolk Island (Gillespie 1952: 300-304). Although Darwin was bombed by the Japanese and largely destroyed as a military base on 19 February 1942, it would be resurrected and become a key operational and logistics base as the war progressed, despite numerous subsequent damaging air attacks. Other than Darwin, which is on the Australian mainland, the only one of the offshore forward operating bases to remain Australian territory today is Norfolk Island, so we will use it as a case study.

**Norfolk Island – a case study**

Norfolk Island is located in an isolated part of the South Pacific some 1400km east of Brisbane, 700km

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Page 18
south of New Caledonia, and 750km north-west of New Zealand (Map 1). The island is c. 8km long by 5km wide, is sub-tropical and originally supported a dense sub-tropical rainforest, but 19th century settlers cleared 90 per cent of the island to create a largely self-sufficient agricultural community. The coastline consists almost entirely of cliffs 60-80m high – there is no natural harbour, but there are two roadsteads. Dependent on the direction of the wind, cargo is craned from ships into lighters, which are then towed to small landing wharves for unloading.

Norfolk Island became a strategic point in 1902 when it became a key node in the around-the-world British undersea telegraphic cable route (Hitch 1992). The submarine cable ran from Brisbane to a repeater station on Norfolk where a branch cable from New Zealand joined it, before continuing on to Fiji, and thence to Canada. The cable allowed revolutionary enhancements in commerce, diplomacy, as well as military and social interaction, across the British Empire.

In World War I, German Navy cruisers from their Asiatic Squadron cut the cable at Fanning Island in the central Pacific and were interrupted while attempting to do so at Cocos Island in the Indian Ocean. Norfolk Island, similarly, was a potential target for the German cruisers and commerce raiders who operated in the area. After World War I, an aerial route from Australia to the island was established in 1931 when Sir Francis Chichester landed a small floatplane at Emily Bay.

**World War II**

Before World War II, coastwatchers had been deployed on Norfolk Island and a Militia unit, the Norfolk Island Infantry Detachment (NIID), had been formed (Hitch 1992). Its commander-in-chief was the Administrator of Norfolk Island, Major-General Sir Charles Rosenthal⁴, who had commanded the 2nd Australian Division in the latter stages of the Great War (Hill 1988).

After the outbreak of war in 1939, a Royal Australian Air Force survey party found four suitable sites for short airfields, but the Australian government, while willing to protect the cable station, decided not to construct an airfield, considering it would be more a strategic hindrance than a help (Gillespie 1952: 300). Then, German commerce raiders (Orion and Pinguin) made a reappearance in the South Pacific. An Australian infantry detachment of 57 all ranks was despatched to Norfolk to reinforce the NIID and prevent sabotage of the cable station (Gillespie 1952: 300).

Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and Malaya on 7-8 December 1941 and had achieved its key objectives, including the occupation of Australia’s forward bases at Singapore, Ambon, Timor and Rabaul, by late February 1942. The battle of the Coral Sea (4-8 May), the midget-submarine raid on Sydney Harbour (31 May/1 June) and the Japanese commencing to build Henderson Airfield on Guadalcanal (southern Solomons) in early July, focused Allied minds.

The Allies knew little of the actual Japanese plans for Norfolk Island. They assessed that the Japanese were planning to use Henderson Airfield to support two thrusts: one down through New Caledonia, to secure the nickel mines and to protect the thrusts’ western flank; and the other to Fiji, to cut the lines of communication from the United States to Australia. They anticipated that standard Imperial Japanese Navy tactics would be followed, *i.e.* secure their flanks by submarine reconnaissance, followed by aircraft carrier strikes. The Allies decided to position themselves to counter this threat.

The Australian government considered that the defence of Norfolk was primarily a naval responsibility. Vice-Admiral Robert L. Ghormley USN, Commander, South Pacific Command, noting that Norfolk was almost equidistant from New Caledonia, New Zealand and Australia and that a site for an airfield was available, viewed the island as a ‘stationary aircraft carrier’. Ghormley argued that an airfield, once constructed, could become a base for anti-submarine patrols, a refuge for aircraft in distress, and a staging depot for land-based aircraft moving between New Zealand, Australia, New Caledonia, and the Solomons. Ghormley also assessed that an adequate garrison would be necessary for the airfield’s defence and to deny it to possible enemy raiding parties (Gillespie 1952: 300-301).

