



CENTRE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

DEFENCE WHITE PAPER PROJECT

2020 Force Structure Plan

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Australian Government

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Introduction

In 2018, the United States in its National Defense Strategy outlined a pessimistic view of the state of world affairs, highlighting that “*we are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory*”¹. This is the information age and with the modernisation of technologies in several fields, the scope of threats that a nation-state has increased exponentially.

Since the end of the cold war and the simmering down of tensions between east and west, the nature of conflict tilted toward asymmetric warfare, against smaller states and other non-state actors. In the Balkans, a NATO-led force intervened post the horrendous atrocities committed by Serb ultra-nationalists against Bosniaks and other populations. Before that, NATO forces part of Operation Desert Storm carried out massive airstrikes against Ba’athist Iraq under Saddam Hussein, after his invasion and occupation of neighbouring Kuwait. The tipping point of our timeline would be the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC. Post this terrorist attack which claimed over 3,000 lives, the United States committed all of its resources toward the declaration and subsequent conduct of an all-out, global war on terror. This global war on terror, which was realised in campaigns across the world, notably in Iraq and Afghanistan, began to come to an end after about a decade, only to be escalated again with the rise of the Islamic State. Evaluating the casualties of these protracted and now unpopular wars, the United States eventually withdrew and sought alternative means to achieve its ends. With the slow and gradual demise of the war on terror, fighters who had travelled far and long.

PART I: Threats faced by Australia

This brings us to today's scenario. The power of the United States of America, and the symbol for which it stands – as the sole superpower of the world; a global policeman – is on the decline. Militarily, one can foresee it to remain the sole power of the world, but its primacy, especially in Asia and the Indo-Pacific is challenged by the Communist Chinese – the People’s Republic of China. China is being viewed as a threat not only to the United States but to several other administrations present in the region. The Pew Research Centre conducted a study to determine the attitudes of people around the world toward China. A median of

¹ U.S. Department of Defense. (2018). *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Defense: <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

41% of those surveyed responded negatively. Negative views were found in Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, among others².

The Chinese challenge to American primacy in the region is a major threat to the status quo and the current Australian security architecture – which is heavily reliant on the Australia, New Zealand United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty) of 1951. The treaty signed in 1951 is a collective-security, non-binding agreement between the three Anglophonic, Pacific states, stipulating cooperation on military matters, originally meant for the Pacific theatre, and today encompassing worldwide conflicts as well, such as that in Afghanistan.

The rapid rate of modernisation of the People’s Liberation Army and all of its branches, tagged along with assertive military behaviour in the Himalayas, the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea and the East China Sea, poses serious ramifications for the Australian Defence Forces (ADF). The fear of being dragged into a potential conflict between the United States and China looms in the minds of Australian military and civil-political leadership. The massive island nation in the Indo-Pacific could also be dragged into a conflict if matters are to fall apart and go south on the Korean peninsula – a threat that could get as hot as nuclear warfare if not managed well.

PART II: Relevance of the Document

The 2020 Force Structure Plan outlines the Australian government’s commitment to ensure its capability to enforce national interests in light of these looming threats. Today’s modern world has seen the modernisation of existing military systems, platforms and equipment, and has also seen the militarisation of technologies that could not have been perceived in the last century. While there has been advancement in technology, man’s ability to reason and settle disputes peacefully and rationally has not seen much progress. As a result of these mentioned abilities as well as disabilities, the Australians, along with other military powers will continue to determine threats, improve threat perception, analysis and further ‘improve the lethality of the ADF, provide the Government with more flexibility to deal with grey-zone challenges,

² Silver, L., Devlin, K., & Huang, C. (2019, December 5). *Attitudes toward China*. Retrieved from Pew Research Centre: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/12/05/attitudes-toward-china-2019/>

adapt to accelerating technological advances and increase the ADF's ability to successfully project military power³.

The document analyzes Australia's evolving security requirements through the examination of current as well as proposed future capabilities through a broad range of classified scenarios over 20 years, while also discussing the need to invest in the growth and development of a sovereign defence industrial base that is internationally competitive, innovative and meets the technical requirements to support the operations of the ADF.

The 2020 Force Structure Plan highlights three broad objectives which the Department of Defence aims to deliver:

- **Shape** Australia's strategic environment;
- **Deter** actions against Australia's interests; and
- **Respond** with credible military force.

Working toward the furtherance of these objectives, the government will aim to increase the capabilities in all operational domains, with an intent to move toward a joint and integrated approach in programmes. The previous Defence White Paper released in 2016 identified five domains of operations for the Australian Defence Forces, with tasks and roles as mentioned in Figure 1.

³ Department of Defence, Australian Government. (2020). *2020 Force Structure Plan*. Canberra: Department of Defence, Australian Government. Retrieved from https://www1.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020_Force_Structure_Plan.pdf



Figure 1: Operational Domains and Department of Defence's New Capability Program Architecture⁴

⁴ Ibid.

