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ASYMMETRIC WARFARE AND
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL
ASYMMETRIC ADVANTAGES:
TAKING THE FIGHT TO THE ENEMY

by Colonel Chris Field

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Introduction

Asymmetric warfare is the military action against an adversary to which he may have no effective response and which pits strength against weakness, sometimes in a non-traditional and unconventional manner.

– The Future Air and Space Operating Concept (FASOC)¹

Conflict has always involved one side seeking an asymmetric advantage over the other by exploiting surprise, the creative use of technology or novel methods of operation. Asymmetry is sought by conventional, special and irregular forces in an attempt to avoid an enemy's strengths and maximise their own advantages. *All contemporary warfare is based on the search for an asymmetric advantage* ... Asymmetry exists where there are notable differences between two things under comparison. Military asymmetry may be reflected by differences in intent, composition of forces, culture, technology or size.

– Land Warfare Doctrine 1 – *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*²

The four future operating concepts for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) address the concept of asymmetric warfare.³ Unfortunately, most of these concepts inadvertently give ground to Australia's enemies by—almost exclusively—addressing asymmetric warfare as a style of fighting in the unique realm of people who will do harm to our nation, and our national interests.

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- 1 Australian Air Publication (AAP) 1000–F, *The Future Air and Space Operating Concept* (FASOC), Air Power Development Centre, Canberra, March 2007, p. 69.
 - 2 Land Warfare Doctrine 1 (LWD 1), *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, Department of Defence, 2008, p. 15.
 - 3 The future joint operating concepts of the Australian Defence Force are: (1) Future Joint Operating Concept (FJOC), *Operations for the 21st Century*, May 2007; (2) Future Maritime Operating Concept (FMOC), *2025 Maritime Force Projection and Control*, 2007; (3) *Adaptive Campaigning* – Future Land Operational Concept (AC-FLOC), 16 September 2006; and (4) The Future Air and Space Operating Concept (FASOC), *The Right Effects through Precise Control*, March 2007.

For the ADF to fight and win in twenty-first century conflicts, we must recognise that asymmetry is not the sole province of our enemies. We must take the fight to the enemy, and use our own national asymmetric advantages to greatest effect. If we cognitively allow our enemies to gain ownership of asymmetric warfare, then eventually we will surely taste defeat.

This paper is divided in two parts. Part 1 critically examines how the Australian Defence Forces four extant future operating concepts—Future Joint Operating Concept (FJOC), Future Maritime Operating Concept (FMOC), *Adaptive Campaigning* – Future Land Operating Concept (AC-FLOC), and the Future Air and Space Operating Concept (FASOC)—incorporate ‘asymmetric war’ into the ADF’s future warfighting and thinking. Part 2 expands on US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ assertion in 2008 that:

[Asymmetric] challenges have two things in common. First, they are, by their nature, long-term, requiring patience over years and across multiple presidencies. Second, they cannot be overcome by military means alone, and they extend well beyond the traditional domain of any single government agency or department. They require our government to operate with unity, agility, and creativity, and will require devoting considerably more resources to non-military instruments of national power.⁴

Building on Robert Gates’ assertion that more than a single government agency is required to counter asymmetric threats, this paper describes four means by which Australia, and by association the ADF, already possesses asymmetric advantages over our enemies. With four national asymmetries identified, among many possibilities, this paper suggests how we may utilise our asymmetric advantages in order to enable our nation to fight and win against elusive, adaptive, and determined enemies.

⁴ Robert M Gates, Pre Alfalfa Luncheon Speech at CSIS, January 2008. Transcript by Federal News Service Washington DC.

Part 1: ADF's Future Operating Concepts

Future Joint Operating Concept (FJOC)

The ADF's Future Joint Operating Concept (FJOC) attempts to claim asymmetric warfare as an ADF capability.

A conventional military force can **fight asymmetrically**, which demands that we tailor our operations so that we do not have to fight like with like, or can avoid battle on unfavourable terms. This may include **dissimilarity**, whereby we apply forces in a way that the adversary is not expecting, and **overmatching at decisive points**, whereby we create more or greater effects than the adversary can counter. We can achieve effective asymmetry against most adversaries by using our conventional forces to apply coercion or direct pressure in unconventional ways. In the future, fighting asymmetrically may involve using lethal and non-lethal force, acting in concert with other elements of national power, or acting against critical vulnerabilities that are not usually the focus of military operations. Increasingly, these effects will be produced from both kinetic and non-kinetic weapons.

Deception and surprise are parts of an asymmetric attitude that refuses to accept conflict on the adversary's terms. Surprise is created when the adversary is unable to react effectively to our initiatives in time. Deception is created by measures that mislead the adversary. In the future, synchronised surprise and deception will be integral to our efforts to generate shock and thus create desired effects.⁵

Of note, the **bolded** areas in the quote are exactly as they appear on page 25 of the FJOC. Arguably the **boldness** used to note the four concepts of *dissimilarity*, *overmatching at decisive points*, *deception*, and *surprise*, with *surprise* also being a

5 Future Joint Operating Concept (FJOC), *Operations for the 21st Century*, May 2007, p. 25.

principle of war, indicates some unease within the ADF regarding how we shall employ asymmetries. Why wouldn't, for example, *dissimilarity*, *overmatching at decisive points*, *deception*, and *surprise*, be introduced in the FJOC earlier than page 25? Why, rather than a brief mention, does the FJOC not examine the four aforementioned operational techniques more closely, in order to draw out arguments, lessons and ways for ADF's warfighters to fight asymmetrically?