South Pacific Command immediately implemented plans for the construction of an airfield. In April 1942, a United States Army party surveyed sites for an airfield with long runways, so as to be able to accommodate the heavier and multi-engine aircraft then coming into service. In early September, 4000 tonnes of construction equipment and supervising engineers were despatched to Norfolk along with 200 workmen of the Australian Commonwealth Main Roads Department to begin preliminary work (Gillespie 1952: 301).

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⁴Sir Charles had been President of the United Service Institution of New South Wales from 1921-1923.
For defence and protection, Ghormley requested from New Zealand a minimum garrison force of one infantry battalion, three batteries of artillery, a hospital and other services and, when the airfield was complete, one flight each of fighter and dive-bomber aircraft. On 29 September, the New Zealand War Cabinet approved the despatch of the necessary garrison force to Norfolk (Gillespie 1952: 301).

**Norfolk (‘N’) Force**

The Norfolk garrison was to be a 1488-strong force of New Zealand infantry and artillery to be styled N Force and to be commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Barry (Evans 1948, Chapter 13; Gillespie 1952: 300-304; Hitch 1992; McGibbon 2000). The advance party arrived on 26 September, liaised with the Administrator and the existing garrison, and then commenced preparing camps for the main body. The main body arrived from New Zealand in two echelons, the first on 9 October and the second on 14 October, in the troop-ship *Wahine*, escorted by HMNZS *Monowai* (an armed merchant cruiser) and USS *Clark* (a destroyer). Following a handover, N Force relieved much of the Australian infantry detachment which had been sup-porting the NIID and that detachment returned to Australia. N Force consisted of:

- 36th Battalion, 3rd New Zealand Division, a territorial infantry battalion, including a 10-vehicle universal (Bren gun) carrier platoon to give protected mobility to the battalion’s 3-inch mortars and Vickers medium machine-guns, act as an armoured ready-reaction force and provide fire support for counter penetration and counter attack forces (Gillespie 1952: 301);
- 152nd Heavy Battery comprised of four 155mm GPF guns (the United States version of the Great War French Grande Puissance Filloux gun) to engage Japanese warships and troop transports – two were deployed to the highest ground on the island, being the ridge line between Mount Pitt (318m) and Mount Bates (319m), and two on the bluffs overlooking the primary landing stage at Kingston (Map 2) – later, all the guns were concentrated on the Mount Pitt/Mount Bates ridgeline (Evans 1948; Gillespie 1952: 301-302);
- 215th Composite Anti-Aircraft Battery with a troop of four 3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns deployed near the airfield, a troop of four 40mm Bofors guns at Anson Bay to protect the cable station, and a troop of four 40mm Bofors guns at Kingston – later, the 3.7s were relocated to the coastal cliff line at the end of the runways, in order to give them a secondary coastal defence role (Evans 1948; Gillespie 1952: 302);
- an independent field artillery troop – a mobile troop of four 25-pounder field guns, to deploy as required to counter infantry landings (Evans 1948; Gillespie 1952: 302); and
- miscellaneous engineer, Army Service Corps and ordnance detachments (Gillespie 1952: 301).

Colonel Barry established N Force Headquarters centrally in Devon house and grounds. Unit camps were deployed in sites round the 37km of rugged coastline. A 24-hour watch was instituted, and the task of defending the island and its installations against sudden raids from enemy submarines was begun (Gillespie 1952: 302).

As a natural barrier of cliffs defends most of the Norfolk coastline, coastwatchers were deployed around...
the coast and were linked with a central operations room. The tactical plan involved defending only certain possible landing areas. Units and guns were tactically sited to meet such an eventuality, with mobility being the underlying principle (Gillespie 1952: 303).

The gunners’ work-up training (Evans 1948, Chapter 13) involved a number of live shoots where the small, uninhabited Philip Island, 7 km to the south, was used for target practice (Figure 1).

As soon as defence plans had been exercised to operational efficiency, a roading and camp construction plan was started by the engineers. They built a 20-bed hospital; and metalled the earth and clay roads which served the airfield and camps. The engineers took over maintenance of the airfield on 5 March.

The Army Service Corps detachment extended the scope of its supply activities by producing fresh vegetables in quantity. To ensure a regular supply of fresh meat and overcome the tendency to reduce too drastically the island’s limited stock of beef, a flock of 300 sheep reached the island on 1 January 1943 (Gillespie 1952: 303).

