

# **Introduction: National Security Choices for Australia's Next Government**

Robert Wylie

Australians are scheduled to elect a new government in 2007. The new government, whatever its persuasion, will need to choose what Australian national security interests command priority, how best to pursue the priority interests so identified and what proportion of Australia's limited resources it should allocate to doing so. Many of these choices are seminal in the sense that once made they will commit the nation to courses of action that cannot be modified quickly or cheaply.

This edition of *Security Challenges* seeks to foster discussion by the Australian public, by Australia's parliamentary representatives and their advisers, and by the Australian media of those seminal national security choices that will confront the new government upon its taking office. It is particularly concerned to identify those choices that need to be made now, but that will have implications for future generations of Australians and their governments.

In seeking contributions for this special, pre-election edition of *Security Challenges*, the editors asked authors to not only identify and describe issues, but also to consider interactions, to address priorities and to suggest trade-offs. The resulting contributions are grouped as follows:

- Broad analysis of Australian national security objectives for a new government (Allan Behm) and how a new government might think about Australia's global national security interests (Rory Medcalf);
- Discussion of how a new government might manage specific national security enablers including ANZUS (Ross Cottrill), Australian intelligence capabilities (Sandy Gordon) and Australian counter-terrorism legislation (James Renwick);
- Analysis of how a new government might manage particular national security capabilities, including developing and enlarging the Australian Defence Force (Ross Babbage), future development of the Australian Federal Police (John McFarlane), securing Australia's maritime approaches (Sam Bateman) and responding to a biological

attack or naturally occurring outbreak of infectious disease (Christian Enemark);

- A concluding article suggesting a way of thinking about the issues raised in the other contributions (Stephan Frühling).

This diverse range of authors did not somehow reach agreement on the issues involved. Nor was any such agreement intended. Instead, they produced a rich menu of ideas and proposals that will help inform the national security dimension of the forthcoming election.

In addressing Australian national security objectives, Allan Behm decries the so-called policy pragmatism that focuses on immediate planning required for swift reaction to external pressures. Such pragmatism can deny Australia the ability to create the opportunities by which it can shape its own destiny, practice strategic leadership and encourage stronger adherence to, and practice of, the values that ultimately underpin Australian society. Behm urges the new government to look beyond pragmatic reaction and to plan deliberately to shape Australia's strategic options. To this end, he advocates a national security strategy based on, among other principles:

- An explicit statement of Australia's strategic objectives;
- Recognition that the 21st century will be dominated by a clash of values derived from, on one hand, Islamic radicalism and, on the other, liberal democratic freedoms;
- Analysis of the future demands of the alliance with the USA;
- Constructive defence relations with our neighbours and with China and India; and
- Enhanced capacity for strategic policy making within government (including the reassertion of a disciplined approach to Australian defence capability development).

Rory Medcalf contrasts Australia's wide-ranging global interests with the country's limited capacity to protect and advance those global interests unilaterally. He urges the new government to recognize that, with limited defence resources but potentially unlimited global interests, Australia needs to make a greater effort to assess relative risk, and to translate that analysis into more conscious risk management in national security thinking. While Australian governments would have no choice but to respond to an attack on Australian territory, those Governments have considerable discretion in choosing which conflicts further afield Australia engages in, and how it would do so. This is particularly the case for Australian involvement in conflict in West Asia and Northeast Asia, both regions of key security concern for

Australia. This leads Medcalf to conclude that, for the next few Australian Governments, the most interesting defence-related decisions will be less about what to capabilities to acquire, and more about why and how to use those already in hand or in near prospect.

So how would a new government go about implementing a national security strategy? Ross Cottrill analyses the ANZUS alliance as a security enabler, i.e. in terms of practical US support to Australia, through access to US intelligence, military technology or assistance in times of conflict. He concludes that the alliance cannot meet all Australia's high priority needs and argues that it can complement, but not replace cooperation with regional partners. Australia needs to hedge against the possibility that, post-Iraq, the US may be more cautious about intervening abroad and, as in the post-Vietnam era, look to its allies to assume greater responsibility for pursuing their own interests. This leads him to urge the new government to look beyond the political salience of the Alliance in balancing alliance policy and wider national security policy.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of access to high quality intelligence to a new government in understanding and managing Australia's national security. According to Sandy Gordon, humans—operating as individuals, communities or states—have traditionally used intelligence to secure advantage when competing with other humans. Intelligence was regarded as a highly specific undertaking designed to secure advantage in the form of knowledge, insight and predictive capacity. To deliver advantage over human adversaries capable of learning and adapting, intelligence needed to be kept secret.