As this paper later notes, ADF unease with asymmetry, and asymmetric warfare, is also apparent in the future operating concepts of the Australian Navy and Air Force, which both describe 'asymmetric war' as a capability controlled and practiced by our enemies.

An additional concern is that the FJOC makes a point of stating 'conventional military force *can* fight asymmetrically', which implies that 'conventional forces', as distinct from 'special forces', will usually fight *symmetrically*—applying their 'conventional' strengths *symmetrically* against an enemy's strengths. Such inaccurate distinctions in the ADF are unhelpful and provide our enemies with unnecessary seams to exploit in ADF structure, culture and thinking.

Here is a possible rewording of the FJOC opening statement on asymmetric warfare:

The ADF, throughout our history of military engagement and conflict, has always sought to fight and defeat our enemies asymmetrically. Put simply: we raise, train and sustain our forces to the highest standards; learn, adapt and incorporate knowledge gained from operational and other experiences; while empowering our people and leaders so that the ADF can rapidly, unexpectedly and overwhelmingly apply our strengths against our enemies' weaknesses. Asymmetry, for the ADF, is not a linear process, nor is it a set of principles which our people must mechanically follow. Rather, asymmetry is an organisational mindset, an ethos and culture, which includes all elements of ADF capabilities, including lethal and less-than-lethal options, acting in concert with other elements of national power in whole-of-government, and whole-of-nation, coordinated campaigns.

This definition gives no ground to our enemies, aligns with Robert Gates' 2008 assertion, and states that the ADF is completely comfortable with and adept in asymmetric war. By not separating 'conventional' from 'special' force capabilities, this

definition asserts that the ADF fights using asymmetry as a natural and usual way of ADF business. Our enemies do not own asymmetric war. To succeed we must seek and understand the weaknesses of our enemies, and adapt faster than them in the competitive learning environment that is twenty-first century warfare.

Future Maritime Operating Concept (FMOC)

The Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) Future Maritime Operating Concept (FMOC) makes fourteen references to asymmetry or asymmetric. Unfortunately, the FMOC uses asymmetry/asymmetric as almost meaningless adjectives that provide few clues to how the RAN may fight in the future, or even how our enemies may fight.

As has been the case in the past, asymmetry will be part of the future.

The confluence of technology, asymmetry and insurgent groups will see the presence of increased lethality no matter what the mission.

The sea surface domain must also include ships in port, as the asymmetric threat is omnipresent.⁶

When the FMOC does concentrate analysis on how asymmetry may be manifested, the focus is mostly on our enemies.

Non-state actors will be concentrated in the littoral regions via less technologically advanced missile systems and smaller UASs [unmanned aircraft systems] for both ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] and/or possibly carrying asymmetric weapons such as chemical and biological agents or small amounts of explosive.⁷

6 Future Maritime Operating Concept (FMOC), *2025 Maritime Force Projection and Control*, 2007, (Unclassified Version), pp. 9, 12.

7 Ibid., pp. 11, 13. 'The Information Domain must be able to deal with shortened warning times and to communicate the presence of asymmetric threats and other fleeting targets in time to permit an engagement decision to be made.' 'Shaping activities, or Information Operations, have the potential to clarify complex operating pictures by encouraging non combatants to not become involved and thus reduce the asymmetric threat.'

The future capability goal of ADF maritime forces in 2025 is to be able to generate and sustain a balanced, adaptable and agile joint maritime force capable of projecting force and exercising local sea control across both open ocean and littoral maritime environments in a battlespace characterised by multi-faceted, symmetric and asymmetric threats.⁸

Force protection against asymmetric threats is expected to remain a significant issue for Future Maritime Forces in 2025.⁹

Maritime forces will require a force protection capability to counter asymmetric attack to varying scale at all times.¹⁰

When the FMOC comes to grips with asymmetry as an option for the ADF, the emphasis should be placed on technologies, such as sea mines and submarines, which in various guises are also available to our enemies. In concentrating on ‘asymmetric’ technologies, the RAN avoids exploring asymmetry via evolved tactics, thinking, learning, and/or organisational change through which the RAN may create difficult to replicate advantages over our enemies.

Sea mines are excellent weapons of asymmetry, generating an effort to detect and remove them disproportionately greater than the effort required to lay them.¹¹

The sub-surface domain remains an opaque environment. It is *probably the domain that lends itself to the greatest asymmetry* and is the domain in which it takes the greatest amount of time to develop situational awareness (as it involves large volumes of water), moving stealthy targets and a cluttered sensor environment. State actors will dominate this domain.¹²

8 Ibid., pp. 14, 16. ‘The possibility for asymmetric threats to surprise maritime forces will evolve.’

9 Ibid., pp. 21, 22. ‘Ensuring commensurate protection capabilities are in place should also include the range of asymmetric threat.’

