

Introduction

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Australia seems to be moving into a period of greater uncertainty and instability. The future now seems less clear than it once was; the events of the catastrophic bushfires in 2019–20 and the return of a global pandemic, in the form of COVID-19, in 2020 serve to remind us that the world in which we live remains subject to challenge and change. For the Asia-Pacific region, this is especially so, given the geopolitical, technological and economic restructuring that is currently underway. As former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright noted in 2020, understanding the ‘interconnectedness’ between politics, economics and technology is critical in anticipating change and disruption in the twenty-first century.¹ That said, these challenges are not without historical precedents. History shows that Australia has faced pandemics, natural disasters, financial disruption and a number of ‘large’ and ‘small’ wars before.

For the Australian Army, this book could not be more timely or relevant. Military forces often stand accused of being slow to recognise change. Examples include the refusal by some in Europe throughout the 1930s to understand and adjust to the intellectual and tactical requirements of mechanised warfare, leading to enormous difficulties in facing the German Army from 1939.² Resistance to change, or failing to recognise war’s constantly evolving character, has proved fatal in the past for nations and their military forces and will continue to be a significant factor in future conflict.

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Excerpt
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Map 0.1 Australia and the region

This book provides a thought-provoking analysis of the Australian Army's capacity to change, with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region and the Army's role in securing the national interest inside and outside declared conflicts. Its intended utility is both strategically and historically focused: strategically, in that Australia's military contribution to the security of the region has, and will continue to be, an important sovereign element of national power; and historically, in that many of the challenges faced by the Army in shaping, influencing and accessing the region for the past 120 years offer important insights and clues as to how the Army must change to meet the emerging security challenges of the twenty-first century. The chapters are designed to be useful as a tool for practitioners in the Australian Army and the wider defence community and to be understood by and of interest to the general public, underscoring the obvious fact that the Australian Army does not operate in a vacuum.

The book is organised in three sections: Part 1 deals with the notion of the Australian Army's influence abroad, Part 2 addresses the enduring lessons that the Army has learnt throughout its history of engagement across the region, and Part 3 looks forward to the ongoing nature of the Army's engagement and underscores the importance for the Army of maintaining posture and presence in the decades ahead. As with all rigorous scholarly engagement with an issue, the chapters of the book do not necessarily agree, but this only underpins its importance in capturing the breadth of the debate on the topic of regional engagement. The purpose of the book is, at its heart, to elicit debate by entertaining and exploring alternative viewpoints. To this end, the scholars who have been approached to contribute come from a variety of backgrounds and have engaged in a scholarly or practical way in the region and examined the Army's potential for influence in all its forms. They have used historical examples, as well as recent or contemporary events, to explore the dimensions of regional engagement for the Australian Army and to draw contemporary and historical parallels.

In mid-2018, the Australian Army released its most recent capstone document, 'Accelerated warfare', which described the changing character of war as well as stressing that the role and function of the Army should extend beyond named military operations.³ The Army also outlined how it saw the current operational environment: the international system was becoming less stable, more contested and increasingly defined by self-interest rather than values and conventions. It emphasised the importance of 'shaping' and 'influencing' by being more focused as a military force on achieving access across the region through the persistent application of military diplomacy, relationship-building, burden-sharing and peer-to-peer engagement. Critically, the Army recognised as somewhat outdated the notion of 'peace and war' as a way of defining the international system and instead codified 'competition, cooperation, contest and conflict' as a more accurate way of describing how states interact with one another. For the Army, this model is significant: while there is a need

to preserve its core combat functions, it has also identified the importance for itself of shaping and influencing beyond being a ‘break glass only in time of war’ military force. Less than two years later, this readiness setting proved prescient, as the Army was called out over the summer of 2019–20 to supplement state and federal emergency services in the wake of the twin crises of bushfires across much of south-eastern Australia and then a global pandemic.⁴

As well as focusing on the role of the Army outside declared conflict, ‘Accelerated warfare’ highlighted the competing priority of being able to adapt to new technologies of warfare in time with their development. The Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Rick Burr, said at the time: ‘The threats against us are accelerating in terms of the speed of cyber, the lethality of the weaponry, and the way in which information space is being exploited, and therefore we need to accelerate our response to these threats ... we can’t just continue along the way we’ve always done business.’⁵ In short, ‘Accelerated warfare’ provided an opportunity for the Army to recognise what is driving change inside the global system. It also required the Army to think seriously about the challenge of adapting at a pace that provides initiative and builds momentum against expected security challenges as well as allowing exploitation of opportunities in the forms of emerging technology and changing global dynamics.