These operational domains have been adopted by the 2020 Force Structure Plan as well. All operations in these domains will be supported by a competitive and innovative Defence Enterprise. To achieve long-term goals, a significant investment in defence capabilities will be injected into the Australian industry, creating jobs and skills and helping achieve the goals set about by the Department. The Australian Government has also decided to the previously prescribed 10-year funding model for Defence, providing it with total funding of AUD 575 billion up to the fiscal year 2029-30, of which AUD 270 billion is dedicated to investment in capability improvement. Additionally, the budget for Defence has been decoupled from GDP forecasts, to avoid the need for adjustments in response to future fluctuations⁵.

Information & Cyber Domain

It is a fact that defence systems across the world are beginning to rely heavily upon fast, reliable and secure internet-based communications – between units and commands – to enable swift and real-time decision-making capabilities on the ground. This, while improving coordination between combat units and command, has also resulted in an increased threat of the impacts that come with cyber-warfare. While several non-state actors and criminal elements engage in such activities, it is also known that aggressive states such as China and North Korea engage actively in such malicious activities.

As such, Canberra deems it critical to invest in the development of cyber capabilities and an allied force to enhance information and electronic warfare systems, with the program expected to attract an estimated AUD 15 billion. Aspirations to establish a joint command and control structure to synchronise the control of forces will complement the setting up of ‘C4 capabilities’ – command, control, communications and computers. This will enhance decision-making, situational awareness and the synchronised employment and deployment of assets, platforms and resources. The ADF’s situational awareness will also be improved to support the employment of precision weapons and deployment of combat units through the improvement of joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.

Maritime Domain

The *Maritime Domain* proves to be of more critical importance in assessing Australia’s security environment. The island nation holds under its jurisdictions among the world’s largest exclusive economic zones through which millions of tonnage in international shipping sails through. Its location in between the Indian and Pacific Oceans makes it a critical link in how several countries make their geostrategic analyses. Among the countries that play a pivotal role in the outcome of regional politics is China. The PLA Navy

⁵ Ibid.

(PLAN) is rapidly upgrading and modernising its three fleets: the Yellow Sea (Northern Fleet), the East China Sea (Eastern Fleet) and the South China Sea (Southern Fleet). To counter this expansionist force, the Australian government has set aside approximately AUD 75 billion over the next decade in enhancing Australia's maritime capabilities.

Among the several projects are the development of stealthy, long-range, high-speed weapons platforms, modern warships, advanced submarines and advanced strike capabilities. The expansion of the ADF's maritime capabilities will provide a definitive boost in operations ranging from anti-submarine warfare, sealift, border security, maritime patrol, aerial reconnaissance, area denial, sea control and subsurface warfare.

To ensure enhanced maritime capabilities, projects over the coming years will include the upgradation of existing classes and the production of future classes, across all classes including frigates, destroyers, attack submarines, offshore patrol vessels, mine ships, replenishment ships, amphibious vessels, ice breakers, and salvage vessels, as well as the upgradation and replacement of the ADF's maritime aerial fixed-wing and rotor-wing aircraft.

Aerial Domain

The *Aerial Domain* is critical in the maintenance of situational awareness and quick response, in the case of disasters during peacetime or military matters during conflict. Most geopolitical powers are upgrading their air fleet to include fifth-generation aircraft, which gives them a technological edge over other forces. Australia's previous defence White Paper highlighted the need for maintaining an Air Force with a potent and technologically superior fleet of combat aircraft, supported by airborne early warning and command-control aircraft sustained by mid-air refuelling capabilities. While drones have been around for a while now, countries have also begun to actively look into the field of lethal autonomous weapons systems, also known as LAWS.

Canberra intends on maintaining its pace with the rest of the world and actively developing a potent, networked force, acting on previous commitments as well as new plans for sophistication in C4 and ISR technologies. To this extent, the government will invest an estimated AUD 65 billion over the next decade to enhance capability development.

The AFD and Canberra are committed to the procurement of the F-35A Lightning II JSF, the F/A-18F Super Hornet, the EA-18G Growler, MC-55A Peregrine AEW aircraft, and the MQ-9B Sky Guardian UAV along with enhanced and precise air-launched ordnance. Other procurement options include as mentioned

LAWS, and UCAVs to team up with manned aircraft during operations, the acquisition of loitering munitions, and the development of missiles for defensive as well as offensive roles, including hypersonic.

The Australians are also looking into the integration of an air combat management system to provide combat and control management needs enhancing real-time decision-making capabilities.

Space Domain

Satellite communications and technologies have become increasingly critical over the past few decades. The *Space Domain* carries systems and platforms that are crucial for maintaining uninterrupted communication, navigation and data gathering & analysis. In today's digital age, systems and services – both military and civilian – are heavily reliant upon satellites floating in space for several purposes. The government of Australia seeks to defend this link and ensure that it remains a strength and does not become a weakness. For that, AUD 7 billion is being dedicated to investing in the enhancement of allied capabilities.