10 Ibid., p. 22. ‘Similarly, land and air operating concepts should consider the ability to contribute to maritime force protection against both conventional and asymmetric threats.’

11 Ibid., p. 12.

12 Ibid. [italics added]

Adaptive Campaigning – Future Land Operating Concept (AC-FLOC)

The Australian Army's *Adaptive Campaigning – Future Land Operating Concept* (AC-FLOC), 2009, has benefited from five years of Army work on examining future war. AC-FLOC is, in effect, an amalgam of two previous publications: *Complex Warfighting*, 2004, and *Adaptive Campaigning – The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, 2006,¹³ combined with rigorous Army analysis of national and worldwide trends, and extensive consultation throughout Army, the ADF, inter-agency stakeholders and coalition partners.

The key point to note is that the Australian Army has developed its future operating concepts over half a decade while in contact with the enemy. During that time, Army has gained a greater understanding of asymmetric war which, in turn, has greatly benefitted AC-FLOC. As noted below, the Australian Army's initial Future Land Operating Concept, *Complex Warfighting*, while highly valuable to Army and the ADF in 2004, did misrepresent asymmetric warfare as an enemy capability.

In *Complex Warfighting*, Army explained one method in which our enemies may choose to fight the ADF, and coined terms for the use of asymmetric warfare by our enemies, 'asymmetric grand strategy' and 'asymmetric theatre strategy':

US dominance has led to asymmetric 'avoidance behaviour' by its opponents. These opponents cannot defeat the US in conventional war: direct military confrontation against US Forces is essentially un-winnable. Thus actors such as Al Qa'eda have adopted an asymmetric grand strategy in which they seek arenas other than conventional military operations in which to confront the US. They have also adopted an asymmetric theatre strategy, which seeks to draw the West into increasing, protracted and exhausting confrontation with the rest of the world, particularly the Islamic world. At the operational and tactical level this strategy is executed through unconventional means—terrorism,

13 Future Land Operational Concept *Complex Warfighting*. *Complex Warfighting* was endorsed by the Chief of Army's Senior Advisory Committee (CASAC) on 7 May 2004, and agreed by the Chiefs of Services Committee (COSC) on 31 March 2006 for use as the AC-FLOC. *Adaptive Campaigning – The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, was endorsed by the Chief of Army's Senior Advisory Committee (CASAC) on 1 December 2006 and agreed by the Chiefs of Service Committee (COSC) on 8 December 2006.

insurgency, subversion and information operations—making decisive military responses problematic.¹⁴

Along with the asymmetric ‘avoidance behaviour’ described earlier, diversity is a major cause of ‘Asymmetric Warfare’. Because there are numerous different actors, diversity creates asymmetry—a mismatch of capabilities, cultures, technology, objectives, or will. Asymmetry, in turn, exploits a mis-match in the ‘defeat threshold’—how much one must damage a force to defeat it. Western forces tend to have high tactical defeat thresholds: they are hard to defeat in actual battle. However, their strategic defeat threshold may be lower than their tactical threshold—they may be vulnerable to changes in public opinion, political will and (perceived or actual) casualty-aversion.¹⁵

By 2008 it was clear that *Complex Warfighting* was in need of revision, especially as it gave the ownership and employment of asymmetric campaigns and strategy to our enemies. *Complex Warfighting* inadvertently articulated asymmetric war as a method of war that was ‘owned’ by our enemies, and this ownership enabled our enemies to exploit mismatches in ‘defeat thresholds’. *Complex Warfighting* did not state that the ADF could apply asymmetric tactics against our enemies; instead, it noted that our enemies could asymmetrically attack the ADF’s vulnerabilities. Such ownership of asymmetry by our enemies caused *Complex Warfighting* to state that the actions of our enemies ‘demanded’ a military response, implying that our enemies could set and establish operational tempo for our forces through the use of asymmetric warfare:

the adoption of asymmetric strategies and unconventional means by our enemies exposes Australia to diverse, complex and ambiguous threats that may *demand* a military response.¹⁶

The ‘demand’ for a military response was not the ADF’s experience in Timor Leste from 1999, Afghanistan from 2001, Iraq from 2003, or the Solomon Islands from 2003.

14 Future Land Operational Concept (FLOC), *Complex Warfighting*, 31 March 2006, p. 3.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

In these four campaigns, which represent the ADF's most recent land operations in complex environments,¹⁷ the ADF has, through a combination of effective intelligence, training and modern equipment, combined with whole-of-government and coalition actions, set the conditions and controlled operating environments to ensure that our enemies have not 'demanded' a military response. Arguably, the tactical success of Australia's deployed forces since 1999 demonstrate that the Australian Army, supported by the ADF, is creating its own asymmetric effects in our present operational environments.

