



**Australian Army
Research Centre**



**An uncertain and
dangerous' decade:
Preparing the Army for
the next ten years**

David Beaumont

Serving our Nation



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Research Centre**

An uncertain and dangerous decade: Preparing the Army for the next ten years

David Beaumont

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ISSN XXXX-XXXX (Digital)

ISSN XXXX-XXXX (Print)

This publication is part of the *Australian Army Occasional Paper* series.

All enquiries regarding this publication should be forwarded to the Director of the Australian Army Research Centre.

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We have been a favoured isle, with many natural advantages for many decades, but we have not seen the conflation of global, economic and strategic uncertainty now being experienced here in Australia and in our region since the existential threat we faced when the global and regional order collapsed in the 1930s and 1940s. This is a sobering thought, and it's something that I have reflected on quite a lot lately as we've considered the dire economic circumstances we face.

That period of the 1930's has been something that I have been revisiting on a very regular basis, and when you connect both the economic challenges and the global uncertainty, it can be very haunting. But not overwhelming.

It requires a response.

**The Honourable Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia,
01 July 2020¹**

Introduction

The Australia of 2020 is amid a health and economic crisis that it did not fully anticipate, after a bushfire emergency of such significance that wartime provisions for a military response were required, while witnessing dramatic shifts in the geostrategic environment. The complexity of circumstances defies memory, with events of historic scale and significance. It has been a challenge for the Army, as part of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), to respond to this confluence of problems. This is not a reflection of an idleness in the Army – far from it. It is a reflection of the inherent difficulties in making choices and trade-offs about military capability, when it is made available, and for what reason. To prepare the Army for the next decade requires us to face the questions before it, to challenge the assumptions that have driven its planning in the past, and to avoid ‘freezing’ in the face of the monumental strategic changes witnessed. The Prime Minister of Australia, The Honourable Scott Morrison, in releasing Defence’s latest strategic update and force structure described ‘[t]he simple truth is this: even as we stare down the COVID pandemic at home, we need to also prepare for a post-COVID world that is poorer, that is more dangerous, and that is more disorderly.’²

For a military to be prepared it must: be consistent and objective focused; continually guided by the fortitude and insight of smart leaders; balance the day-to-day ‘business of defence’ while constantly searching for ways to win a war that might come; carefully steward the resources that are entrusted to it; successfully marry innumerable groups and activities into a seamless process of force structure and development ... the list goes on. Preparedness is an all-consuming task without a clear end and an effort that is rarely as successful as we would like. Richard Betts goes so far as

to write about the great American ‘tradition of unreadiness’—the propensity of the most powerful military in the world to be caught off-guard for events. A casual observation of the ADF’s response to the bushfire emergency of 2019–2020—and now a global health and economic emergency of a kind that the world has not seen for over 100 years—might suggest that the ADF suffers the same affliction.

That the ADF has been able to respond quickly to these crises is an indicator of the opposite, whatever our desire may be to focus on negatives or search for issues to mend and repair. No military force can see the future with such clarity that it will seamlessly transition from the routine to the operational, and the succession of extraordinary crises that Australia has experienced in the past two years defies earlier appraisal. The fact that the Australian Army, as part of the ADF, has met what government has demanded of it in these times is an outcome to be applauded. The tremendous effort of Army’s soldiers, alongside the Navy, Air Force and Department of Defence (Defence), is having an impact that the nation truly needs and one that it should expect. The premise behind the Army’s 2018 conceptual paper *Accelerated Warfare* was that change in the world was accelerating and that adaptability was the only realistic response.³ From this point a ‘contest of ideas’ was initiated, fuelling a discussion that in turn confirmed the Army’s strategic philosophy for the years ahead. *Army in Motion* and *Army’s Contribution to Defence Strategy* followed up with strategic direction to prepare the Service for this environment.⁴ Both papers have been resoundingly validated in their focus on adaptability as an organisational philosophy.

Significant national disasters, pandemics and geostrategic competition have created circumstances that challenge many of our assumptions just as they confirm the importance that the Army is adaptable. If these circumstances have shown that events and threats are almost impossible to imagine, what are the implications for how the Army is ‘designed’ and prepared? Alternatively, should the Army be more confident about its ability to identify and act on what it knows as ‘emerging threats and opportunities’? A much better question to answer—a question this paper considers—is: can the Army improve its agency and control when these threats and opportunities transpire? Another: what are the ‘lighthouse’ objectives that prevent the Army from deviating to a state of diminished preparedness? It seems more certain than just possible that the strategic and policy paradigm has shifted,

and now it is up to the Service to move with the tide. Assumptions are being tested on a seemingly weekly basis. Fortunately, Australia has an Army comprising intelligent and motivated people who have proven themselves operationally and in times of peace. Now it is time for the Army to start to discuss, debate and above all plan ‘what comes next’, considering options that give the Army, the ADF and Australia the resilience they need to face the future.

The purpose of this paper is continuing the ‘contest of ideas’ about the Australian Army as it looks towards its next decade (2020–2030). It is a paper that speculates on the future, with this speculation allowing the identification of areas and issues that could require Army response—either as part of the Defence team or independently as an organisation. It is an example of assumption-based analysis by hypothesising about the future and what the Army might do to prepare itself for this imagined future. The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, the paper will ask what has changed, and what the issues that will define the decade are. The second part will extrapolate these issues and hypothesise what their impact upon the Australian Army will be. This paper will look to the most dangerous outcomes at the edge of potentiality, for this is critical in preparedness planning. The final part identifies what the Army might consider in preparing for this future.

Four important caveats should be kept in the back of the reader’s mind. Firstly, this is a paper about the Australian Army as an organisation and steward of a component of the ADF’s capability; the paper should not be construed as a case of Service jingoism but as a frank study on an important part of the joint ADF. The Army is only as strong as the joint team, just as the joint team is only as strong as the Army. Secondly, the paper has been written as simply as possible to better focus on issues rather than on practitioner definitions and technical terminology. Thirdly, it is a product of good intention and seeks only to create discussion. Fourthly, and to this end, it seeks to challenge the reader by imagining severe events and providing frank assessments of what is observed in evidence. This self-reflection is necessary now because—if the Australian Army does not prepare for a sudden change in the global, national and organisational environment around it—it will have no agency or power to respond in a way that the nation needs.

Part 1: the issues that will define the decade

It is tempting to avoid investing time and effort in long-term planning when an intense rate of effort and crisis management requires organisations to focus on the immediate future. One of the biggest challenges in strategy formulation is in the offsetting of short-term planning proclivities — proclivities that result in ‘a tyranny of small decisions’ and a lack of ambition.⁵ The Army — indeed, the ADF — will need to be being ‘future ready’. Similarly, it also cannot assume that its future is defined by a multi-decade capability development program that will unlock Army’s true potential years down the track. Given such time, Army can adjust its materiel, workforce, training base, organisation, bureaucracy and processes, and align its efforts with national and international partners, to optimise itself for all manner of contingencies. This paper hypothesises that the Army must now focus on the middle ground — that difficult period beyond the pressures of the day and before new capabilities arrive to overcome the Army’s present problems in an imagined future. Furthermore, it is in this middle term that trends may grow into inevitable and existential crises if left unchecked and the opportunities and efforts required to offset them lie.

The Australian national security enterprise monitors many trends to uncover potential threats to Australia, and the Army has typically focused on those trends that impact operational land power. The 2014 unclassified *Future Land Warfare Report*, for example, avoided making firm predictions on the future but termed five ‘meta-trends’: ‘crowded, connected, lethal, collective and constrained’.⁶ The Army has since moved on from land operations-centric futures reports, replacing them with acknowledgements of the dynamic strategic environment. *Accelerated Warfare* subtly adjusted from

the battlefield by describing changing geopolitics and competition, the changing nature of threat, the effects of technologies and the blurring of 'domains' of war.⁷ These views were carried over into the current range of Army strategic guidance, philosophy and narratives, including *Army in Motion*, *Good Soldiering*, *Army's Contribution to Defence Strategy* and the *National Institution Statement*.⁸ All of these documents attested to the need for the Army to be prepared for anything, but to maintain an eye on the imperative to transform to meet the future; this was captured in the phrases 'ready now' and 'future ready'.

What follows here represents select issues and trends that have been revealed as particularly potent in the two years since *Accelerated Warfare* was published. It does not replace the observations made in that paper or any other. In fact, it is attested here that the circumstances depicted in *Accelerated Warfare* did, in fact, speed up. What follows is a validation of the unwritten acknowledgement by the Army that it cannot prepare for everything, but it must be prepared to adapt swiftly to an environment that defies expectations. The Army's adaptability will always be a measure of its future success, and enables it to do things as an organisation that no other can do in the nation.