This volume brings together a collection of work by some of Australia’s finest military historians and draws on and expands the most recent Chief of Army History Conference. The conference, held in late 2019, was themed *An Army of Influence: The Australian Army’s Connection with the Region*. In his opening address, Lieutenant General Burr emphasised the importance of the Army’s future focus being informed by its own history: ‘We must look back, understand, respect, and honour our past and carry it forward into the future.’⁶ Simply put, in order to be ready for the future, as described in ‘Accelerated warfare’, the Army’s fighting power – its intellectual, moral and physical components – relies on the applied study of its past endeavours, through professional military education and discourse. A failure to apply the Army’s history in understanding its future would invoke unnecessary risk for the coming generations of soldiers. To quote the late philosopher George Santayana: ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’⁷

In order to ensure that the Army does not forget its past, Part 1 of this book begins, Chapter 1, with Emeritus Professor David Horner’s reprise of the Army’s collective experience in regional engagement throughout the past 80 years. No other individual is better qualified to offer a view on the Army’s performance in this regard. Professor Horner’s chapter begins with the arrival in Port Moresby of the 13th Heavy Battery of the Royal Australian Artillery in 1939 (the first time a permanent Australian unit had been deployed overseas in peacetime) and concludes with a summary of the Army’s most recent commitments in the region and across the globe in the wake of

the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001. The emphasis that Professor Horner places on the commitments that were absolutely crucial to the defence of continental Australia (namely, those of the Second World War), as well as on other deployments that sought to balance alliance obligations and bring stability to the region (specifically Australia's commitments to Korea, the Malayan Emergency, Confrontation, Vietnam, East Timor and Iraq/Afghanistan), gives a level of insight into the Army's history of regional commitment that is essential for anyone who aspires to develop a sophisticated sense of the importance of persistent engagement with friends and allies if military relationships are to be meaningful and sincere, particularly in times of crisis or conflict.

Chapter 2 is a presentation on the utility of the Department of Defence, including the Army, as a tool of statecraft. Professor Brendan Sargeant is uniquely qualified to describe the policy relating to the application of regional engagement in terms of meeting government direction. As a recently retired Associate Secretary of Defence, in 2017 he was responsible for oversight of the implementation of a major reform of the enterprise governance, planning, performance and risk-management processes of the department. Notably, Professor Sargeant was the principal author of the 2013 Defence White Paper and also served as the department's Deputy Secretary of Strategy. Understanding the policy settings in which the Army must execute its regional engagement activities is critical to ensuring that these actions are consistent with government direction and military intent.

Part 1 concludes with Chapter 3, a commentary from Brigadier Ken Brownrigg (Retd) on the importance of the role of the defence attaché. No better example of this has been demonstrated than in the 1999 crisis in East Timor preceding the International Force East Timor intervention later that year. The then Colonel Brownrigg was one of just two Australian officials in Dili prior to the arrival of the Australia-led forces, and it was he who advised how to best enter the capital without unnecessarily heightening tensions with the departing Indonesian military forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or TNI). Too often, the essential role of the defence attaché as a feature of diplomacy is overlooked; one only needs to consider their role in facilitating aid and recovery in the event of natural or human-made crises to understand their value in projecting military power and safeguarding national interests.⁸

Part 2 of the book brings another historical focus to this study. It shifts the emphasis of inquiry to an applied history with an emphasis on enduring themes and lessons from the Army's experience in regional engagement using case studies as a mechanism to better understand and anticipate the future. The part begins, in Chapter 4, with a study of the Army's role in the Pacific region during the Second World War. Colonel Graeme Sligo leads this chapter with significant insights on how the Army conducted regional engagement throughout the 1940s, based on his previously released book *The*

Backroom Boys.⁹ Most interesting is the role of the Army Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs. The creation of this directorate coincided with the rise of an independent politico-military world view, fostered by General Sir Thomas Blamey and others, that Australia had to give serious consideration to the role of reconstruction, partnerships and regional leadership in the postwar environment. These thoughts and actions resulted in the creation of a defence attaché system after 1945, initially focused on creating permanent military posts in Washington and Tokyo.