The other weakness in *Complex Warfighting* was that asymmetric warfare was described too narrowly, implying that to avoid our strengths, our enemies must resort to terrorism:

Globalisation, which has created and empowered a diverse range of enemies of the West; and US dominance, has caused those adversaries to seek asymmetric arenas and unconventional means to confront the West. This renders Australia less likely to suffer a conventional military attack, but more likely to face ambiguous and asymmetric threats, including terrorism.¹⁸

Significantly, *Adaptive Campaigning – The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting*, 2006, made no mention of asymmetric warfare, for either the Australian Army or our enemies.¹⁹ This deficiency was initially addressed in the Australian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine 1 – *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare* (IWD 1), 2008, and was consolidated in Army's 2009 release of *Adaptive Campaigning – Future Land Operating Concept*.

In AC-FLOC, the Australian Army has followed the lead of IWD 1 in acknowledging that:

17 IWD 1, p. 92. Complex Environment may include Complex Terrain which is defined as: The environment shaped by physical, human and informational factors that interact in a mutually-reinforcing fashion. It is terrain that limits the utility of technological intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and reduces opportunities for long range engagement with a consequent increased emphasis on close combat.

18 Ibid., p. 12.

19 *Adaptive Campaigning – The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting* was endorsed by the Chief of Army's Senior Advisory Committee (CASAC) on 1 December 2006 and agreed by the Chiefs of Service Committee (COSC) on 8 December 2006.

asymmetry exists where there are notable differences between two things under comparison. Military asymmetry may be reflected by differences in intent, composition of forces, culture, technology or size. Conflict has always involved one side seeking an asymmetric advantage over the other by exploiting surprise, the creative use of technology or novel methods of operation. Asymmetry is sought by conventional, special and irregular forces in an attempt to avoid an enemy's strengths and maximise their own advantages. All contemporary warfare is based on the search for an asymmetric advantage.²⁰

Army's journey to understand and cope with the complexities of asymmetry continues. As noted in AC-FLOC 'conflict is a search for asymmetry which is simply pitting our strengths against his weakness while guarding our own weaknesses from his strengths'.²¹ While AC-FLOC, supported by IWD 1, is an excellent start to countering the debate that dictates 'asymmetry' as the enemy's capability, it is clear that the majority of extant ADF future concepts do not, at this point in time, share that view.

Future Air and Space Operating Concept (FASOC)

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Future Air and Space Operating Concept (FASOC) describes asymmetry as being an effect entirely controlled by our enemies by stating that:

Australia can expect to face asymmetric and complex security threats ...²²

an unbalanced force that is highly effective against one type of adversary but ineffective against others [leaves] us vulnerable to new asymmetries.²³

the adversary, particularly one employing asymmetric warfighting strategies, may choose not to, or be unable to, contest control of the air ...²⁴

20 *Adaptive Campaigning* – Army's Future Land Operating Concept, prepared by Head Modernisation and Strategic Planning – Army, Australian Army Headquarters, Canberra, September 2009, p. viii.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

22 FASOC, p. 10.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

As a consequence, the FASOC avoids any sophisticated discussion on asymmetry from any perspective. This omission is surprising, as the FASOC articulates a clear definition of asymmetric warfare:

Asymmetric warfare is the military action against an adversary to which he may have no effective response and which pits strength against weakness, sometimes in a non-traditional and unconventional manner.²⁵

Why Asymmetric War?

A successful asymmetric opponent seeks to fight a major conventional power above and below its level of conventional competence and superiority.²⁶

– Anthony H Cordesman – *The Lessons of the Israeli–Lebanon War*

The truth is that irregular, indirect, and asymmetrical are all inherently empty concepts, definable only with reference to their opposites. And those opposites, similarly, are bereft of definite meaning.²⁷

– Colin S Gray – *Irregular Warfare, One Nature, Many Characters*

Why have most of the ADF's future operating concepts elected, almost exclusively, to surrender an understanding, analysis and development of asymmetric war to our enemies? The answer is partly that this surrender is inadvertent, and partly that asymmetry is sometimes considered a modern military cliché that many people use without thought. The ADF must move beyond our blindness to 'asymmetric war' and identify Australian national asymmetric advantages, above simple ADF asymmetries, so that we can make 'asymmetry' a key element of our own national way of war.

Australia's Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) published a 2005 paper, *An Analytical Framework for the Study of Asymmetric Warfare*, stating that:

25 AAP 1000–F, *The Future Air and Space Operating Concept* (FASOC), p. 69.

26 Anthony H Cordesman, *The Lessons of the Israeli-Lebanon War, Arleigh A Burke Chair in Strategy*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008, slide 13.

27 Colin S Gray, 'Irregular Warfare, One Nature, Many Characters', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2007, p. 43.