The relationship between the Army’s jurisdiction and the capability it offers government

The Army’s role in the community has shifted with changing expectations of what it can and what it should do. The Army’s involvement in Operation Bushfire Assist from 2019 was important not just because it was a response to a national disaster of surprising scale; this operation also tested the boundary between the normal jurisdiction of the ADF and an implicit obligation to support the nation when other federal agencies lacked the capacity to do so. The nature of the response—incorporating a ‘call out’ of Army Reserve personnel conducted in a ‘constitutional grey-zone’ according to the Prime Minister —was particularly significant.⁹ With the decision to draw upon massed part-time capability, the ADF provided capabilities well beyond what would normally be prepared for a ‘high-risk weather season’. Naturally, the flexibility of the Army’s preparedness management system was tested but it performed well. Many tasks performed by all service personnel were beyond their training and readiness status, but the adaptability of the Army was proven in their completion. During and after the crisis, a variety of commentators suggested that military forces—including part-time members—be trained, and prepared for a range of tasks normally performed by other civil authorities.¹⁰ Thus, a discussion on the role and remit of the Army commenced—one that, if taken to completion, could introduce significant preparedness challenges if training for war was compromised by new tasks.

After the 2019–2020 bushfire crisis, the Army was already thinking about similar responses in the future, and ‘lessons learned’ studies are yet to deliver comprehensive results. A Royal Commission will also lend commentary, and will likely contain recommendations about the Army’s future role in disaster relief.¹¹ Yet few would have imagined that, so soon after, Australia would be embroiled in a health—and soon to be economic—disaster of global proportions.¹² The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Army is clearly going to be lasting and potentially even profound. At the time this paper was written, the ADF has established a joint task force, and the Army has made its own contributions of bespoke capabilities supporting state and federal government objectives. Much of the support provided by the Army has been in capabilities already under extreme pressure. These include health services and other logistics functions that are limited

in capacity. The Army has also contributed to Defence economic stimulus measures through bringing forward purchasing and adjusting where and when it spends money. There is both a willingness and an expectation for every capability at the Army's disposal to be directed to the commitment.

It is possible that these operations will be considered exceptional in hindsight, leaving little impact on the Army over the long term. This is unlikely, especially in the case of climate change, where the risks of severe natural disasters will continue to increase and national-level action, including military responses, is likely to be required. Other exceptional circumstances may arise, just as the COVID-19 pandemic did, and once again the ADF will be committed to roles it has not been specifically designed or resourced to perform. It may be just out of reach of people's memories, but the Army supported health responses into Indigenous communities as part of Operation Outreach, in a 'Federal intervention', in 2007. A more recent example is Army's involvement as part of border security through Operation Sovereign Borders. It seems likely that governments at all levels will be more comfortable in calling for military support given the successful mobilisation of capability that has been witnessed in 2019 and 2020. Thus, the Army should question where its reservoir of capability to support such tasks sits and how it might be prepared, 'scaled' or mobilised to meet its obligations. This may mean that the Army should establish new preparedness requirements in its plans and consider how it employs the well-trained and flexible workforce it has on offer.

The economic crisis

The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are so severe that they are challenging the globalist paradigm and will test the resilience of the nation for years—even decades—to come. A national recession is inevitable as annual gross domestic product plummets 10% in the last quarter alone with many believing that a 'depression' is coming, the likes of which have not been seen for 90 years.¹³ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has predicted that the cost to Australia of its economic shutdown will be over 20 per cent of its annual gross domestic product.¹⁴ Additionally, at the time of writing the Australian Government has committed \$320 billion (16.4 per cent of annual GDP, much of it from debt), dwarfing the stimulus package during the Global Financial Crisis by a factor

of four and reflecting around eight years of cumulative economic growth in the national economy. The significance of these amounts is evident in a comparison with the 2019–2020 Defence budget of 1.9 per cent of GDP.¹⁵ With military capability a reflection of national wealth and the government's willingness to spend on defence, there are always financial risks to the ADF, and the Army within it, during a time of recession. Government assurances to maintain the Defence budget have not only stood firm, but significant additional contributions have been announced, even as national income declines. It is now important for the Army and all in Defence to use this money wisely and in an appropriate way to assure the preservation of national strategic interests. Little more may be forthcoming, even as the changing strategic environment gives reason that further investment may be required.

The Government has announced a decade-long increase to the Defence budget of \$270 billion, but it should not be forgotten that this money is to acquire new capability as much as it is to deliver additional capacity. Financial pressures on Defence remain likely, especially so as resources are redirected to meet the new force structure mandate.¹⁶ Few in the Army would remember the last time Australia was in a recession and fewer still would know how it impacted the Army. The Army may find itself in a situation like it encountered during the 1991 recession, with a transformational capability program underway and funding pressures preventing its full realisation. At that time Defence was only able to fund 75 per cent of its capability requirements, with internal efficiency seeking and the mass outsourcing of organic logistics and departmental services functions the only way out of a financial black hole.¹⁷ Flexibility in the Defence budget was restored. However, the damage done to Army's capacity to prepare, respond and sustain military operations is widely recognised as having caused problems as the ADF deployed on Operation Stabilise in East Timor in 1999.¹⁸ It seems that Defence may avoid this fate given the Government commitment to fund new capability, but it's difficult to predict how the economic situation afflicting Australia will ultimately impact Defence. It is prudent to be prepared for a period in which capability decisions will be made under financial duress and requiring trade-offs; deep analysis, rational thought and a strong sense of the cost of choices will be even more critical in delivering the Army's future capability. This will be the only way it will avoid degrading its preparedness and inviting another 'East Timor' moment at a time where the risk of conflict is higher.

The economic crisis may also have consequences for capabilities acquired for the Army over the coming decade. At this point there is a broad consensus to preserve Defence's major capital programs, especially those that have a direct impact upon employment, Australian industry content, national self-reliance and economic growth.¹⁹ It may be that the Army will continue to be one of a number of important levers that the government can use to stimulate certain sectors or industries within the economy through procurement. This will have implications for the Defence Integrated Investment Program (IIP) and will most certainly influence decisions about how the Army's equipment is sustained and repaired. It is expected that the recently announced investment of extra funds in Defence—funds that could be expended on other Government activities at a time where resources are particularly precious—will result in local investment.²⁰ However, if the fiscal situation degrades further, Defence may have to reallocate funding to areas of perceived higher priority as it did in 1991, drawing resources from uncommitted capability programs, sustainment budgets and potentially personnel budgets. The Army's senior leaders, and those who will follow them in the years to come, may be forced into 'least worst' choices with respect to the Army's future force design. In this environment, it will be important for the Army to develop a narrative to convince others that an investment in it is strategically necessary, as well as reflecting potential strategic threats.

Budgetary resilience will therefore be one of the most important concerns for all in Defence as Australia moves from the COVID-19 health crisis into an economic crisis. An increase to the Defence budget does not mean that the Army can be profligate, as these resources are tied to acquiring new capability rather than specifically addressing extant resource gaps. A few exceptions do exist—Government has explicitly addressed the need for larger quantities of stockholdings and improved facilities. For the Army, however, it must carefully steward the resources it has been given to make the most of the Nation's generosity. The government's desire to repay debt used to shore up the national economy will create powerful headwinds as Defence aspires to continue its modernisation plans throughout the decade. Financial guarantees can be waived if the budgeting demands it; the Army naturally has to be adaptable to the needs of the Commonwealth. Changing financial needs over the next decade could fundamentally affect what capabilities are acquired and even how much redundancy stocks and supplies are eventually procured to sustain operations. Importantly,

with fresh lessons in mind, strategic resilience—especially in the context of resourcing ADF activities—might be brought to the fore. All of these issues will pose enormous risks and challenges for what is now considered the normal ‘business of Defence’.



The Army’s role in the resilience agenda

Recent public emergencies have seen the term ‘national resilience’ proliferate in political and popular discourse. But it is not a new idea. The idea of national resilience as it applies to natural disasters has been a government interest since 2011. The concept was stewarded by the Department of Home Affairs and has resulted in partnered planning across a broad church of government and non-government agencies including Defence.²¹ This view of resilience speaks to the ability of Australian society to restore normality after traumatic events. Most members of the national security community, alternatively, consider resilience as a measure of how Australia absorbs a strategic shock as well as its capacity to respond effectively afterwards. More recently, though prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, national resilience was measured in a debate about strategically valuable commodities such as fuels and a range of critical industrial products (such as electronics).²² This particular view of resilience is linked to the older concept of ‘supply-chain security’—an idea advocated by leaders of modern globalisation and concerned with surety of commercial supply.²³

'National resilience' may have been an important topic before the bushfire devastation of 2019–2020; now it is seen as an alternative to a globalist economic approach that seems to have failed us. The fragility of Australian prosperity was exposed as citizens stormed shops for basic household items, the capacity limitations of the national health sector were revealed and shown in the challenge it has been for government to deploy resources to overcome such a significant health and economic emergency. This is a crisis of supply, rather than demand; where the problems have resulted from non-availability rather than a collapse in society's desire for them. Military observers should have viewed this situation with nervousness, as a similar fragility exists in the supply chains required by the ADF to maintain its technologically sophisticated and otherwise highly capable joint force.²⁴ But these observers should also consider national resilience as a pre-eminent security concern, for it is the role of militaries to protect their nation's prosperity through the use of armed force. As geographer Deborah Cowen believes, there has always been a 'profound entanglement' between war and trade.²⁵ Resilience is a problem societal in its scale and has prompted much discussion about the limits of the assumptions that underpin our daily lives.