### The Airfield

The construction of the airfield (Figure 1) involved a degree of cutting and levelling, as well as the destruction of a number of farms. Despite this, the population of Norfolk provided a workforce of 300 men to build the airfield, including the laying 1524m of Marston matting.

To support the operation and defence of the airfield, a COL\(^6\) Mark V radar with a notional range of nearly 300km, but a proven range in this location of 115km, was installed on the summit of Mount Bates. It was operated by the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) 51st Radar Station from May 1943 and was used successfully, in particular, to provide assistance to aircraft in distress. It was retained at Norfolk until the end of the war (Simmonds and Smith 1995: 157, 262).

A RNZAF Hudson bomber landed on the partially completed airfield on 25 December 1942. Two Hudson bombers landed on 28 December and three the following day. The era of dawn-to-dusk patrols from Norfolk then began (Gillespie 1952: 304). The airfield was officially opened on 13 February 1943, after the final works had been completed.

Had the Japanese won the battle of the Solomons, the airfield could have been on the front line immediately (Ross 1955). Hence, it was used initially as an operational airfield for RNZAF bomber patrols in anticipation of a second Japanese thrust into the South Pacific. Its role, however, became increasingly logistic as:

- a base for maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrols;
- a base for rapid air-sea rescue response; and
- a vital transit airfield on the route between Australia or New Zealand to New Caledonia or Fiji for aerial reinforcement of the Solomons and beyond.

The transit role (Ross 1955) saw 130 to 230 aircraft fly through per month (an average of up to seven per day) over 1943-1944. Aircraft types included: bombers: Hudsons, B-17s, Venturas, Liberators, Mitchells, Avengers, Lincolns and Catalinas; fighters: Kittyhawks and Corsairs; and transports: C-47s, C-54s, C-60s (Lodestar) and C-63s.

### N Force: Relief-in-Place and Transfer of Defence Responsibility to the RNZAF

Following the Japanese withdrawal from Guadalcanal in the southern Solomons, the 36th Battalion and the artillery units were progressively sent north to rejoin the 3rd Division in New Caledonia (Gillespie 1952: 304-305). From 29 March to 7 April 1943, the 36th Battalion was relieved-in-place by the 1st Battalion, Wellington-West Coast Regiment, under Lieutenant-Colonel A. R. Cockerell DSO, who took over command of the island’s defences from Barry on 9 April. Cockerell inherited an organisation which required little change. Artillery units from New Zealand replaced those returning to the 3rd Division, and detachments of other services similarly took over.

Three months after the relief-in-place, however, the strength of N Force was reduced (Gillespie 1952: 304-305). All Grade I servicemen between the ages of 19 and 37 were recalled to New Zealand in July. By September, the strategic situation was such that South Pacific Command considered a garrison was no longer necessary, except to operate and maintain the airfield.

The New Zealand War Cabinet approved the withdrawal of the force on 15 November, and, on 8 December, 478 members of the garrison embarked for Auckland. A small rear party remained until 11 February 1944 when command passed to the officer commanding the RNZAF station at the airfield. Norfolk became a RNZAF and NIID responsibility until the end of hostilities.

Towards the latter stages of the war, a regular air-transport service was provided from Norfolk to Bou-
gainville. Royal New Zealand Navy corvettes and Fairmile motor gun-boats also stopped off to refuel as they moved north. In July 1946, the last RNZAF personnel were withdrawn from Norfolk (Ross 1955).

Aftermath

After World War II ended, clean-up operations continued on Norfolk until 1948, when the airfield was handed over to the civil authorities (Hitch 1992). Separately, the colonial territories in the archipelago, other than New Caledonia, obtained independence over ensuing decades, but Norfolk Island remains an Australian territory.

The Norfolk Island airfield became a primary staging base for Operation Morris Dance, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) response to the 1987 coup d'état in Fiji, during which the ADF conducted a non-combatant evacuation operation to extract stranded tourists (Breen 2016). It also has been the staging base for numerous ADF operations when conducting disaster relief in the wake of hurricanes and other natural disasters which regularly hit the islands of the South Pacific. In recognition of the continuing geostrategic and operational importance of Norfolk Island, the airfield recently was upgraded by the Australian government at a cost of AUD$43 million.