There is a degree of ambiguity ... over exactly what is meant by the term 'asymmetric' when used in relation to asymmetric warfare. Definitions range from simple statements relating to the use of non-conventional tactics, through to the broader view that 'all warfare is asymmetric'. In some publications one combatant is stated as having an asymmetric advantage over another based purely on differences in technology. Many definitions of asymmetric warfare bear a close similarity to definitions of manoeuvre warfare as this relates to seeking 'asymmetry of force' (i.e. using strength against an enemy's weakness).²⁸

In the report, even the redoubtable DSTO admits that 'the term "Asymmetric Warfare" ... permeates DSTO strategic guidance documentation but without adequate definition'.²⁹

Carol Bell, at the 2005 Rowell Seminar and the 2005 Chief of Army's Conference, made statements on asymmetric war that are simple, and should be sobering to a defence force that largely gives thought to its enemies owning asymmetric capabilities. Bell defines:

asymmetric wars as those conflicts in which the two sides have different weapons available to them and pursue different strategies. Only the term 'asymmetry' is new, and based on this definition there have been many asymmetric wars in the past. All the colonial wars of the nineteenth century, for instance, were

28 W Hobbs, P Dexter, M Egudo and D Grieger, *An Analytical Framework for the Study of Asymmetric Warfare* (Restricted), Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO), Land Operations Division Systems Sciences Laboratory, 2005, pp. 1–2. This DSTO paper collected asymmetric warfare definitions from a number of authors including: K F McKenzie, Jr, *The Revenge of the Melians: Asymmetric Threats and the next QDR*, McNair Paper 62, National Defense University, November 2000; V J Goulding, Jr, 'Back to the Future with Asymmetric War', *Parameters*, Winter 2000–01; C S Gray, 'Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror', *Parameters*, Spring 2002; and, I Belany, 'Fighting Asymmetric Wars: An Application of Lanchester's Square Law of Modern Warfare', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 147, No. 5, October 2002. 'Definitions range from simple statements relating to the use of non-conventional tactics, through to the broader view that 'all warfare is asymmetric' – including, notably, Frank G Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century, Hybrid Wars*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007, which on p. 24 states: 'Asymmetry—here the authors recognised that asymmetry manifests itself to some extent in ever aspect of warfare.'

29 Hobbs, et al, *An Analytical Framework for the Study of Asymmetric Warfare* (Restricted), p. 2.

asymmetric; a point celebrated in British poet Hilaire Belloc's mocking little verse: *Always remember we have got the maxim gun and they have not.*³⁰

Bell goes on to explain that the invention of the term 'asymmetric war' probably arose from:

the fact that the three great global struggles of the twentieth century—the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War (which took the form of a Third World War)—were all quite symmetrical, in the sense that the two sides in each case were relatively equal in military capacity and had roughly similar weaponry, though not necessarily similar strategic doctrines. One only need think of the contrast between the German theory of *Blitzkrieg* and the French Maginot Line concept. Indeed, the first use of the asymmetric war concept that I have found comes from about the time when the notion of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) was becoming familiar in the late 1980s.³¹

Importantly, Bell puts the current use of 'asymmetric war' into a context that could lead to the assertion that the ADF's future operating concepts have used asymmetry in an *ad hoc* and ill-considered manner:

... the idea of asymmetric warfare did not become widely used until the bombing in Aden Harbour of the USS *Cole* in 2000. Notable in that attack, and many others since, is that old military principle, economy of force. This means that, at the cost of just one small boat, some explosives, and two volunteers, it was possible to kill more US servicemen and damage more US naval assets than the whole of the Serbian Armed Forces had done in the Kosovo campaign the previous year.³²

30 Coral Bell, 'Asymmetric Wars' in Scott Hopkins (ed), *Asymmetric and Complexity: Selected Papers from the 2005 Rowell Seminar and the 2005 Chief of Army's Conference*, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, February 2007, p. 5; Hilaire Belloc, *Complete Verse of H. Belloc*, rev. edn., G Duckworth, London, 1970, p. 184.

31 Bell, 'Asymmetric Wars', p. 10.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Interestingly, the French Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces Publication, *Winning the Battle – Building Peace*, distinguishes two types of asymmetry which have different implications for armed forces:

- A conflict in which a subversive system leads a global asymmetrical struggle against the interests of a state or an alliance and in which the armed forces are only part of the instruments available in response to the threat.
- A conflict in which an armed force is confronted with an asymmetrical form of combat directly linked to its involvement constituting the violent response of its opponent in the field. As the main targets of these actions located in the theatre of operations, the armed forces are the key actors in that fight.³³

These distinctions are important as they allow the French to consider broad whole-of-government responses to asymmetric threats, while simultaneously allowing the French to develop both conventional and unconventional capabilities within their own defence force. With the exception of Land Warfare Doctrine 1 – *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare* (2008), this type of broad and agile thinking is not yet available in ADF doctrine or future operating concepts.³⁴

The United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment* (2008), makes a significant point that ‘mirroring’ behaviour by our enemies allows them to counter our asymmetric advantages quickly and cheaply, and in a manner that frustrates our commonly expected technological edge.

One only need to consider the enormous expenditures the United States has made to counter the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IED). The United States has spent literally billions to counter these crude, inexpensive, and extraordinarily effective devices ... [W]hile this asymmetry is most dramatic against the low-end threat, it applies to more sophisticated threats as well. Current economics indicate that China likely spends far less than the United States for the same capability. For instance, because of its labor market, the cost of many of the raw materials, and the savings gained by reverse engineering

33 Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces Publication, *Winning the Battle – Building Peace – Land Forces in Present and Future Conflict*, FT-01 (English), Paris, January 2007, p. 16.