It is patently clear that 'national resilience' should matter to the Army. The Army—indeed, the ADF—seeks a resilient nation (as well as resilient relationships with supporting partners) to ensure reliable access to products, services and people to support its operations. Established properly, sources of national resilience can create situations of considerable strategic advantage. Reliable supply provides flexibility by creating opportunities for decision-makers, as well as being intrinsically important for an army that must prepare for a range of contingencies. A resilient nation can be speedily mobilised and resources can be directed more efficiently to military operations if the government desires. In other words, a military with reliable access to what it needs can respond quicker to a broader range of events and sustain its operations for longer. Supply-chain security, revealed to be so lacking in the current pandemic yet under stress for years preceding, is now an area of strategic risk that the national security community will be deliberating upon.²⁶

For the Army, aspirations for improved resilience are likely to be a powerful impetus for further integration with industry partners and supporting defence infrastructure.²⁷ There is a policy aspect to this that Army will only ever be able to influence rather than substantially design, but the Army's partnerships with industry and national institutions can stimulate the development of the capacities that are needed. The Army continues to work on its relationships with industry through a range of programs conducted by the Land Capability Division of Army Headquarters, in partnership with the Land Systems Division of the Capability, Acquisition and Sustainment Group. Accompanying plans will be foundational to the establishment of the 'coherent approach to mobilisation and the national support infrastructure' that Stephan Fruhling described in 2017.²⁸ Furthermore, with a shared understanding of preparedness requirements, the Army can help industry prepare a greater industrial capacity for the time it may be needed for military use. Although this model suits a vastly different societal and political approach than is possible in Australia, it does highlight that improved national resilience can be attained through a considered approach to defence–industry relationships.

For those who doubt that this is an important issue for the Army, it should be remembered that many of the ADF's commitments on operations overseas over recent decades have been done so as a small component of large coalitions. In these coalitions, leadership usually comes with the obligation to provide common logistics services and support to participating nations. Supply-chain risks and logistics problems for Australian forces may have been masked by arrangements that saw logistics burden often carried by our larger partners. Furthermore, they should also ponder on the fact that globalisation has made it increasingly difficult to quantify or determine where supply risks are, where military items and materiel are produced and what it can conceivably do to influence national or international industry. Sinking funds into large military stockholdings may not be the only answer, but it is clear that an answer is needed.²⁹ Reliability is in question; this is not a fault of industry but a consequence of the complex, decentralised and globalised industry environment evolved for efficiency and now tested by extraordinary circumstances. The Army has begun to invest in commitments that allow for reliability—to deliver 'assured logistics'. Australian industry is now quite aware of the need to match short-notice, strategic responses. But it may be that the Army—along with the ADF—needs to better understand how it can influence the capacity of industry to 'scale' in parallel with the fielded force.

The acceleration of major power competition

'It is clear, however, that Australia's strategic environment has deteriorated more rapidly than anticipated when we made this commitment in the 2016 Defence White Paper. This deterioration means adjustment should be made by the Government to our defence policy, capability and force structure.'

2020 Defence Strategic Update³⁰

Increased competition between major powers has been monitored widely since the 2014 Russian seizure of Crimea. In military circles this competition was operationalised and given names ranging from 'hybrid warfare' to, most recently, 'political warfare'.³¹ In the recently released Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff argue that the binary conception of peace and war is now obsolete and a 'competition continuum' now applies.³² This narrative echoes lessons of Cold War national mobilisation calculus—a point captured in Hal Brands' articulation of the 'lost art of long-term competition' and practice of the 'the dark art of political warfare'.³³ With these articles, Brands articulates the importance of influence and the criticality of engagement versus withdrawing into isolation.³⁴ For Australia to be influential amid this competition, it aspires to be active within the region and work to preserve strategic interests that are increasingly under threat.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a range of trends, but the exacerbation of tensions between major powers is significant. Recent disputes have related to debate over the causes of the pandemic, over medical resources and supply-chains, and the consequences of economic shutdowns across the world, among other disputes. The Bank of America Merrill-Lynch reports that the crisis will only accelerate the deterioration of US geopolitical hegemony and that power will be shared across more countries.³⁵ This won't necessarily end with high-intensity warfare, but tensions will likely run rife. The resource cost to compete militarily against the US and its allies with 'dangerous luxuries' remains extremely high, meaning that the Army as part of the ADF's joint force can still meaningfully contribute to deterrence and assuring peace.³⁶ It is possible that competition will increasingly turn to the employment of proxies (horizontal escalation) rather than risk conflict (vertical escalation) through the employment of irregular (non-state) actors and non-military levers of power.³⁷

Major power conflict in the future should not be entirely discounted, with the COVID-19 pandemic seeming to create the conditions for 'open', rather than 'grey zone' military adventurism. In June, Chinese and Indian forces fought in the Himalayas; border tensions escalated to the point that the first loss in life in 45 years eventuated.³⁸ Turkish forces continue to intervene in Libya in an example of how countries are escalating military commitments while the pandemic compels other countries to look inward to their health and economic crises.³⁹ Writers including Andrew Krepenivich remind us that conflict can manifest at a much greater rate than we would normally expect.⁴⁰ Although the *2020 Defence Strategic Update* discusses present-day conflict in the 'grey zone', the reality is more and more fighting is occurring in open view with the world becoming an increasingly dangerous place.

The prospect of 'open' conflict is rising. In Australia's case, right now, strategic competition has economic overtones. Since the Global Financial Crisis reshaped global economics from 2008, there has been an increased blurring of an 'economic mindset' and a 'security mindset'; as military power is underwritten by economic strength, rising major power economies change the calculus about military deterrence and threaten the pre-existing strategic order.⁴¹ Geoeconomics, a term referring to the use of economics for geopolitical purposes, has been reborn. With the economic consequences of the pandemic, however, the competition will only accelerate as geostrategic opportunism sees rivals fuel an already 'explicit geopolitical contest'.⁴² Economic tools may be used as a way of coercion through sanctions and trade restrictions, or economic agreements purportedly to aid economic recovery may instead serve as geostrategic shackles to ensure dependency or partnerships. Trade and investment will become increasingly securitised, and new strategic interests will rise to be protected by the possible use of military force. Quite clearly this will have connotations for the Army, for not only does its capability and capacity depend on the economic characteristics of the nation, but there is a rising potential that new 'flashpoints' will emerge that will necessitate some form of military response.

The Government's recent *2020 Defence Strategic Update* and accompanying *2020 Force Structure Plan* directly respond to these 'accelerated' threats, and compel the ADF to 'shape, deter and respond' when required. These terms require the Army, as part of the joint force, to further invest in areas essential for the 'ADF's self-reliance for delivering

deterrence effects’ and even to ‘enhance lethality’ for high-intensity conflict (essentially a euphemism for what we know as war).⁴³ But there are many other ways that the Army can play a part in preserving peace—the most significant being its capacity for engagement with partner nations throughout the region. The Army’s international engagement approach has always been a positive influence upon Australia’s international presence and has ensured close ties with regional and global partners are sustained.

While a narrative of US ‘minimising exposure’ to the outcomes of competition has been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, a realignment of US strategic interests will only increase the need for Australia to be regionally focused.⁴⁴ To this end, discussion of cooperation with India and Indonesia might become more important than ever before.⁴⁵ Closer ties with historical partners such as Singapore, Japan, France and New Zealand will support the development of collective offsets against expansionistic nations.⁴⁶ But, most of all, the quality of the bonds established by supporting and working with smaller nations and friends across the Indo-Pacific, from Papua New Guinea to Micronesia, will be as important to security as preparing for the defence of the Australian mainland is. In coming years, the Army will have an important role in underpinning this engagement through its international engagement program.



Tensions in preparedness

The Australian Army must adapt current routines to not only the circumstances of today but also the challenges of the future. The stability of sustaining virtually continual operations in the Middle East since 2001 — where a systematic process of force preparation, deployment and redeployment defined the Army's daily business — is now over. The Army's 'force generation cycle', matched with the standardisation of Army's three full-time brigades and a consistent approach to individual and collective training, was an ideal way to establish operational readiness. It ensured the Army could systematically provide highly capable and ready forces for planned deployment rotations, while maintaining a capacity for minor operations at short notice. However, as successful as the 'force generation cycle' has been, this approach to preparedness has had significant costs. These costs will make it difficult for the Army to sustain this preparedness approach during the next decade.