Gordon argues that the new government will confront a range of threats going well beyond familiar military and counter-intelligence spheres. Such non-conventional threats transcend state-on-state issues and include, for example, environmental threats, threats of pandemic disease, terrorism, and trans-national crime. He divides such non-conventional threats into those involving:

- Human agency (e.g. terrorism, crime, people smuggling and trafficking); and
- A non-human agency (e.g. climate change and similar types of environmental threat, natural disasters, pandemic disease).

According to Gordon, while these two categories of non-conventional threat are linked, they have divergent implications for the role of intelligence. Countering new threats directly caused by human-agency still involves secret information, knowledge of which would give the opposition (or threat) an advantage in what remains a relationship of conflict and opposition.

However, countering non-conventional threats like climate change entails no need for such a secret, tightly held intelligence response. Especially in liberal democracies such as Australia, governments instead need to engage in highly visible public dialogue with relevant experts, whose credibility is underpinned by public trust in evidence-based scientific method and peer-review. The dialogue between government and public must be transparent, and the entire community must be aware of the circumstance and convinced of the threat if it is to be persuaded to change its behaviour in order to deal with the threat.

Gordon argues that, to meet the needs of a new government operating in this environment, the Australian intelligence community must at the same time:

- Retain a separate specific role for intelligence focused on human-on-human competition and, for that reason, requiring a secret approach to intelligence (including a capacity to meld secret and open source material);
- Be sufficiently flexible to incorporate, as circumstances require, the full spectrum of information and analysis ranging from the intelligence agencies to scientific and economic agencies;
- Be able to inform longer term decision making that transcend the short term of the then-current government;
- Be able to draw in two or even three levels of government (such as in the case of SARS);
- Be able to connect internationally to access overseas information and assessment; and
- Be headed by a powerful analytical and organisational capacity containing the range of expertise required to bring together diverse lines of information, identify real problems, set priorities and devise viable strategies to deal with them.

As all contributors to this special edition of *Security Challenges* note, countering terrorism has been a major theme of the recent Australian national security debate, particularly since the events of 11 September 2001. James Renwick notes that this new environment has enabled the government, with bipartisan support, to enact a new regime of terrorism offences, proscribe terrorist organizations, establish ASIO's compulsory questioning powers (and related detention powers) and introduce control orders and limited detention without trial that would have been unthinkable previously.

According to Renwick, the new laws, particularly those related to ASIO's powers, to control orders and to detention without trial, are about *preventing* a terrorist attack rather than about *punishing* those responsible for perpetrating it. A key challenge for a new Australian Government will be retaining public trust in its ability to retain long-held and hard-won freedoms and protections from the arbitrary use of power or wrongful conviction, whilst ensuring that democracy and the rule of law itself are not used as a cover by those who seek its overthrow.

In addition to addressing broad national security issues and associated enablers, the new government will need to consider investing in specific national security capabilities. These include:

- Developing the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and sustaining political support for its deployment;
- Enhancing the capacity of the Australian Federal Police (AFP);
- Securing Australia's maritime approaches; and
- The security of Australians' health

Ross Babbage urges the new government to eschew the kind of declaratory or aspirational language that too often characterises the Australian national security debate. He urges the new government to give careful attention to the nation's capacity to mobilize the resources required to give practical effect to ambitious goals. In addition to highlighting tough defence budgetary choices the new government will need to make, Babbage draws attention to the rising cost of the large numbers of highly skilled people needed by the ADF. He suggests some radical steps for a new government if it is to attract and retain sufficient quality personnel to meet current needs, let alone operate the new defence systems scheduled for introduction in the new decade.

Babbage goes further, however, in suggesting that if it is to respond effectively to increasingly frequent and difficult security problems caused by weak, damaged and failing states, a new government will need to explore increasingly imaginative and innovative ways to form flexible teams of personnel from defence, police, transport, construction, health, education, financial services. Underpinning all this, according to Babbage, is the need to manage the Australian electorate's reluctance to sustain overseas combat operations for extended periods when the issue at stake is domestically contentious.

Investment by the current government in enhancing the capacity of the AFP has broadened and deepened the options available to a new government seeking to protect and advance Australia's national security interests,

particularly in our region. In assessing the AFP's strategic role, John McFarlane draws particular attention to the importance of the AFP's international liaison network, its International Deployment Group (IDG) now building up to 1200 officers, and the AFP experience with the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the abortive Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) in Papua New Guinea, and continuing problems in East Timor.