34 Land Warfare Doctrine 1, p. 15.

technologies, the Chinese space program costs an order of magnitude less than that of the United States.³⁵

In other words our enemies, with access to cheap labour and raw materials, combined with the ability to ignore patents and reverse engineer technologies, can quickly overtake any technical edge we may have created for an asymmetric advantage. This means that technological based asymmetry, in a rapidly evolving, connected, and intellectually agile world, is fragile at best, and in the worst cases born obsolete.

35 United States Joint Forces Command, Center for Joint Futures (J59), *The Joint Operating Environment (JOE), Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force*, Distribution Statement A: Approved for Public Release, 25 November 2008, p. 50.

Part 2: How does the ADF Fight Asymmetrically?

The US military has an immense array of asymmetric capabilities, which are worthless if we cannot apply them effectively.

– Ancker and M Burke – *Doctrine for Asymmetric Warfare*³⁶

If the premise is now accepted that asymmetric war is not a type of war that is ‘owned’ by our enemies, but a process by which belligerents, including the ADF, may exploit advantage over opponents, then an opportunity is now available for the ADF to think about our own asymmetric advantages. What makes the ADF, and the Australian nation, formidable? Are we formidable? What asymmetric warfighting capabilities does the ADF possess that allow Australia a significant advantage over our enemies?

There are no simple answers to big questions, such as how does a defence force fight? But, difficulties aside, there is a significant need for the ADF to take the lead in thinking about asymmetric war before we surrender the entire concept to Australia’s enemies.

Importantly, the nature of asymmetric threats dictates a broad national response. Such a national response is beyond the ADF’s capabilities, and arguably beyond even emerging whole-of-government capabilities within Australia. To repeat Robert Gates’ statement:

[Asymmetric] challenges ... cannot be overcome by military means alone, and they extend well beyond the traditional domain of any single government agency or department. They require our government to operate with unity, agility, and creativity, and will require devoting considerably more resources to non-military instruments of national power.³⁷

36 Ancker and M Burke, ‘Doctrine for Asymmetric Warfare’, *Military Review*, July–August 2003, <<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/ancker.pdf>> p. 23.

37 Robert M Gates, Pre Alfalfa Luncheon Speech at CSIS, January 2008. Transcript by Federal News Service Washington DC.

The remainder of this paper expands on Robert Gates' key assertion: that more than a single government agency is required to counter asymmetric threats. The paper describes four means, based on the capabilities of people, not technology, by which Australia, and by association the ADF, already possesses asymmetric advantages over our enemies. With four asymmetries identified, among many possibilities, this paper will suggest how we may utilise our asymmetric advantages in order to enable our nation to fight and win against elusive, adaptive and determined enemies.

Australian National Asymmetric Advantages

1. Our National Competitiveness

Australians love to win. The Australian Institute of Sport, the Wallabies Rugby Union Team, the Kangaroos Rugby League Team, the Australian Cricket Team, the Australian Netball Team, and the Australian Hockey Team all figure prominently in our national psyche. The six aforementioned sporting organisations are not, of course, Australia's only sporting groups, but they are sporting groups that quite frequently carry the hopes, dreams and colours of Australia in their battles in international sporting arenas.

How do Australians decide upon which sports to place their national dreams? Why is the Australian Soccer Team not as significant an icon as the other teams mentioned? Quite simply Australians seek, and appreciate, a single requirement: victory. We seek to place our national hopes on the shoulders of Olympic or Commonwealth Games athletes, and sporting teams wearing our national colours, against the world's best. If a sporting team perennially underperforms, such as Australian Soccer (although this is changing), the nation quickly loses interest.

To amplify this point, by Australian standards it is not acceptable to simply achieve world domination in any sport. For Australians, after we win a vital international sporting event, such as the Rugby Union World Cup, our competitiveness and our very success leads us to conclude that we now must simultaneously continue to improve our national skills, guard against complacency, renew aging teams, and prevent other nations copying our tactics, stealing our ideas and plotting revenge.

In short, Australia remains in a constant state of national competitive tension.

As a nation we are our own harshest critics, and we rarely see our sporting prowess from the vantage point of other nations. That a nation of 21.5 million people that repeatedly defeats other nations on the international sporting stage is a difficult notion to challenge. Our sports people are ruthless—think of the manner in which various

Australian Cricket captains have mercilessly built game plans to inflict crushing defeats on other cricket nations, and how our swimmers dominate other nations physically and mentally.

This leads to **National Asymmetry No 1**: Australia's national competitiveness means that tactical success by our enemies will only strengthen Australian resolve. Australia has the capacity to rally and adapt in the face of defeat, and to emerge stronger, more innovative and more lethal against all enemies. These characteristics have been honed through Australia's international sporting prowess, through victory and bitter defeat, and have led to Australia's constant state of national competitive tension.