The edifices of routine have mounted up as two decades of consistency conform process, plans and mindsets. The 20-year cycle of operations has emphasised components of the Army over others within the Army's 'force generation cycle'. The need to sustain numerous deployment rotations and forces at high readiness has resulted in readiness imbalances within the Army. These imbalances have manifested in organisational fatigue, capabilities lacking scale, materiel availability issues and heightened logistics costs due to the high rate of training.⁴⁷ John Blaxland describes the modern Army as 'boutique'; what it can do it does well, but it suffers for its lack of scale and likely breadth of roles.⁴⁸ Conscious of these costs, the Army has regularly reflected on ways to ameliorate these problems in its planning and concepts concerning how it might fight. Unfortunately, much of this work has been undone by the emergencies at hand that have continued to apply pressure upon the Service.

It is essential that the Army begins its response to not just the immediate problems but also the ones that might follow. The Army's bias for action will be enhanced as it matures its strategy for the future. This strategy and the resultant capability and preparedness plans need to be developed now and a narrative for the future established early. This will require the Army to check assumptions that will distract it from honest reflection. However, the Army's planning approach must also account for the inherent changeability

of the strategic situation that Australia faces. It is absolutely possible that the trends mentioned in *Accelerated Warfare* and reinforced here will converge into major power conflict. Conflict could come much sooner than the time the Army's plans bear fruit, especially in the context of the normally long lead times for the acquisition of military hardware. With this in mind, this paper will move onto a prediction of what may unfold in the coming decade. This paper provides a future to consider. That future may not eventuate, but it is necessary to explore it anyway.

Part 2: the future

The second part of this paper is a hypothesis about the future. It is based on an extrapolation of the trends mentioned in Part 1. As a hypothesis, it a starting point for further investigation—some of which is contained in Part 3. The future depicted here is a means to assess several significant strategic risks and exists only to show the ways that the Army might respond to the emergent threats and challenges over a nominal 10-year period. But it also shows that the Army must maintain its well-defined vision of where it may be in 10 years if it is to have a chance of being reasonably prepared. Preparedness is a relationship between desired capability and time, and without such a target it is impossible to make rational decisions about what the Army must do and when.⁴⁹ The Army, if not the country, must improve its preparedness over the long term. This will require investment to prevent the gap between required capability and actual capability from becoming so large that the Army cannot be scaled to meet the need in time.⁵⁰

Why is the 10-year period important? It is a period that reasonably qualifies as the medium-term, as distinct from the short-term, crisis planning and the long-term futurism of multi-decade acquisition cycles that typically define Defence procurement and strategic planning activity. More poignantly, it also represents the timeframe recently emphasised in the *2020 Defence Strategic Update*. Moreover, and as identified in part 1, there are serious strategic risks and problems for Australia which could manifest in this period. Many of these risks have been articulated in a range of complementary research and commentary already.⁵¹ There will be pressure to focus on the short-term as the Army responds to events. However, a preference for addressing present problems potentially denies the Army the opportunity to prepare for future ones that are now well described and seemingly increasingly likely to occur.

In other words, if it does not start planning for these possible futures now, the Army could lurch from crisis to crisis and will be in a perpetual state of surprise.

This part of the paper charts the decade by describing challenges, risks and opportunities in the context of three time periods. The first period is from 2020 to 2022—a span of time defined by the COVID-19 health emergency and its immediate consequences. The second period is from 2022 to 2025. During this period vital decisions concerning the Army's reconstitution must be made, not only to help it recover from an intense period of effort but also to begin to adjust force posture to reflect emergent geostrategic challenges. It is likely that Australia will be amid a recession, and there will be considerable pressure for the Army to meet government fiscal objectives while supporting the national recovery and evolving strategic policy requirements. The third period is from 2025 to 2030. For the purposes of this paper, the final half of the decade is concerned with the rapid re-posture of the Army as a counter to imminent conflict. Of course, this assumes that there are no warnings of conflict in the first half of the decade.

There are two important caveats to this paper that must be stated. This paper has assumed that the crises that the Army, as part of the ADF, will face are arranged in a linear pattern over time. These periods are by no means fixed—they are arbitrary segmentations for the purpose of maintaining a narrative within the paper and helping guide thought. Secondly, the timeframe is equally arbitrary, although a ten-year pattern of events seems 'reasonable enough' to plan towards. The reality is that many risks may transpire earlier, later, or (hopefully) not at all. The events of 2019 and 2020 show us that crises do not conform to nice, neat patterns of cause and effect. It is dangerous for planners within the Army, as well as the rest of Defence, to think that they may have the luxury of a decade before the military is called out for a crisis. Rarely do conflicts and crises begin at a time of choosing for strategically defensive nations such as Australia, and its military must prepare for the likelihood that it will not be as prepared to the level its planning aspires for. It is time to prepare offsets if the reality gessed at here seems likely to come to pass.

2020–2021: the Army as part of the Defence response to pandemic

As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic defies the experiences of any serving member of the Army and ADF. During this emergency the Army has undertaken an important societal role, but one beyond an idealised view of military professionalism. Army personnel have already been required for duties that other government agencies cannot provide. For much of the near future the entirety of Defence will be grappling with the balance between its *jurisdiction* to preserve Australian sovereignty and its *capacity* and *obligation* to support the nation in disaster relief. This support, provided as part of the Defence effort to meet an essentially war-like footing, has drawn a natural connection to mobilisation and an automatic redirection of attention to the urgent. Ad hoc organisation will be required, emphasising the already-declared need for the Army's organisation to be malleable as needs change. Resources, such as increased volumes of relevant supplies, health equipment and repair parts, will need to be appropriated. Army's proficiency in organising and leading multi-agency efforts will be essential; this is especially important in remote areas of Australia, where self-sufficient military capabilities will be critical. In the immediate response to the crisis, and conscious of the experience of Operation Bushfire Assist, Army will likely have to exploit opportunities to scale.

The choices made at this time will probably be beyond the expectations set by Army's preparedness system, with people and equipment employed outside of role and for indefinite periods. These choices will compromise preparedness over the longer term as Army focuses on directing all effort to immediate needs. Not only will a full range of full-time and part-time forces be employed but it is also certain that the Army's training capacity will be redirected. This could include the provision of specialists to support units or as part of a follow-on force, the rapid training of niche specialist skills or even support for the training of civilian responders. If the latter occurs, it will be important that the Army aligns military training standards with civilian equivalents; this alignment is also important such that, if need be, in the future civilians with requisite skills and training can be brought into uniform at short notice.

The Government will likely require Defence, including Army, to do its part in supporting a suffering national economy. After all, a significant increase of funds to the amount of \$270 billion over ten years has been invested into ADF capability with the *2020 Defence Strategic Update*; this is an important investment that will invariably be utilised to stimulate local industry.⁵² Defence has already sought to assist the Australian economy by bringing forward purchases, adjusting capability expenses and employing a range of other methods. There will be a point where this inefficient deployment of funds will have to be replaced by a targeted, timely and efficient approach to creating resilience within the national support base. This will be important if the geostrategic climate worsens and a military emergency appears to be developing. The emerging economic crisis has already revealed such fragility in the national economy as it applies to defence that a government expectation to maximise Australian content in materiel and stocks will remain starkly evident and strategically vital.

The way in which Army transitions from a state of emergency to one of sustainable normality after 2022 will have a considerable effect on its agility and adaptability in the following three years. The consequence of successive crises since 2019 will be felt in the endurance of people and the state of equipment and in the legacy of hastily established processes introduced to control frantic military activity. Some areas will necessitate greater attention than others as the Army considers the rotation of tired units into tasks or as specific capabilities (especially health, engineering and command and control) are exhausted. Governance and other artefacts of good management will be damaged in haste, but there will be an opportunity to streamline processes and better align activities because of what is learned to be truly important. The ADF's preparedness model will probably be so compromised that it is valueless, and Army will have to start to create opportunities for reprieve so that it can respond to future contingencies and other events.

The Army will likely continue to fulfil to fulfilling its humanitarian and partnership obligations regionally. It is unknown what the effect of COVID-19 will be in the populous nations of South-East Asia or how effectively smaller nations throughout the Indo-Pacific will assure the health of their citizens. Australia, and its partners, will play an important role. Their presence will not only support humanitarian assistance outcomes but also offset other actors willing to exploit the opportunity that a health and economic crisis may bring

to their claims in the region. Army's international engagement program will also contribute to deterrence through the extension of already tight-knit bonds with regional partners who, like Australia, seek a safe and prosperous region. Where capacity does not allow such a level of engagement, the Army must also work with like-minded nations to preserve regional stability and security and support Defence efforts throughout the world. The maintenance of established, close relationships with Australia's neighbours will be a valuable strategic offset that will reward the ADF's preparations in the years ahead.

The next two years for the Army will likely be intense and draining. This is not just a consequence of the direct impact of supporting operations underway, but also because of the need to reconstitute after Operations Bushfire Assist and COVID-19 Assist, the resumption of routine but necessary training, as well as posture the Army to meet the needs of the new Government direction. However, the Army must avoid the temptation to fixate on its immediate problems. Capability planners must be left to continue their work, although their efforts must reflect the new reality facing the Army. A substantial effort will be required to adjust the Army's capability program to reflect resourcing and changes to the time at which acquired materiel may be available. The after-effects of an injection of resources from the Defence budget to Australian industry will have to be managed, and a more sustainable method of economic stimulus will be needed to ensure the long-term viability of the Australian defence industry and commercial activity.