Land Domain

The *Land Domain* has had the richest military experience and history, among all of the theatres of the ADF's operations. Australia's land forces have fought in both the world wars and in most major conflicts in East and Southeast Asia. The nature of operations ranges from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to peacekeeping and total combat. To ensure a fighting edge, the government plans to invest in strike weapons, watercraft, helicopters, information and cyber systems, logistics resilience and autonomous platforms. Through this, the ADF will receive enhancements in mobility, intelligence gathering, surveillance & reconnaissance, special operations as well as rapid response capabilities. The land arm of the ADF will be the recipient of an estimated AUD 55 billion.

Canberra intends on developing its capabilities in armoured warfare. For this, it is looking into the production and procurement of the Boxer IFV, enhancing land-mounted ISR elements, to replace the ageing fleet of M113AS4 APCs; this along with additional upgrades to the ADF's fleet of M1 Abrams MBT. Battlefield strike capabilities will be further enhanced through the production of two regiments of domestically manufactured self-propelled howitzers, along with the replacement and/or enhancement of the existing regiments of M777 light howitzers and the procurement of long-range rocket artillery and missile systems. Along with other major powers such as the United States, Australia will also seek to develop directed energy weapons platforms to be integrated into ADF vehicles and armour against the likes of MBTs.

Another asset to any land forces is the combined usage of aerial and land units, in roles that support both combat as well as support missions. For this, the force structure plan stipulates the replacement of the existing fleet of Euro copter Tiger armed reconnaissance helicopters and the procurement of a fleet of special operations capable rotary-wing aircraft. The ADF will also be looking into the development and procurement of small-sized UAVs for ISR missions and long-range rotorcraft for military power projection.

For the protection of its personnel and in response to related scenarios, the ADF will also train and equip its personnel to contain and conduct operations in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear-contaminated environments. The government will also continue to invest in the enhancement of the capabilities of its soldiers through the continued development of small arms, heavy weapon systems, night vision equipment, personal armour and networking systems.

Recommendations have also been made to further enhance mobility in the fields of amphibious war, something that will become an important characteristic in the event of the emergence of conflict in the region. For this, new Army watercraft and amphibious vessels are being looked into to develop the ADF's amphibious lift capacity. The military is also looking into the development of weapons systems to enhance the protection of existing vehicles such as the Bushmaster and the Hawkei APCs.

Part III: Analysis and Conclusion

For Australia, China, while being the largest trading partner, is also undoubtedly the greatest threat in terms of military security. After going through this document, along with the 2016 Defence White Paper and the 2020 Defence Strategic Update, the 2020 Force Plan Structure sets the correct tone and path that the Australian Defence Ecosystems must be working toward.

In the hypothetical situation of conflict with China, the South China Sea region and the larger Southeast Asian region will be the area of conflict. Keeping this in mind, Australia has focussed heavily on the development of maritime capabilities in all of its spheres – aerial, surface and sub-surface – through the enhancement of platforms both manned and unmanned. Chinese submarines and hydrographic survey vessels venturing into the Indian and Pacific Oceans have made regional powers such as Australia and India nervous and have forced the two IOR powers to work hand in hand against Chinese adventurism. The development of submarine and anti-submarine warfare capabilities is the right foot forward in countering said threats and in ensuring Australian sovereignty in its waters.

As was discussed in the earlier section, the information and cyber domain of operations of the ADF has been allotted the highest allocation of the 10-year budget. The development of C4 technologies at the joint level is crucial to ensure the optimal conduct of operations, utilising assets and resources available to each of the services. It is also well known that the Chinese do not shy away from the employment of cyber-attacks and disruptive technologies whenever beneficial. As such, moving toward a better-networked military will also deem critical the necessity of network security and protection against cyber-attacks. It will require the protection of assets in both the cyber domain, as well as the physical protection of isolated military network systems which can be threatened by infiltrations.

Allied to this domain is also the space domain, wherein militarisation of space by the United States and the Chinese can have severe ramifications for other space powers, forcing them to work on means to better protect related assets and space satellites.

The procurement of modern weapon platforms and assets will also assist in developing capabilities in the wide range of scenarios Australia will face in the future. Apart from mere procurement and other military objectives, the government has also set about important goals for the national economy to achieve – self-reliance and domestic innovation in the field of military technology and industry. It also speaks of improving the durability of existing supply chains and discovering new ones through the domestic manufacture of weapons, ordnance and allied systems for use by the ADF.

To conclude, the objectives and paths set about by the 2020 Force Structure Plan will surely help direct authorities, in way of enhancing the Australian Defence Force’s combat capabilities and ensure that they can attain the goals set about by Canberra and secure national interests.

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