2. Federalism and Change

Australia's Federation, forged without conflict in 1901, has served this nation well. In particular defence, taxation and law have been largely synchronised across the world's only single-nation continent. Our nation speaks, officially, one language, and even our accents vary little from coast to coast.

Australia has had no civil wars, and inter-state rivalry occurs largely on the sporting fields for the nation's major sporting codes. Australia's Federalism is not perfect, as any Commonwealth or national employee who moves across state boundaries and interacts with disparate education, motor vehicle, health, housing and employment conditions can attest.³⁸

Despite its weaknesses, a strength of Australia's federalism is our nation's ability to change. We dislike over-government, and we do not like to be told what to do.³⁹ As our founding fathers assessed, a federal system of government, where power was distributed among states and not solely concentrated in the realm of a centralised

38 M Stutchbury, 'How Julia will kill jobs', *The Australian*, 31 March 2009, p. 9. 'Unique to Australia, the [wage] award system [contains]...4053 different awards, containing 4000 pay scales, and 105,000 job classifications, along with...rules about penalty rates, meal breaks, overtime, and loadings.'

39 M Blenkin, 'Call for abolition of states: Fitzgibbon', *The Age*, 4 July 2008, p. 6. As was noted by Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon in the first Edmund Barton lecture at Newcastle University, there are some concerns that Australia is over-governed. Mr Fitzgibbon stated that Australians are, arguably, the most heavily governed people in the world: 'fourteen houses of parliament for 22 million people. In Tasmania, they have an MP for every 8000 electors. The duplication, the inefficiencies, the buck-passing, and blame-shifting cost our economy billions'. Mr Fitzgibbon said the Business Council of Australia put the cost at \$9 billion per year. M Stekete, 'Quest to streamline the nation', *The Australian*, 22–23 November 2008, p. 23. 'Research commissioned in 2006 by the Business Council of Australia calculated that inefficiencies and duplication between federal and state governments cost taxpayers at least \$9 billion a year directly, equivalent to \$1100 a household.'

national government, was preferred. So when Australians are asked to change, and they believe that change will assist this nation, they will do so. Think of Australia's ability to: accept uniform national gun laws; save water when our dams are low; reduce, within a generation, our national smoking and littering habits; develop sun and skin cancer awareness and prevention for our school children and sporting icons; and, our ubiquitous embracing of florescent safety clothing for hundreds of thousands of Australian workers.

National Asymmetry No 2: Australia successfully federated in 1901, and this system of government has served Australia as a nation well by avoiding civil chaos and internecine disturbances. Within this federal system, Australians have demonstrated a significant capacity to change, and hence a capacity to respond, as necessary, to our enemies with a common voice and approach.⁴⁰ When faced with an intractable national challenge or problem, Australians have proven that they can adapt, innovate and find solutions.

3. Volunteerism

It is a rolling miracle of the Australian volunteer community, of the church and charitable sector, that this great army of people immediately comes and is there, without complaint, without request for anything in particular. Prepared, with sleeves rolled up, quietly, effectively, assiduously doing the job.

– Prime Minister Kevin Rudd⁴¹

Have you ever been struck by how much Australia relies on volunteers? Drive to the shops on a Saturday morning, and think about the volunteers that you pass: the officials at the children's soccer match, the Lions Club in the canteen, and the St John's Ambulance first aid attendant at the same match; the person dressed in high visibility clothing controlling movement at the pedestrian crossing; the bush fire brigade officers at most country and many urban fire stations; the surf life savers patrolling the local

40 CACI International Inc (CACI) and the National Defense University (NDU), *Dealing with Today's Asymmetric Threat to US and Global Security – The Need for an Integrated National Asymmetric Threat Strategy*, CACI International Inc, May 2008, p. 22.

41 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's speech on the Victorian bushfires, 10 February 2009, Speech Transcript of the PM's speech to the Federal Parliament, <<http://www.alp.org.au/media/0209/spepm100.php>> accessed 15 February 2009.

beach; the orange overalled State Emergency Service officials; the parents cooking sausages in the shopping centre car park to raise funds for their school; a working bee at another school; people walking by you on their way to the Red Cross Blood Bank; and, the Salvation Army Volunteer collecting donations as you walk into the shopping centre.

National tragedies, such as the February 2009 Victorian fires, serve to amplify this national spirit of volunteerism.

Our nation is supported by an unassuming and largely unseen 'army' of volunteers, with 34 per cent of the adult population, 5.4 million people, volunteering each year. In 2007, the four most common types of organisation for which people volunteered were: sport and physical recreation, education and training, community/welfare and religious groups, and these people concentrated on fundraising, preparing and serving food, teaching/providing information and administration.⁴²

Importantly, the motivation for volunteering included: being asked directly; knowing someone involved with the volunteer group, a history of voluntary work in the family; and most were motivated by a desire to help others or the community.⁴³ As a value to the Australian economy, total annual hours volunteered was 713 million in 2006, and the median annual number of hours volunteered was fifty-six hours. It is estimated that paying Australia's 500,000 emergency management volunteers alone, including overheads, would cost \$12 billion a year,⁴⁴ and that welfare services, for example, annually benefit from \$30.9 million worth of volunteer care.⁴⁵

National Asymmetry No 3: Australians do not respond well to being ordered into action. Instead, when motivated, Australians will give generously of their skills, time and labour. The Australian nation may be large, and national infrastructure can be fragile at times and places, but the Australian people are resolute in their beliefs and in their support for community. This resolve and bonded community spirit will not easily fracture, even in the face of the most resilient enemies.