Most important of all, the Army will need to apply its best thinkers and strategists work to produce solutions for emerging strategic problems. The Army will need to draw upon its intellectual capital through organisations such as the Australian Army Research Centre, its Future Land Warfare Branch and elsewhere in Army Headquarters, but also leverage a 'virtual' network to deal with the specific problems of the day. Concepts and plans developed will have to communicate the value of 'the Army' in a changing world; its utility and purpose, its criticality given Australian geostrategic circumstances, and its current and planned level of capability and resourcing—including legacy 'hollowness'—so that it continues to present a compelling case for investment. Moreover, these plans must ensure Army fulfils its primal purpose as the basis for the joint land force and an important part of the strategic offset that is the ADF. The purpose of these plans, prepared alongside partners across all three Services and the joint domain,

will be to see the Army achieve the best possible preparedness outcome as the nation struggles through recession and strategic threats continue to grow.



2022–2025: the Army, recession and recovery

The period 2022–2025 is one of reconstitution for the Army, but not rest. This paper assumes that by 2022 the ADF's COVID-19 task force will have been stood down and the nation will be recovering politically, socially, and economically. Nonetheless, it is almost certain that in this period the Army will be involved in a range of important regional development activities. These tasks could range from continuing to support primary health care in cities but also remote locations, to facilitating training or support to other government initiatives. Relationships with the Australian community will be renewed, and new forms of service might be investigated to support emerging Defence needs. Because this paper is concerned with preparing the Army for worst-case scenarios, it also imagines that, within the global recovery period, a range of state and non-state actors will exploit the opportunities created by a world in crisis.

There will still be a range of other crucial activities for the Army. The impacts of climate change, so starkly evident during 2019 and early 2020, will result in consistent Army involvement in disaster relief responses. These may be

within Australia or without; the capacity of regional partners to respond to disasters being limited by the challenging economic times. The Army must be sure to contribute to these international tasks as much as possible, not because the government demands it to be so but because they are intrinsically valuable to Australia's outreach in the region. By providing an appropriate response to severe weather events regionally, Australia ensures its good standing and strong relationships. Furthermore, these activities help to demonstrate collective resolve and a willingness for regional nations to work together for human development and security reasons.

A period of reconstitution is always necessary after an operation; a period during which personnel rest, supplies are restored, routine and training are recommenced and adjustments to the organisation are made as lessons learned are applied. Reconstitution does not occur quickly, and given the recent confluence of operations that the Army will have supported, it is possible that years may pass before a normalised approach to the Army's preparedness is resumed. Over this period there will be a need to prioritise resources, time and effort as it will not be possible to remediate everything. It will have been important that an orderly hand-off of operational tasks be transitioned to other government agencies or, perhaps better still, industries that are trying to recover.

What is especially important now during the period 2022-2025 is that it begins building the 'future-ready' Army. The Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Rick Burr, initiated a deep study of the Army's tasks and requirements in late 2019. This resulted in the development of a 'Army Objective Force' model that will shape the Army's force structure, posture and capabilities such that the Army better meets the strategic requirements set by Government. This work has been vital given the Government expectation that the Army, and the rest of the ADF, uses the funds it has invested to constitute a force that is better able to shape, deter and respond. In the short-term—and once the final Army plan has been endorsed in the context of the *2020 Force Structure Plan*—the Army will have to rapidly move to ably introduce new capabilities and better use old ones. It will have to adapt with the introduction of long-range precision weaponry, new armoured reconnaissance and fighting vehicles, and maritime capabilities, to name just a few. It must support existing ADF studies on mobilisation and experiment as to the capability and preparedness response needed. As a paper investigating extremes, what

follows will be a consideration of what an Army heading to full-scale war might look like.

The introduction of the 'Army Objective Force' need not commit the Army to an inflexible plan that ages poorly. As the Army starts to adjust its force structure, it will be doing so in full cognisance of the changing strategic trends and circumstances affecting Australia. Applied research will be necessary, and the Service must continue to lead its reforms with rational analysis. It must also explore the use of analytic methods and approaches that allow the Army, as part of the ADF, to scrutinise the impact of strategic competition. A proper 'net assessment' will be required to guide the development of a 'fighting force' that is capable of scaled responses right up to a full-scale war for national survival. This form of strategic assessment focuses on strategic interactions between nations and it looks to how 'red' and 'blue' strategies interplay.⁵³ This will help the Army's leaders make the right choices about how the Army is best organised, situated and prepared.

There are some important areas of work that must accompany the Army's efforts with the 'Army Objective Force'. Firstly, and as part of an ADF effort, it will have to develop a plan to sequence mobilisation so that it can determine what forces are required and when. This will have to match the procurement of materiel; given the acquisition of materiel takes much longer than the mobilisation, training and preparation of personnel, substantial sums of money and a higher risk attitude to procurement will be required. In terms of personnel, longer-to-train and technically vital personnel categories would be prioritised over combat forces. This will necessitate planning for a potential expansion in the Army's training establishments early in the period. A sensible war-stock plan will be required, and the Army will have to work closely with industry to assure logistics support. The list goes on.

Once again, it is important to remember that all this change will be occurring in a period of significant economic stress for Australia, despite the commitment by Government to direct significant additional funds to the ADF's modernisation. Irrespective of whether an existential threat to Australia will emerge by 2030, reconstitution while Australia is in an economic recession will be tremendously difficult. Risks must be expressed by the Army so that resources can be efficiently prioritised and allocated. There are numerous reasons that this is the case, and only a few will be mentioned here. As described earlier, Australia's last recession was in 1991.

When it came, Army was forced to make the choice between maintaining structural preparedness (that is, the force structure and size needed to meet the strategic requirements set of it) and maintaining its capability programs. It chose its materiel. The 1991 Force Structure Review saw Army reduce in size, and tracts of its logistics forces were commercialised in line with the government agenda of the time.⁵⁴ This choice came back to bite the Army during the stabilisation mission to East Timor—an operation no one expected was coming.⁵⁵

Circumstances are different this time around. Firstly, and most importantly the Federal Government is clearly concerned about opportunistic nations exploiting regional discord in the wake of the health and economic crisis and will likely redirect funds to Defence if the strategic environment necessitates it. Secondly, and as the cause of the coming recession will probably be tied to a lack of labour, the government is likely to see the ADF as valuable in stimulating Australian defence industry and thus providing a source of employment, and as a necessary presence in the community. The Army will, naturally, be a recipient of this investment. Thirdly, and recent responses to crises have revealed, there is not much ‘fat’ in Defence left to draw upon without fundamentally impacting the capacity of the ADF to achieve what is directed of it. If the 2020 Defence Strategic Update is any indication, it is highly unlikely that Government would tolerate a lowering of the ADF’s preparedness given the prevailing strategic climate.

Nonetheless, it is still within the realm of possibility that the Army will have to rationalise even as new investments materialise. The economic cost of the COVID-19 pandemic will be sharp and, despite assurances that the Defence budget will be preserved, necessity may force the Government’s hand. All Government expenditure is likely to be under review, and the efficient use of Defence resources by a responsible Army will be paramount to succeeding in a difficult fiscal environment. This will be necessary despite the commitment made by the Federal Government to achieve a Defence budget of 2% of GDP with the 2020 Defence Strategic Update. But there could also be a contest for resources if government requires the ADF to adjust its preparedness as the strategic situation deteriorates. The Services, and now Joint Capability Group, will form arguments and narratives to either protect capabilities from being diminished or seek limited funds to develop expanding force structures. In either case the Army will not forget its responsibility to the joint force and be graceful if resources must be directed

to other areas of Defence. There is always opportunity in such times, as they can force important changes to organisational behaviour and operational doctrine. But it is exceptionally important for the Army to have developed the case for investment and nurtured its arguments with a narrative and communication plan well before Defence's force structure planners confer in a room.

As the Army returns to a manageable pace of activity, concepts to achieve the 'Army Objective Force' of 2030 will begin to drive substantial changes to Army's form and function. The rethinking of Army preparedness now underway within Army Headquarters, inclusive of methods of scaling and mobilisation, will be accompanied by reforms to the workforce and governance. Materiel preparedness and logistics in the broad will be important topics to impel Army's transformation plans. For a time, Army might have to turn inward to fully invest in organisational reform to draw every efficiency possible out into the open. Data-informed decision-making will be in order. This may necessitate a significant restructure of the Army's commands and organisations. Such reform will enable the Army to better grip the dynamics of the organisation, controlling activity so that the important goals of the future can be met. The Army must be determined to meet its 2030 objective—whatever it believes it to be—and serious in its attempts to establish the systems of control that will be so important to its force posture when it truly matters.