Discussion

It may well be that, in the future, Australia acquires the missile and satellite capability that enables it to surveille and strike strategic and tactical targets in the Indo-Pacific region from the Australian mainland. That day, however, is not yet with us. Further, our current combat aircraft, the fifth-generation F-35A Lightning-II Joint Strike Fighter, has a limited range – range 2200km; combat radius 1093km. Air-to-air refuelling can extend the range and, if we had aircraft carriers in our fleet, they could extend the range, too. But there is no plan to introduce aircraft carriers or to modify our two amphibious assault ships (LHDs) or any future ones to enable the carrier-compatible F-35B or F-35C models to operate from them.

As our World War II experience demonstrated, another option to extend the range of our F-35A combat aircraft is to acquire forward operating bases (stationary aircraft carriers) in the Indonesian-Melanesian archipelago. The only Australian territories now available, however, are the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island in the eastern Indian Ocean, and Norfolk Island in the South Pacific. The emergence of independent nation-states in the archipelago since World War II necessitates that future forward bases in the area be established by Australia only at the invitation of the relevant nation-state with a view to strengthening the host’s own defences. Any benefits accruing to Australia’s defences from such activities would be secondary.

Whether such bases are on Australian territory or that of other nations, it would be essential that each base be garrisoned in sufficient strength to repel enemy raids (whether by air, land and/or sea) and have sufficient air and naval combat power on call to defeat any attempted invasion/occupation. It also would need a supply chain (sea and air lines of communication) able to sustain the base logistically and which was defended by naval and air power. Further, measures including long-range land-based artillery and/or missiles, coupled with sea and air power, would be needed to avoid the base being bypassed and isolated.

While the New Zealand army and air force together with the United States Navy were able to satisfy these requirements at Norfolk Island in World War II, Australia, operating on its own, was unable to achieve the same success further afield at Ambon, Koepang (Timo) and Rabaul. Given Australia’s continued limited resources, such requirements might be very difficult to sustain today unless assisted by regional allies.

Conclusion

Australia’s experience in World War II shows that operating bases deployed forward of and to the east flank of the Australian mainland on islands in the Indonesian-Melanesian archipelago can be used successfully to provide surveillance/early warning and strategic depth to the defence, to defend vital assets and to serve as a springboard for advances further north. Such ‘stationary aircraft carriers’, however, require stringent requirements to be met for their protection, requirements which may be difficult for Australia to satisfy in any future conflict.

Norfolk Island in World War II continues to serve as an example of a successful forward operating base, including the application of coastal and anti-aircraft artillery defence techniques to an isolated island. While it fell largely to New Zealand and to the United States Navy to protect the Norfolk base in World War II, it has since become a vital ADF staging base for peacekeeping and disaster-relief operations in the South Pacific.

Acknowledgements

We thank Dr Ian Pfennigwerth, Air Vice-Marshal Bob Treloar and Professor Michael Hough for helpful comment on the manuscript.

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*Norfolk Island Airport Repair and Rehabilitation Question & Answer Sheet September 2019 No. 2.

*PNG has invited Australia and the United States to upgrade PNG’s patrol boat base on Manus Island but has selected a Chinese company to upgrade the Manus airfield (Shugart 2020).
from 1988 to 1990. In civilian life, he was a research scientist and then a senior public administrator. He is a past president of the Institute and edits *United Service*.

Lieutenant Colonel I. M. C. (Ian) Wolfe CSM RFD, also a member of the Special Interest Group on Strategy, is an Army Reserve infantryman who commanded the Sydney University Regiment from 1998 to 2000 and subsequently has held a range of staff and training appointments, including in Defence Headquarters and the Department of Defence. In civilian life, he was a programme manager in financial services. He is now semi-retired and pursues his interests in bushwalking and global travel, in addition to military strategy and history.

**References**


**BOOK REVIEW:**

**An Australian band of brothers: Don Company, Second 43rd Battalion, 9th Division: Tobruk, Alamein, New Guinea, Borneo**

by Mark Johnston

*NewSouth Publishing: Sydney; 2018; 464 pp.; ISBN 9781742235721 (paperback); RRP $34.99*


The book follows, in particular, three Australian frontline soldiers from their enlistment in the 2nd Australian Imperial Force in 1940 to the end of World War II. All three were posted to Don Company, 2/43rd Battalion (a South Australian battalion), 24th Brigade, 9th Australian Division. They fought in the defence of Tobruk (1941), the battle of El Alamein (1942), the liberation of Australian New Guinea (1943), and the re-capture of Labuan, British North Borneo (1945).

