

Keeping Australia Secure

What do you think it means...and how do we do it?

An ASPI Public Debate Initiative

What does the future hold for Australia in Asia and in the world? The events of 11 September in New York, and nearer to home more recently in Bali, have put security and terrorism into the headlines more than ever before. A glimpse of the future or just a phase? What are the real threats and what do we do about them? Let's discuss these important matters—we want to hear your views.

Some Issues for Discussion

- ▶ *Australia in the World*
- ▶ *Our place in South-East Asia*
- ▶ *Terrorism near and far*
- ▶ *The future of war*
- ▶ *Weapons of Mass Destruction*
- ▶ *North Korea*
- ▶ *Alliances and friendships*
- ▶ *The role of Defence*

Some Recent Defence Force Operations



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1. Getting Started

Discussion Rules

- We're here to encourage **debate** and hear opinion
- ASPI is **neutral**—we take no political or policy line
- **Respect others' opinions; a fair go for all.**

In these discussions we concentrate particularly on armed conflict and Australia's security now and in the future.

This is an important step before we decide how we should be spending money raised by our taxes. How should we plan, develop and train the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and other security agencies?

Historically, the ANZACs and later forces were prepared to contribute to the distant campaigns of powerful allies like Britain and the United States (two world wars, Korea, Vietnam and others). From the mid-1980s, the swing towards a self-reliant force to defend Australia itself started to take stronger root in policy and practice. But the ADF continues to be involved in demanding peace-making, peace-keeping and other international operations, usually under a mandate of the United Nations, all over the world.

Recently, transnational or 'tribal' problems including terrorism and lawlessness have inflicted much more death and suffering than 'old' wars between countries. Many societies, some in our immediate region, are crumbling and their states failing. At the same time, weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—nuclear, chemical and biological weapons—are being developed by more and more states but without the usual safeguards. Australians at home have remained largely untouched by all this—so far. But does this mean that conventional defence of Australia is no longer needed?

Our limited budget won't insure fully against all these possible challenges. So the dilemma is to decide which are the most dangerous or important ones for our planning. In these discussions we will be asking:

- ▶ How should we seek to achieve national security?
- ▶ What are the main problems and opportunities—and the priorities?
- ▶ How far afield should we be prepared to go?

What is Security?

In its broadest sense, national security includes economic, environmental and human welfare, freedoms and values. Defence, as a big part of this puzzle, might sound like repelling attackers from the ramparts or borders—but it's much more than that and includes safeguarding our interests, like territories, waters, citizens, and freedom of shipping and trade. It means being very aware of threats, international responsibilities and trends, and addressing military and non-military problems like crime and terrorist networks. Police and other security and intelligence agencies must cooperate under their relevant state and federal laws to provide a national response.



2. Australia in Context

A. The Global Setting

Our place in the world is expressed through myriad official and informal groups and relationships. Let's take a couple of the big ones.

ANZUS. The US is now the sole super-power and we gain many benefits from a close alliance relationship. We often join in with US-led policies and operations, but we also need to speak and act in our own national interests.

- How do we benefit from the US Alliance—are there downsides as well?
- Do we contribute effectively—what can we bring politically & militarily?

United Nations. Through many agencies, treaties and conventions but with little real power over member states, the UN seeks to gain consensus and peace in a rough and tumble international scene. We have been generally supportive and sometimes have taken leadership roles in various issues like limiting WMD. The ADF has been involved in many UN peacekeeping operations both near and far. But the UN is an imperfect system and gaining agreement is often slow and difficult, or even impossible.

- Is this the way of the future or is the UN an idealistic sideshow?
- Should Australia work through the UN in most circumstances?
- What other international links, partnerships and initiatives should we follow?

B. The Asia-Pacific Region

The 'arc of instability' across our north and east (see map front cover) is proving well named. Border disputes abound from Japan to the South Pacific Islands. Recent serious bombings have added to long-standing conflicts among pro-independence, ethnic or religious groups. Australia's aid and development programs over the years have recently been supplemented by peacekeeping missions in Bougainville and the Solomons. Even then many states in the Southwest Pacific face real challenges to their viability. And in parts of Southeast Asia democracy and national cohesion are threatened by separatist movements and internal conflict.

- Is the Asia-Pacific Region our highest priority or do we go where the need is?

Our Strategic Situation.

Despite our remote geographical position, Australia has strong trading and cultural links throughout the world. We traditionally take an interest in international affairs and are active in the United Nations. Our future depends on events in distant regions as well as on our own choices. We have formal alliance treaties—with the US, New Zealand and PNG for example—and many traditional friends in our region and beyond. These partnerships are valuable to us; but they bring some responsibilities and do not remove the need to provide for our own defence.

East or West?

Australia, a multi-cultural English-speaking 'middle power' in a diverse, populous Asian setting, has ties with both east and west. This is our neighbourhood—but do we feel out of place? Historical involvement in S-E Asia and strong trading and security interests in N-E Asia do not necessarily contradict our traditional western heritage, systems and friendships—but sometimes it is a juggle. For many years we have debated whether we should be secure from, in, or with Asia? What do you think?