2025–2030: the transformed Army

The second half of the decade will involve five years of significant adjustment as the preparations and plans of earlier years are put into action. Once again, several significant assumptions are made here. Firstly, this scenario assumes that there is a need for Army to scale in size to a point beyond that of the contemporary Army. This will be necessary as the strategic environment necessitates that the Army take a greater role in national deterrence. Secondly, it assumes that there have been no further crises on the scale of a major civil emergency. This may be just good fortune or because any natural or man-made disaster requiring a military intervention is well within the capabilities of the ADF of the time—perhaps, in this case, Army has better prepared itself for a broader role in severe climate change after considering its Operation Bushfire Assist role. Thirdly, this scenario

assumes that the Army, as part of the Defence venture and a broader national security approach, has done all that it reasonably can to arrange processes and activities to meet a significant strategic requirement.

From 2025, the Army will be well on the way to making the 'Army Objective Force' a reality. It will have balanced the requirements for infrastructure, workforce and strategic need to reshape the Army such that it is more efficient and easily sustained in peace. This might include the consolidation of new materiel where it is to be exercised and with access to industry partners right to the reorganisation of commands to accommodate the introduction into Service new capabilities such as long-range missiles. Some parts of Army will be heavily involved in defending Australia against 'grey zone' threats, though all of Army has a role to play in ensuring deterrence and responding to evolving threats. All parts of Army, however, will be involved in regional engagement activities. A focus on the region to Australia's north will naturally see a range of activities underway, with a range of partners. Regional missions will become more important than ever as Australia demonstrates its commitment to regional security, as the Army redesigns itself to better operate in the archipelagic environment. In short, the Army could very well undertake a transformation at least as significant as that which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s.

But the cost of transformation could be high if transformation is haphazard. The second half of the decade could very well leave the Army's capacity degraded, the intensity of its efforts reducing preparedness. The cost of high operational readiness and the effort of transforming the Army will continue to stress the Army's resources and tire its personnel, meaning little flexibility will be in its budget to procure equipment and reconstitute capability at the rate previously planned. Its capacity, measured in terms of logistics sustainability and the impact of a high rate of activity on its workforce, will be equally limited. Sources of efficiency within the Service will be frustratingly difficult to find, even if Army's organisational profile changes to reflect impending tasks and strategic requirements. The Army's plans to work with its partners in industry and academia and across the Australian national security enterprise will be in their infancy. All this will be taking place while it watches northward, considering the simmering global tension and national competition in the detritus of the collapsed global economy.

The ADF will want to adjust its force structure and posture, supported by an upswelling of concern in public commentary about geostrategic dynamics. The Army's own concepts for 'force scaling' could very well be tested and the Army will need to adjust its form as a response to emergent strategic threats. However, it cannot be guaranteed that further funds will be redirected from economic recovery to military expenditure in 2025. Army's priorities will have to be directed to those capabilities directly relevant to strategic offsets (such as cyber and command and control capabilities), those essential for facilitating any scaling (for example, training establishments) and those that will be difficult to raise at short notice. It will be difficult for the Army to find funds for expensive high-end technology, and it will have to be judicious in where it directs its capability investments. 'Seed corn' will need to be preserved across the force, in areas that can be scaled rapidly as preparedness levels are raised or the planned process of mobilisation begins. This could include the Reserve forces that will likely form the backbone of any response to full-scale war.

A confluence of issues will be tied into pre-crisis activity. The Army's units might have to be positioned to suit rapid emergency responses or as regionalised 'anchors' around which force expansion may occur. For example, a Reserve or regular brigade may become the heart of a larger formation or based upon a specific operational requirement. The Army will have to work closely with joint agencies to ensure that logistics networks are prepared, and industry partners and civilian officials are integrated in all planning. The Army, through other agencies in Defence, will have to maintain close bonds with regional authorities, as these relationships will be important in facilitating force scaling. Quite clearly, workforce planners will be busy, considering options beyond when regular and existing 'Reserve' forces are exhausted in the first stages of a major crisis response. Industry plans for mobilisation will have been debated in government, policy will have been rewritten and a five-year plan to take the nation from peace to war will have been considered.

It will have been important for the Army to have unpicked a range of issues relating to its sustainment and sustainability by this point. It will have to determine what it requires to be operationally self-sufficient and use this knowledge to make informed judgements about stockholdings and partnerships with industry. Advice from potential coalition partners—in particular, the US—will be essential to ensure partners consider one

another's material needs. The idea of 'self-reliance' will be popular and shape strategic investments in local industry; it is even plausible that the nationalisation of some businesses may be required to ensure Australia has the strategic resilience it needs. Improvements in the Army's self-sufficiency—the ability to operate from organic resources and without the goodwill of a coalition partner—will mean the Australian Government will have more options for the Army's operational use.

As mentioned throughout this paper, what is being described here is an extreme. The chance of Australian being embroiled in a major conflict in 10 years might appear low, but few thought we would be amid a global health crisis that has upended our way of life in 2020. Major conflict can emerge from economic and political upheaval, the likes of which we are witnessing now, and it almost always catches the world by surprise. So it is important for the Army consider the worst outcomes, for it is the role of a professional military to be prepared for them. Thinking about such a problem now is better than being unprepared for it later. An even better reason for our interest in the topic now is that 10 years seems to be a distressingly short period of time to prepare the necessary defence of Australian sovereignty against an existential threat. Imagine what it would take to respond sooner! It takes decisive action now to prepare the Army and to steward the nation to a point where a well-planned and executed scaling of the Army can occur. In the final part of this paper, and considering the future described here, the paper will articulate pre-eminent concepts that should drive planning.

Part 3: the challenges of the next ten years

Enough has already changed to warrant a serious rethink of assumptions about the Army and its future. The next decade, from 2020 to 2030, will be immensely challenging for all who serve in the Army. It may prove to be a change in epoch for the Army, where a pattern of behaviour and activity that defines the present-day Army could very well be swept away to face a dangerous, deadly future. At a minimum, the role of the Army in society will adjust to meet changing expectations. The Army will have to navigate an extremely intensive period of activity before reconstituting and preparing for not just the next crisis but also a range of operational tasks supporting neighbours and preserving the peace in a strategically competitive environment.

After synthesising the scenario presented earlier, while focusing on a 10 year horizon, this paper presents eight challenges for the Army. These challenges, if addressed, are likely to give the Service the best chance of preparing for the worst. But they are only a starting point for discussion. It is impossible to solve every one of the Army's preparedness problems, but it is possible to minimise risks and for the Army to take the opportunity it may have when it can. Time is not forgiving when it comes to preparedness. When time is wasted, the cost is measured in eventual effectiveness on operations.



The Army and its role in supporting the community in national emergencies

The call-out of Reserves to support and the ADF ‘war footing’ for the COVID-19 pandemic highlights how important the ADF is to disaster relief and population support. The scale of these circumstances might be unusual, but the fact that the Army was employed to support government organisations under pressure is not. Not only has Army been vital in national disaster responses throughout its history, it has also always been involved in a wide variety of national development tasks and civil emergencies since its formation. Some have been controversial and have seen the Army perform roles it never expected to—for example, the 2007 health intervention (Operation Outreach) into Australian First Peoples communities. It will be critical for the Army, and Defence, to enunciate the costs and risks associated with supporting these contributions, as preparing for them can have effects on the Army’s ability to achieve its primary role in national defence as training and effort is shared between the two tasks. Nonetheless, it is prudent that the Army prepare force structure and posture solutions— involving all categories of service within its workforce—to better enable it to meet domestic security and disaster relief tasks. For example, the success of the recent Reserve call out for Operation Bushfire Assist highlights a reservoir of capability that extends beyond the conventional role of the part-time workforce.⁵⁶

There is another reason that the Army should invigorate its partnerships with the broader Australian community—a shared understanding of needs improves the national capacity to respond to events. The Army’s recent *National Institution Statement* highlights the essentiality of the Army’s relationship with the community to its effectiveness.⁵⁷ It is starting point for the Army’s narrative, and an important one at that. A recent RAND report assessing the UK military’s relationship with the British community identified the importance of public engagement in creating a resilient society but also noted that this resilience helps to establish effective strategic deterrence.⁵⁸ The Army, through its relationships and continued efforts in supporting civil tasks, will contribute to this effect by continuing its improved integration between Defence and the Australian community. This approach is not new to the Australian Defence establishment. The Australian Government of the 1980s and early 1990s saw it as so important that an ‘agenda’ was commenced and strategic division to manage the agenda was created in HQ ADF.⁵⁹ In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Army should not let slip the tremendous contribution it has made since 2019. It should continue to be a powerful, positive influence on Australian society as a whole.

Addressing structural preparedness

The Army is a force that has been scaled back since the end of the Vietnam War to a small, professional and well-equipped cadre. It relies on personnel that are highly proficient and generalist in nature in order to preserve the necessary skills that a modern army needs. Rather paradoxically, it is becoming more and more expensive to maintain a small force with the best available materiel and training that the Army is used to now. Additionally, the level of technical expertise required to maintain a force incorporating high standards of technology is making the Army technically complex and increasingly difficult to sustain. An expectation of quality has been established that will be extremely expensive to achieve if the Army is forced to scale or expand. These factors conspire to force a rethink of how the Army conceptualises and prioritises preparedness.