The book uses letters, diaries and memoirs of the three infantrymen to develop an account of their war, including: night patrols at Tobruk; advancing steadily through German barrages at El Alamein; charging enemy machine guns in New Guinea; and repelling Japanese counter-attacks on Borneo. It is an entertaining read which would appeal to new or experienced readers of Australian military history.

Marcus Fielding
BOOK REVIEW:

Pathfinder, ‘kriegie’ and gumboot governor: the adventurous life of Sir James Rowland AC, KBE, DFC, AFC

by Air Marshal Sir James Rowland and Dr Peter Yule

Big Sky Publishing: Newport, NSW; 2020; 520 pp; ISBN 9781922387400 (paperback); RRP $27.75

James Rowland was a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) bomber pilot in World War II who became a prisoner-of-war. Post-war, now an aeronautical engineer, he re-joined the RAAF and became a test pilot, head engineer for the Mirage aircraft procurement, head of the RAAF engineering branch, Chief of the Air Staff, and Governor of New South Wales.

Pathfinder is a succinct overview of Rowland’s achievements. It was first published by the RAAF History and Heritage Branch in 2018 and, appropriately, it has been republished for the commemoration of the RAAF centenary in March 2021. In part, the book is Rowland’s autobiography and, when in later life the opportunity for note-taking decreased, his story is taken up by Dr Peter Yule. Yule is a research fellow in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne. He has published over 20 books on Australian military, medical and economic history, including the Collins-class submarine project. The joint authorship does not detract from the quality of the book and Yule has clearly indicated the parts written by him and those by Rowland.

Born to settler parents in rural New South Wales in 1922, Rowland was brought up on a station near Armidale before attending the University of Sydney to study aeronautical engineering. Life on the station instilled a resilience in him which would stand him in good stead in later life.

Deferring his studies, he joined the RAAF in 1941, and underwent pilot training in the Empire Air Training Scheme at Temora. On arrival in England as a qualified fighter pilot, he was informed that he was to fly bombers as there were no vacancies in Fighter Command, whereas there were plenty in Bomber Command as the ‘chop rate’ was high.

Selected for operations in the Pathfinder Force, Rowland (aged 22) and his crew served with distinction on Lancasters until, on his 34th mission, a mid-air collision over Hanou, Germany, in 1945 ended his wartime flying. His resilience was called upon during his interrogation by the Gestapo and his imprisonment at Stalag 13. Not knowing the fate of his crew caused him nightmares for the rest of his life. After his death, it emerged that his crew were either killed in the crash or were murdered upon capture.

Post war, Rowland returned to university to complete his aeronautical engineering degree. He re-enlisted in the RAAF in 1947 and re-trained as a test pilot. Thus began an illustrious test flying career during an age when the sound barrier remained an obstacle and jet aircraft were being introduced into service. His service at the Aircraft Research and Development Unit had a lasting impact on the development of the modern RAAF. The Dassault Mirage III fighter aircraft was still under development when the Australian government committed to its purchase. Rowland had to prove the components of the aircraft as they became available and then test fly the aircraft. He taught himself French during this process and led high-level technical meetings concerning the continuing development of the aircraft. His leadership during the procurement of the Mirage was outstanding.

His subsequent movement up through the ranks leading to his appointment as Head of Technical Services recognised his strong professional expertise, leadership skills, drive for improvement, and an ability to mix with all ranks and levels of society.

When the Government selected Sir James to become Chief of the Air Staff (1975–79), it caused a major confrontation within the RAAF. Rowland was not a member of the General Duties Branch and, therefore, customarily ineligible for the position. He remains the only engineer to have led the RAAF. Nevertheless, he was a successful Chief who had to battle the bureaucratic processes imposed on the Services by the Tange Review of Defence (1973), a process that drew the Service Chiefs away from their tasks of ensuring their Services were fit for purpose. Nevertheless, he ensured that he maintained strong links across all parts of the RAAF.

After he retired from the Air Force, he was appointed Governor of New South Wales (1981–89) and then Chancellor of the University of Sydney (1990-91). His service in both roles is replete with examples of his steady leadership, dedication to service, down-to-earth approach, and warm and friendly personality.