3. Some Specific Problems

NEW WARS: Terrorism

Terrorism has dominated the headlines since 11 September 2001. Hundreds more have been killed since then. Bombings in Indonesia suggest that violence would be quite possible in our own towns were it not for Australia's good security—so far. But what does the future hold?

- ▶ Were Bali and Jakarta bombings an exception or is this now a way of life for us too?
- ▶ Can the 'War against terrorism' be won? If so, how?
- ▶ Australia's best response—harsher exclusion, more policing, international cooperation, stronger intelligence services, raids or strikes...? Does the ADF have a role?



▲ ADF counter-terrorism team © Defence Dept.

OLD WARS: Korea—the war that didn't end

Continuing tension and difficult negotiating positions surround efforts to bring the North Korea peacefully into the world community and help retrieve its ailing economy.

- ▶ Why does it matter to Australia? Threats include loss of regional stability and economic growth, WMD proliferation in and beyond N-E Asia, and even war. We would be affected.
- ▶ Today's missiles can reach Japan, China, Taiwan, and ROK. Australia is becoming less remote year by year.
- ▶ What's to be done—by us and by regional countries?



▲ North Korea. AP/AAP/Kasahara © 2002

Then and Now

Fifty years after the Korean War, historical animosities persist all around the Korean peninsula. A tough and repressive North Korean (DPRK) aligned regime maintains an army of a million against South Korea (ROK) despite a devastated economy, crop failures and large scale starvation and persecution. After many years under the Agreed Framework to limit its nuclear program, DPRK has now withdrawn from Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and says it is developing nuclear weapons and missiles to carry them. It seeks aid and concessions.

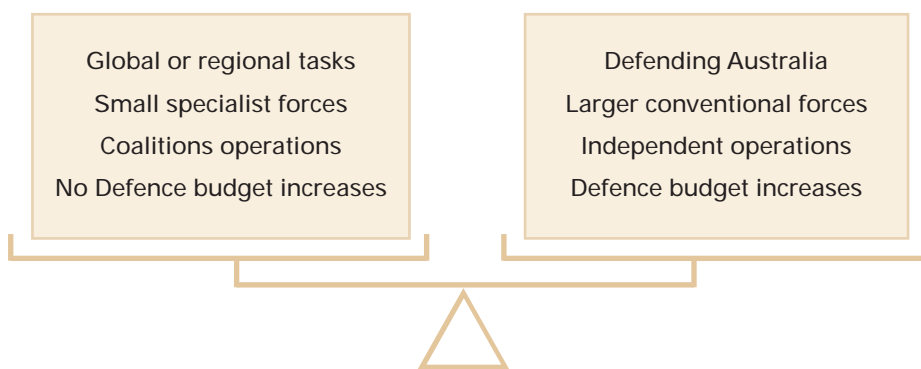


4. Australia's Practical Response

Australia maintains small but high quality defence forces, police (state and federal), immigration, customs, intelligence and other agencies to help protect against illegal activities. All agencies are stretched and asking for more money, so setting the right goals and priorities is vital.

Policies and Posture Options?

Australia needs to strike some tricky balances, including between:



The Australian Defence Force

The ADF

The ADF has fought and patrolled with allies abroad to great acclaim but it is really structured to defend Australia. At only about 50,000 uniformed regulars, the ADF is a small but highly trained force with conventional land, sea and air capabilities. Elements include patrol boats and destroyers, special forces, light mechanised and 'all arms' brigades, air- and sea-lift, strike and air defence, together with skilled people, logistics and supporting facilities. Continual reviews have trimmed non-essential services and holdings, and considerable warning would be needed to expand for major conflict. It costs the taxpayer around \$16 bn per year —about 1.9% of GDP, and costs are growing faster than inflation.

Australians have not had to defend our country from a direct military attack for 60 years. Still, our defence forces have been called upon many times to serve our broader interest like in peacekeeping. Shouldn't we plan our forces around that role?

Some of the ADF's capabilities are working at high operational tempo, while others are little used but have provided good options to successive governments to contribute practically or politically to international efforts. But some may have to be phased out as they age and absorb more funds. New ones may be needed.

A number of other balance points like those above must be struck, such as between mobility, protection and fire-power; between costly smart systems and greater numbers; and between land, sea and air capabilities—where is the balance?

And ultimately ... What is the ADF really for?

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We at ASPI want to discuss security with people in regional and rural Australia to hear your opinions and ideas about our security. These public meetings and talk-back sessions are an opportunity for you to have your say about things like our national sovereignty, border management, and our need for secure trade, travel and economic growth free of aggression or armed attack.

5. What Next?

Other Issues. We have scratched the surface. Please comment on any security issues not mentioned so far that YOU think are important. If you have not had the chance to contribute fully to this session, please contact us at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute with your comments.

What Happens Next? ASPI will fold your opinions into open reports that will be available to Government and to other interested people in the community. Your ideas will also guide us in developing our future research program.

Thank you for your participation.

Want to know more about the issues?

Some Other ASPI Publications



CONTACT US

We hope you have found these questions interesting. To express opinions or seek further information on this *Listening to Regional Australia* project, including our program of activities, please contact us at:

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