The circumstances investigated in this paper are likely to be best responded to by a higher level of structural preparedness developed over the next decade. Structural preparedness—or ‘readiness’, according to Richard Betts—is chiefly concerned with how ready the military or Service is to

supporting its mission in the future.⁶⁰ The term 'force scaling' has seen recent use in the Army, repeated throughout Army's strategic documents and narratives, and is strongly linked to Betts' idea. Structural preparedness is concerned with the mass of the force, its condition and its composition. It is an alternative to operational preparedness, which is concerned with the efficient availability of a particular capability at any particular time.⁶¹ It is difficult to achieve both at the same time; a high state of operational preparedness can degrade structural preparedness through fatigue, and good structural preparedness may result in resources being spread thinly to establish the framework for future tasks. A high level of structural preparedness might be reflected in a 'framework force' where money is spent on an organisation design emphasising rapid force expansion. Conversely, a high level of operational readiness will see a smaller force that is well resourced and ready to deploy at short notice. A balance of both forms relative to strategic requirements is essential as the Army looks to an uncertain decade ahead.

The Australian Army is a force optimised for constant operational service and short-notice contingency responses. Its 'force generation cycle' has performed well in giving the Army a high level of operational preparedness (or being 'ready now').⁶² The Army is likely to be consumed by 'ready now' for a while at least, and the 'force generation cycle' still has an important role in governing what is ready and when. However, this focus should not come at the detriment of its longer-term preparedness and the structure that might be required to counter significant threats to Australian national security. The Army should do what it can in its power to prevent overtraining and overuse becoming self-destructive. A quantifiable measure of capability over time should be developed that is considerate of changes in acquisition, support and sustainability plans and, most importantly, Defence strategy. This preparedness plan must cater for any potential force-scaling or mobilisation requirements and shape all of the Army's routine activities and business.

Matériel and the timing of capability development

Time will be the preparedness metric that drives Army over the next 10 years, and the readiness of matériel the objective. The Army's state of preparedness is not just driven by arbitrary 'notices to move' but also by the timing of when matériel is acquired and infrastructure developed—as well as their state while in use. Militaries often fall into the trap of focusing on the availability of personnel and leave what enables them to act as a secondary concern. As US historian James Huston puts it, '[t]he key to rapid mobilisation is the availability of weapons and equipment, and it is more important to have matériel "in being" than to have unequipped forces in being'.⁶³ The Australian Army had its own harrowing experience of this problem in the short-notice 1999 deployment to East Timor—an operation where deficiencies of basic military equipment highlighted an unacceptable level of risk accepted by the Army.⁶⁴ Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, as Chief of Army in 2003, had a similar experience—he was frustrated by the 'tardiness' in supplying contingents at war in Iraq.⁶⁵ If the Army is to be prepared—and if it is to be capable of efficient 'force scaling' to meet an unforeseen challenge—it has to prioritise matériel readiness and the logistics of the force to create resilience, allow it to absorb 'shock' and respond effectively in short order.

In practice, this means that the Army must have a well-formed sense of the 10 year objective, a coherent organisational plan to meet this objective, and appropriately resourced activities relative to its objectives. The integration of the Army's modernisation program with its preparedness planning will always be important in allowing Army capability and capacity levels can be better predicted. Part of this requirement will be met in a likely reassessment of the IIP given the release of the 2020 Force Structure Plan, made synchronous with other initiatives, including adjustments to force posture and force design. The second important component of this plan will be achieved by a deep analysis of how these capabilities are sustained, including an assessment of surety of supply of all resources needed to make these capabilities operational at the right time and at the right place. This is not just a problem for logisticians; virtually all in the Army's headquarters will be involved in this calculus given the complexity of the task. It is critical work, with dividends delivered in the future. If being 'future ready' requires a reallocation of resources from areas where the time needed to create capability is short to those where lead-time is much longer, the decisions need to be made now.

Resource and capability priorities across the land force

The Army has considered a range of capability changes in Defence strategic planning to meet the objective of being a 'focused force'. It has commenced a considerable body of work in designing the 'Army Objective Force', an approach which considers posture, preparedness and organisational structure to enhance the Army's contribution to the ADF missions of 'shape', 'deter' and 'respond'. The corollary of being a 'focused force' is that the Army will have to decide which capabilities are essential and must be resourced fully, and which are to be held as 'seed corn' at a much lower level of preparedness. At the most extreme, divestment of capabilities that are of lesser essentiality must be considered such that resources can be directed to where they are needed to fulfil the ADF's tasks of 'shape', 'deter' and 'respond'. Moreover, these questions about the Army's future capability and capacity must be considered with an acceptance that 'force scaling' will require the Army to be organisationally and procedurally ready to rapidly adapt. In sum, these proposed changes would significantly aid the development of a long-term plan for achieving the necessary preparedness milestones and could assist in prioritising resources in an Army increasingly defined by its ability to 'scale' its capacity or size.

The Army must relearn how to expand its workforce to meet new requirements. Its current approach of workforce reform, to facilitate new modes of Service, and to eliminate the workforce 'hollowness' that afflicts a range of capabilities is not just essential; workforce reform is fundamental to the Army's capacity to scale. The Army is aware of significant workforce risks in what it terms as 'critical categories'. The challenge with workforce planning is that what is 'critical' in one instance may not be so in others. The Army has had to focus on certain areas of the workforce and the capabilities they represent to sustain long-term operations in the Middle East, but now such operations are over, and mindful of the challenged state of some components of its workforce, it will have to come to a structural solution which reflects the needs of the 2020 Defence Strategic Update. There may be a need to improve the Army's self-sufficiency in areas such as command and control or logistics—capabilities that are likely to be in demand in the immediate future. Furthermore, the introduction of important new capabilities will necessitate a radical shift in the workforce. For some capabilities there

is no other realistic option than investment or reinvestment, and others will have to shoulder the burden of divestment.



Scaling the transformed training system

The Army's training system has been highly effective and capable of meeting a huge variety of needs. Moreover, it has seen renewed attention through the Training Transformation initiative, which aspires to reinvigorate the way teaching occurs. A network of training establishments and centres provides initial employment training to professional courses and integrates with joint offerings over the span of an individual's career. As positive as these changes are, more must be done; it is fundamentally a system that was designed over twenty years ago and will need to change if the Army's preparedness needs to alter. A scoping study of how the training system can be expanded to meet new tasks of the Army, or to facilitate force scaling and potentially mobilisation, might be initiated. This study should be conducted alongside parallel reforms to the Army's preparedness system and be fundamental to the development of the 'Army Objective Force'; any following plan should consider all facets of the training system, focusing on areas such as qualification management that enables people to be very rapidly transitioned into Service at short need.

Leveraging the ‘Total Workforce’

The Army, as part of the ADF and as mentioned above, has undertaken to improve workforce flexibility in recent years. It has scoured analysis about the needs of the future workforce, and is working hard to compete for talent in an increasingly competitive labour market. These improvements should be accelerated, and continue to extend into a systemic review of part-time service as well as ensuring workforce mobility. The existing Reserves program was employed to great effect during Operation Bushfire Assist, and many valuable lessons were learned with respect to activating latent capability through a call out.⁶⁶ However, a change in expectations is likely to give cause for the Army and others to question whether its present approach to the part-time force will create the flexibility the Army needs in the future. The part-time force has demonstrated itself to be capable of supporting full-time forces on exercise and operations and can clearly take a leadership role in many of the critical responses to national crises that have been seen over the last two years.

A review of the part-time force's tasks must consider how different workforce categories as well as civilian employees and industry partners can be incorporated during 'force scaling'. The regular and Reserve components of the Army should be capable of performing all current and foreseeable tasks as well as responding to short-term military contingencies. This is the foundation of its preparedness. But it must also be versatile enough that the existing part-time model of service can adjust as rapidly as we saw on Operation Bushfire Assist; possessing a maintainable and expandable training base reflecting the needs of its part-time force, its personnel with an adequate range of skills to offer flexibility as Army scales, a capacity to operate for extended periods self-sufficiently, and full interoperability with its coalition and joint partners.

The Army in the joint force

Crises can bring the best and worst out in individuals and organisations. Leaders within the Army could be tempted to retreat inward and look to ways to prioritise the Army's agenda over others in the struggles ahead. This paper has dwelt on the Army's future and spoken of the consequences of trends and issues only as they apply to the Service. Yet the Service is one part of the ADF, a smaller part of Defence, an even smaller part of the national security 'enterprise', and an even smaller constituent of Australian national power. No event portrayed in this paper can be solved by the Army operating in isolation, just as no event in this paper could be responded to without the Army's involvement. Although the need to reform may give cause for the Army's leaders to look inward for a time, will need to work in partnership across the joint force to deliver the vision captured in the *2020 Force Structure Plan*. Moreover, the work already underway to enhance partnerships with industry, academia and a range of other institutions must continue to be emphasised as a priority strategic goal. This helps to engender a collective effort to build a stronger defence force, and could also contribute to building a more resilient nation.