42 Figures are from the ABS Voluntary Work, Australia Survey (2006), released in July 2007. <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s01_home/home.asp> accessed 29 June 2008.

43 Ibid.

44 Anthony Bergin and David Templeman, 'Get Ready for the Big One', *The Weekend Australian*, 7–8 March 2009, p. 22.

45 Patricia Karvelas, 'Aussies Leaving Volunteering to Retirees', *The Australian*, 4 October 2006, p. 3. The author quoted The Australian Institute of Health Welfare's 2002–03 figures.

4. Tough Environment and Support for the Underdog

A person flying east to west across the United States from New York City to Los Angeles, will wait several hours before they see arid regions near Utah and Arizona. That same person will wait less than 30 minutes when flying east to west across Australia from Sydney to Perth to see the near arid regions of central western New South Wales, followed by vast tracts of desert. The geographic differences between the United States and Australia partially explain the powerful economy and large population of the United States, and Australia's relatively small economy and population base.

The tough Australian environment includes descriptions of 'remote Australia' as a 'failed state',⁴⁶ vulnerable infrastructure, such as lack of redundancy in optic fibre networks;⁴⁷ and inadequate port, rail and road networks; combined with frequent natural disasters including fires, floods and droughts. This environment is seemingly getting tougher as the world struggles with issues related to climate change. Overall, the tough Australian environment is also noteworthy for producing people who take challenges in their stride, and who seem to naturally support the underdog, the downtrodden, and the less fortunate than themselves.

Australia certainly has some ethnic tensions and some racism, but our nightly television programs are also full of personal stories about the less empowered people in our society standing up to, struggling against, defeating (or being defeated by) some government authority or corporate giant.

46 Victoria Laurie, 'Abandoned outback a "failed state"', *The Australian*, 13 September 2008. 'Remote Australia is a failed state that is becoming a threat to national security and vulnerable to possible invasion because of government inaction and ineptitude, a major report ... has found. The report, to be released by Northern Territory-based think tank Desert Knowledge Australia and described as a national search for ideas and options for remote Australia, was drawn up by politicians, business figures, remote area consultants and former advisers to Liberal and Labor governments. They include Desert Knowledge chairman and former Reconciliation Australia head Fred Chaney, former head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Peter Shergold, former West Australian governor and indigenous affairs adviser to the Carpenter government John Sanderson, West Australian under-treasurer Tim Marney and former ATSI chief executive Bill Gray.'

47 Tony Koch and Mitchell Bingemann, 'Queensland's communications network collapses after backhoe worker cuts cable', *The Australian*, 16 July 2008. 'A worker operating a backhoe on a building site at Molendinar on the Gold Coast threw Queensland's communications network into chaos yesterday morning by severing a fibre optic cable. The Optus network collapsed, rendering landline and mobile phones to and from Queensland useless and leaving internet services blacked out. Automatic teller machines and EFTPOS services were also affected.'

In addition, the nation responds generously to natural disasters both at home and overseas, in our region or further abroad. People, sometimes with little to give away, will give generously to strangers.

Our own ADF, born of Australian society and comprised of Australian citizens, also demonstrates great compassion for the disempowered people of Australia and the world. Frequent images of Australian service people in Australia, the Middle East, Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands supporting and protecting local populations are accepted, and expected, by Australians. It is rare to hear Australians state that the ADF should not be protecting and supporting people within or away from Australia's shores.

There is no debate in Australia that the ADF is being misemployed when it looks after people, when it gives people a fair go, and when it supports the underdog. The ADF, equipped and trained for war—a status that is required by the Australian Government and understood by the Australian people—is also simultaneously able to protect and support disempowered people within Australia and throughout the world.

National Asymmetry No 4: Australians, forged by a tough and unforgiving environment, have developed into a nation that, while not perfect, show unwavering compassion to the disempowered, the unrepresented and the endangered.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore Australia's, and by association the ADF's, asymmetric advantages in a manner that enables our nation to fight and win against elusive, adaptive and determined enemies.

While Australia's national competitiveness, federalism, acceptance of change, volunteerism, tough environment, and support for the underdog may seem so axiomatic as to be not asymmetric at all, the fact is that most of the ADF's extant future operating concepts have, almost exclusively, assigned asymmetric war as the sole province of our enemies.

This thinking on asymmetric war needs to change. Australia's strengths, some of which have been described in this paper, need to be identified, assessed and further strengthened through national resolve and national determination. In short, Australia must take the fight to the enemy.

To do any less will offer multiple opportunities to our enemies, and the myth that our enemies 'own' asymmetric warfare will be realised, with disastrous consequences for our nation.

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