In order to maintain the AFP's capacity to sustain its strategic role, McFarlane urges the new government to:

- Maintain funding for the pre-deployment training of AFP personnel in local languages and culture that experiences in RAMSI, ECP and in East Timor demonstrate is so crucial to successful outcomes;
- Improve arrangements for the integration of IDG personnel with other parts of the Australian Government machinery, especially since deployments usually involve sensitive political and public order issues; and recognize that in deployment the IDG, rather than maintaining the traditional police role of being accountable under the law to the courts, has become an instrument of government policy;
- Increase the AFP establishment by at least 500 members over the next three years, in order to obviate current *ad hoc* secondments of State and Territory police, bringing back retired officers and hiring consultants;
- Reduce the tied budgetary arrangements that prevent the AFP Commissioner from allocating resources—both human and financial—on a longer term, strategic basis; and
- Consider the feasibility of providing the housing, medical and repatriation benefits now applicable to ADF personnel to AFP members whose duties involve regular interstate or overseas deployments.

Sam Bateman points out that securing Australia's maritime approaches is a vital security requirement, regardless of whether one considers the traditional imperative of security against armed attack, or more contemporary needs to deal with such non-traditional threats as illegal entry of people, smuggling of drugs and contraband, unlicensed foreign fishing, disease and entry of terrorists. This formidable challenge is exacerbated by the task of discharging our responsibilities for, and exercising sovereignty over, Australia's huge maritime domain.

Bateman argues that enlargement of Australia's civil surveillance area, its mingling of previously separate security concepts and responsibilities and its

investment in increasingly capable (and expensive) surveillance and intelligence systems have begun to undermine Australia's traditional distinction between military and civilian responsibilities for maritime surveillance. The resulting de facto Australian Coast Guard has yet to resolve legacy arrangements. He urges the new government to curb turf protection instincts in Canberra and to establish an Australian Maritime Surveillance and Enforcement Authority:

- Operating under its own legislation so as to enable its personnel to take a degree of enforcement independent of other agencies;
- With operational personnel being sworn officers and part of a disciplined force with a chain of command, and able to be integrated with the ADF in emergencies; and
- Answering to a single minister responsible for development of overall policy and legislation required for surveillance and enforcement of Australia's maritime approaches.

In addressing health security challenges facing a new government, Christian Enemark focuses on the possibility of biological weapons use and the inevitability of an influenza pandemic. He argues that, in taking both international and domestic action to manage these two threats, a new government should treat them as interrelated in the sense that measures needed to protect people during a naturally-occurring infectious disease outbreak are largely the same as would be required to mitigate a biological attack. Enemark concludes that, regardless of whether or not biological attacks ever occur, a strong and effective public health response would be based on:

- The highly sensitive and well-connected systems for disease surveillance and response required to contain an outbreak in its early stages and to facilitate timely treatment of victims;
- National health systems with the capacity to surge in such areas as diagnostics and patient care, including emergency plans for staff protection, patient triage on a mass scale, distributing and administering drugs and other therapy, and
- Coordination among relevant state, national and international agencies.

Resource constraints and the realities of geography lead Stephan Frühling to argue—like Medcalf—that, while Australia may entertain global interests, it must prioritise those interests in its foreign commitments and think through how and to what extent it can materially influence events that may threaten those interests. He urges the new government to remember that interests

are set (albeit sometimes value-laden) and aspirational, while commitments are chosen and instrumental. For Frühling, the essence of strategy lies in foreign commitments, not foreign interests.

Frühling then compares Australia's power with that of other nations and concludes that Australia is best placed to influence events in South East Asia and the South West Pacific. He argues that Australia's global commitments are more about political capacity to influence allies' behaviour than military capacity to dominate actual or potential enemies. This distinction between investment in capacity to influence *events* in our neighbourhood and investment in capacity to influence *allied behaviour* so as to protect and advance our global interests matters: In looking for options to exert independent influence in Australia's neighbourhood, the new government will need an ADF with capabilities that would be quite distinct from those of an ADF optimised for operating with allies further afield.

Taken together, the contributions to this special edition of *Security Challenges* do not constitute a national security strategy for Australia—a task beyond the scope of such an edition. What they do provide, however, is an assembly of concepts and ideas that can inform the development of national security policies by the major parties, and assessment of those policies by the Australian electorate.

*Bob Wylie lectures at the School of Business, Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). His research interests include Australian industry's role in supplying and supporting innovative solutions to Australian defence capability requirements. [r.wylie@adfa.edu.au](mailto:r.wylie@adfa.edu.au).*