This book is well written, easily engaging the reader in an uncomplicated style. Sir James’ love of flying continually shines through and his description of his life in the junior ranks is refreshing. It is a story of a man at peace with himself. The book is well referenced and includes photographs that capture the essence of the times. I recommend it to those even with only a passing interest in aviation and the recent history of the RAAF.

Bob Treloar

1In World War II, Germans to referred to Allied prisoners-of-war as kriegers.
BOOK REVIEW:

China’s grand strategy and Australia’s future in the new global order
by Geoff Raby

The unipolar, rules-based global order led by the United States, which followed the Cold War, has been disrupted by the rise of China, America’s relative decline and President Trump’s ‘America-First’ policies, division within Europe, and successful defiance of the global order by authoritarian states. Autocracies are exercising greater control over world affairs and human rights. The rule of law, free media and longstanding global institutions all seem set to be weakened.

China is doing its best to shape the emerging global order based on its own interests and aspirations. In order to understand China’s role in shaping the new global order, one needs to view the world from Beijing’s perspective and the grand strategy that the Communist Party of China (CPC) is seeking to pursue. This Raby attempts in this book before discussing what it may mean for Australia’s future.

Raby is an economist and diplomat. He was Australia’s ambassador to China between 2007 and 2011; and earlier had been our ambassador to the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum (2003-05) and to the World Trade Organisation (1998-2001). He is currently chairman of the Australia-China Institute of Arts and Culture at the University of Western Australia; and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2019 for distinguished service to Australia-China relations and to international trade.

According to Raby, China’s grand strategy springs from weakness, not strength. China is constrained by its geography, its history and its lack of resource endowments. It shares land borders with 14 other nations, with most of whom it has had disputes; it is still an empire containing disaffected populations in Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan and Hong Kong; and the energy and natural resources on which its disaffected populations in Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan and Hong Kong; and the energy and natural resources on which its industry depends need to be imported through strategic chokepoints (e.g. Malacca Straits, South China Sea, Suez and Panama Canals) which can easily be blocked by competitors – its vital exports are similarly constrained. It cannot yet compete against the United States in ‘hard power’ (coercion/warfighting); and lacks ‘soft power’ (persuasion) due to minimal diplomatic legitimacy, international suspicion of the CPC system of party-state government, and its increasing authoritarianism at home and more muscular foreign policy under Xi Jinping.

Consequently, China is basing its grand strategy on ‘sharp power’ – using its growing economic muscle to achieve its diplomatic goals, especially through its Belt-and-Road Initiative, augmented by trade, aid and institutional entrepreneurship – e.g. Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Silk Road Fund, New Development Bank – as alternatives to the international order and institutions established under United States leadership. These initiatives are accompanied by political interference abroad; investments in overseas assets; acquisition (legal or otherwise) of foreign technology; and cyber warfare; although China is not the only nation-state to engage in such ‘grey-zone’ activities.

Raby says that Australia must accept that there is a new world order emerging and must assess its future relationships with China realistically. China is a constrained superpower, unable to become a global hegemon, but seeks legitimacy for its system of government. To be effective, Australia must pursue an independent foreign policy and build conditions which enable Australia and China to work co-operatively on issues of common concern.

The book commences with a lengthy introduction – in effect, a synopsis of what is to follow. That alone is worth reading. Then follows the main body in three sections. The first examines the CPC’s grand strategy and the emerging world order that China is seeking to shape to its benefit. The second part examines Chinese society – the ties that bind it together; its dichotomies and its complexities; and the extent to which the CPC has been able to develop soft power and hard power. The third part looks at what all this means for Australia’s future, which Raby envisions as being ‘dystopian’, and then proposes strategies for navigating our way through the new world order. A brief conclusion and a postscript about the effects of COVID-19 on the book’s assessments – the book was largely written before the global pandemic of 2020 – round out the book.

Australia has several sound strategic analysts who range in perspective from centrist to conservative in outlook. While these analysts generally start from the same evidence base, they tend to reach different conclusions depending on their tolerance of risk and the degree to which they take China’s limitations into account.