The importance of developing Army's intellectual capital

The problems facing the nation are so vast they are difficult to grapple with—both complicated and extraordinarily complex. Much has already been said of the need for Army to develop its 'intellectual capital'. This capital is intrinsic to the Army's capability and capacity to plan for the future, just as it is crucial for its adaptability in a time of crisis. The development of its intellectual capital requires a combination of training and education, motivation, career management to ensure talents are rewarded but also exploited, and the opportunity for the brightest individuals to influence the preparedness approach of the future. Furthermore, the Army's collaborative approach with partners who can help with solving the immense challenges before it will be highly important. This is not about venerating military intellectualism as an automatic remedy for the Army's other problems; it is a recognition that the Army needs to apply as much mental energy to the task of deciding upon its future.



The Army has ruminated upon the future and has studied the past to the point of it being a reflexive action. The Army has had a long tradition of reviewing lessons, and aspiring to apply its history to inform the decisions of the day. In 2014, it began to analyse institutional lessons as part of an 'intellectual pivot'.⁶⁷ The review of lessons learned from 15 years of

operations was an act of transition; a reflection of things Army had achieved, or problems it had, and using these lessons to better prepare itself for the next challenge.⁶⁸ The 'pivot' was later followed by Army investment in 'professional military education' and other programs purportedly optimising the Army's personnel to deal with the challenges of the future. Outplacements and professional development opportunities abounded, and entrepreneurship and innovation are now vaunted. 'Logistics transformation' was briefly topical. The Army thought about the connotations of strategic competition, and tactics in battlefields affected by precision weapons, cyber warfare and robotic systems. The impact of climate change and other existential risks have been discussed, debated, and considered in plans.

The Army has considered many problems and has 'reservoirs' of knowledge already available that can support its decision-making. However, it must now overcome the gap in its thinking between what 'is', and what 'ought to be'. It is now time for the conversation—and, more recently, the 'contest of ideas' stimulated by *Accelerated Warfare*—to be directed to overcoming the specific problems that are preventing the Army from reaching its full potential. Now is the time for mental energy to be directed to answering fundamental problems that will shape the Army of the next 10 years. Those who have formed ideas and opinions about what Army should do to face the future must describe how those thoughts should be actioned, and the Service must be mature enough to hear their messages and act on them. This is serious collective work with the aim of guiding the Army away from stagnancy and 'unpreparedness'. The effort will be rewarded. It will be our gift to the next generation of leaders who will be expected to serve in the Army we conceive.

Conclusion

This paper sought to do three things. Firstly, it examined the changing environment and its impact on the Army. Secondly, it outlined a worst-case scenario to depict how the trends identified might manifest into risks that the Army must account for. This section of the paper is a thought experiment and exists as a challenge to the reader to highlight potential areas in which the Army might earn an advantage. Thirdly, it outlined eight areas the Army should focus on to ensure it will be postured for a dangerous future. The paper is a simplistic interpretation of the most complex problem most militaries face—preparing for the right event at the predicted time. It has also portrayed the changes as conforming to a clean line of circumstances when the reality is quite the opposite. However, it is a starting point for a comprehensive reflection on what the Army's future could very well look like and on the tasks that the Army may be doing. The world has changed rapidly, and the magnitude of that change should frighten us. This concern should compel us to plan. Preparing for the events described in this paper will be difficult, as the change necessary might mean that the Army moves on from assumptions, beliefs and practices that it presently holds dear. If the Army does not begin to change now, it will never achieve the potential it needs in 10 years.

In concluding this paper, it is worth remembering where the Army's military potential will come from. It is a product of the economic base of the nation, the willingness of the Australian public to use resources for military development, and the efficiency with which those resources are transformed by the Army, and others, into the combat force. The Army may have limited control over the basics of the economy but can absolutely influence how willing the Australian public is to invest in its future. But the Army's potential

is also a product of how it introduces or adjusts capabilities through time. In making these adjustments, it is also worth remembering that the Army is but one part of a larger puzzle of intricate actors, relationships, and variables. Trade-offs are intrinsic to preparedness, to the point that the results of decisions may conflict and even damage outcomes elsewhere in the system. The Army's leaders will find it impossible to satisfy every requirement for preparedness or obtain everything they want from the nation's economic base. Judicious risk-based judgements based on the highest standard of information are in order.

The Army's narrative has stood up to the challenge of the crises of 2019-20, but the Army's efforts should not stop with the production of core strategic documents and philosophies. The Army continues to have a large task ahead of it to convince the nation that an investment in its potential will be warranted. Although the *2020 Defence Strategic Update* and *Force Structure Plan* heighten the importance of the Army in its contributions to the joint force and to Australia, the Army should not cease its efforts in communicating with all stakeholders and the community. It is not always self-evident to the Australian population why the nation needs an Army, and there is a risk that the Army's narrative is captured in self-congratulation given what it will have achieved supporting the nation through climate, health and economic disasters. The Army, caught in the next few tumultuous years, must commence work now to argue the case for an investment in its preparedness. It cannot rest on its successes and earlier operational performance and think government and the Australian people will automatically see the Army's value in the same way Army does. The post-pandemic world will be politically unstable, trade as the lifeblood of globalisation languishing, economic differences breeding international discontent and the strategic order under considerable pressure. It is up to Army to eloquently describe why this situation matters, and why it will matter 10 years into the future.

The good news is that the Army has recognised that it must be flexible in its suite of strategic guidance. Planning for a milestone preparedness target—potentially even war—does not require that the Army make all decisions and determinations in advance. A more realistic approach is to focus upon critical problems, to suggest solutions and to understand the opportunities and limitations that are created consequently. The moniker of the 2020 Defence Strategic Update—'shape, deter and respond'—works to hone the

thoughts of those considering what the Army must do in the next decade. Nonetheless, it does matter that all in the Army consider what the future may hold with an open mind, just as the Australian community needs to consider what it is they want from Australia's Army.⁶⁹ The Army's projects and reforms must be comprehensive, purposeful, energetic and rational; it's plans considering the perils of the future, but as hopeful and forward-leaning as is typical for the organisation it is. For the Army to be prepared in 10 years— even to be prepared tomorrow—it will be important that it works with the full range of national security partners to come to an agreeable conclusion, otherwise, when the time comes and the Army must put its plans into action, few will listen and opportunity will be lost. If the scenario depicted in this paper becomes reality, this lost opportunity will cost the Army and the nation dearly.

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About the Author

Colonel David Beaumont joined the Australian Army in 1995 as a logistician. His core fields of expertise include mobility planning and 'theatre' logistics support, and he has been actively involved in Army concept development and modernisation throughout the last decade. He has seen operational service in East Timor, Central Asia, Iraq and Afghanistan at various stages of his career. In 2017 he commenced doctoral research on logistics and preparedness at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, as a Chief of Army Scholar and as a Military Fellow. This was followed by his appointment as Chief Instructor at the Army School of Logistics Operations in 2018.



Colonel Beaumont advocates for an improved understanding of logistics issues and consequences within the military, academic and national-security communities. He has written extensively on topics including strategy, expeditionary warfare, strategic competition, preparedness, organisational design and force structure, policy and operational logistics. He publishes regularly at www.logisticsinwar.com and has authored numerous other articles and papers.

Australian Army Research Centre

The Australian Army Research Centre (AARC) was established in mid-2016 in accordance with the wishes of the then Chief of Army Lieutenant General Angus Campbell. It is the successor to the Land Warfare Studies Centre. It sits as a Directorate within the Army's Future Land Warfare Branch in the Land Capability Division of Army Headquarters.

Role

The AARC conducts research and analysis, fosters debate and advocates the value of the joint land force to Government, academia and the public.

Charter

The AARC is dedicated to improving the Army's understanding of the profession of arms. Its purpose is to promote the contribution of the land force to joint operations in peace and war. The AARC conducts applied research on the employment and modernisation of Army with particular reference to Australia's circumstances and interests. It raises the level of professional debate on war and its challenges within the Army, the nation and international audiences. The AARC enhances the professionalism, leadership and ethical awareness of Australian soldiers and officers.

To disseminate ideas and to promote debate, the AARC maintains a vibrant publication and seminar program. The AARC's flagship publication is the Australian Army Journal, now in its fourteenth year. The AARC also publishes Occasional Papers and shorter works on its blog, the Land Power Forum.

Fortnightly the AARC hosts a seminar series in the Ngunnawal Theatre in Russell. The AARC also hosts academic level conferences such as 'Ethics under Fire' and 'On Ops'.

The AARC contributes to Army's understanding of the future character of war and the advancement of land power through a number of initiatives. These include:

- organising and conducting the Chief of Army's Land Forces Seminar as a part of the Land Forces;
- contributing to the development of strategic concepts, strategies, and force structure options;
- assisting in the development of Army doctrine and facilitating its incorporation into future Australian Defence Force joint doctrine;
- managing the Keogh Chair and the Staff Ride Programs;
- managing the Army Research Scheme; and
- mentoring the work of the CA Scholars and CA Honours Students.