This book is refreshing in that it reflects a balanced, centrist approach which places realistic weight on China’s constraints. I am less inclined, though, to be as sanguine as Raby is that the certainty of mutually assured destruction would prevent nuclear war between the United States and China. While neither side wants aggressive competition to lead to a ‘hot’ war, the danger of a miscalculation by one or other side could trigger conflict that escalates to a nuclear engagement, posing a potentially existential threat to humankind.

This is a well-argued and written treatise and I recommend it to all with an interest in Australia’s future in the new global order.

David Leece
In this book, Michel McDevitt has made a distinguished and reasoned contribution to our understanding of China's 21st century naval power. As he points out, China's warships are not 'coming', they are already 'here', and require that all defence planners become familiar with, above all else, the rationale for this dramatic transformation of the People's Liberation Army–Navy (PLAN) from a motley collection of 20th century relics into a modern naval force to rival and to challenge any other.

Rear Admiral Michael A. McDevitt USN (Ret'd) is a senior fellow at CNA, Arlington, Virginia, where he focuses on United States security issues in East Asia, strategy, war planning and naval operations worldwide. During his 34-year naval career, McDevitt held four sea commands, including a carrier battle group in the Pacific. He concluded his active-duty career as Commandant of the National War College in Washington, D.C.

In charting why and how China, a nation traditionally noted for its emphasis on land power, has decided to become a great naval power, McDevitt has traced the development of an awareness of the maritime dimension and its importance to the nation's existence among the senior echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – whose navy it is – and has identified two key concerns for Chinese strategic planners.

The first key concern is that of control of the near seas – in Chinese terminology the 'First and Second Island Chains', broadly encompassing the waters between the Chinese east coast and the Japanese home islands, Guam, Palau and eastern Indonesia to Singapore. Having modernised its industrial capacities, logistics and transportation networks to make it a great exporting nation (which also implies a major importing nation), the Chinese leadership fears that this status could be placed in jeopardy by the actions of a foreign power – specifically the United States and its allies. This unlikely scenario motivates the Chinese to build up their capabilities to resist and prevent its fulfilment in all modes of warfare. The CCP has yet to reveal just how many ships, aircraft and other military systems it believes it needs to secure this area.

The second key concern is what McDevitt terms 'SLOC anxiety'. To all trading nations the security of sea lines of communications is of paramount importance. Regardless of its success or otherwise in defending its near sea approaches, China's economy is also vulnerable to interdiction of its shipping at sea. This, too, is an unlikely scenario, but it is real enough to worry the Chinese into expending vast sums in preparation for their
defence. China already possesses the world's largest distant-water fishing and merchant marine fleets, the former a very useful adjunct to naval power and the latter a sure source of logistics and other support to deployed naval forces. But defence of merchant shipping against attack on the world's oceans where China does not have a preponderance of sea and air power, is a significant challenge. The 'nightmare' scenario for Chinese planners is that both eventualities occur at once.

The resulting increase in the numbers and sophistication of Chinese warships, backed by a strong coast guard and fishing fleet, and a revamped military command structure, has been part of a careful and well-thought-out strategic plan extending back into the 20th century. When President Xi Jinping declares that China will be a world-class power by 2050, he is already talking from a position of strength in defence capabilities. From being a naval force that rarely strayed beyond its home waters in the 1990s, Chinese warships and task groups can now be routinely encountered across the world's seas. By hull count, the CCP already commands the world's largest navy.

The book is divided into eight chapters. It begins with a discussion of Chinese maritime ambitions and then works through the transition of the PLAN to 'blue-water' capability to the development of China's plans for defending its sea approaches, and its options for occupying Taiwan and controlling the South China Sea. A study of its options and problems for Indian Ocean operations are then discussed and the main text concludes with observations on maritime power and the role of the PLAN in exercising it. McDevitt points to acknowledged shortcomings in PLA capabilities for fighting 21st century warfare, but observes that none of its possible opponents, including the United States, has any combat experience in that environment either.

Two interesting appendices outline the development of China's Coastguard – the world's largest, and under military command – and the Maritime Militia, closely associated with the large Chinese fishing industry. Both are important in China's assertion of its maritime 'rights'. There is a comprehensive list of notes (both Chinese and western) and a bibliography.

Without resort to either naval jargon or dramas, Michael McDevitt has written a concise but well-argued text of value to anyone interested in China and its progress towards becoming a great maritime power. His book is highly recommended for careful study.

Ian Pfenningwerth