One of the most significant observations for the Army in this chapter is that by 1942, Colonel Alfred Conlon (who led the directorate) acknowledged the importance of the Pacific region to Australia. Conlon assessed that one of the principal future aims of Australia's foreign policy should be to 'avoid converting the natives of New Guinea into a sullen hostile people on our northern frontier'.¹⁰ For perhaps the first time in its history, under Blamey's leadership and with Conlon's thinking, the Army saw the jungles and peoples of the Asia-Pacific as its critical focus. The harsh lessons of fighting the Imperial Japanese Army throughout the various operations and campaigns of the South-West Pacific had made this point clear. Australia was not in Europe; it was not of the northern hemisphere. It was a country peopled mainly by British emigrants (that would soon change), but it was situated in the Asia-Pacific.

The awakening of the Army's thinking in regard to the region it now found itself focusing on led to further innovations. Under Conlon, the Army introduced an interdisciplinary approach to military problems. It began to recruit sociologists and anthropologists; the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs eventually evolved into the Australian School of Pacific Administration, responsible for preparing the region's civil administrators, health professionals and law and order officers for service in their own respective countries. In terms of what we now call 'access and influence', Conlon's thinking, foresight and tenacity stand as testaments to how the Army of 2022 can think about its future role in the context of 'cooperation, competition and conflict'.

In his review of the history of the Australian Army's commitment to the Korean War in 1950 in Chapter 5, Lieutenant Colonel Dayton McCarthy introduces the notion of the importance of understanding the limits of military commitments. His observation that the Australian Army went from a force of over 400,000 in 1945 to barely being able to muster an infantry battalion to commit to the Korean War in 1950 is a fascinating perspective on how the Army exists in the perpetual cycle of expansion and contraction, with the international security environment and Australia's commitment to collective security the main drivers for the tempo of this cycle. With this in mind, it seems timely in 2022 for the Army to consider what its baseline for preparedness might look like, particularly in the context of 'Accelerated warfare', where the ability to generate persistent presence is seen as critical in the context of regional engagement, global leadership and maintaining trust among partners and allies.

Lieutenant Colonel McCarthy's chapter touches on all points of relevance for any modern army: force generation, preparation, readiness and operational-level sustainment for persistent conflict. In this regard, the author makes clear the links between the broader strategic issues that the Army faced in 1950 and the issues that face the Army and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) today. The collective security arrangement of 1950, including the Commonwealth Defence Plan (which required Australia's contribution to the Malayan Emergency as well as featuring in British war planning in the Middle East), is in some ways comparable to Australia's collective security obligation as part of the Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America, most recently invoked by the Australian Government in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.¹¹ There are also parallels with Australia's post-Second World War regional security partnerships and the Australian Government's recent increase in regional security cooperation with countries of the Asia-Pacific region, including India and Japan.¹²

Lieutenant Colonel McCarthy's analysis of the limitations of the *Defence Act 1903* is relevant to the Army of today. The Act's requirements for the employment of permanent and part-time members of the Army in the event of an emergency (either onshore in Australia or offshore as part of an operational contingency) are as pertinent today, as evidenced in the call-out of the Army Reserve in response to the bushfire emergency of 2020, as they were in the 1950s, when members of the Citizen Military Forces were forbidden to serve overseas, despite the fact that their divisions and brigades featured heavily in British war planning for operations outside Australia, including in the Middle East.

Leadership of the British Commonwealth Forces Korea was also a matter of regional significance which has relevance for the Army today. Upon the re-rolling of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in 1950 to the British Commonwealth Forces Korea, Australia's senior military leaders saw the significance in the Australian Army being able to provide regional leadership through command of the forces. Lieutenant General Horace Robertson supplied that leadership, which endures to this day, through his emphasis on unified command, defence cooperation, doctrine and interoperability, effectively integrating Commonwealth forces (British, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and Indian) as well as working alongside United Nations (UN) forces (US, Japanese and South Korean). In terms of access and persistent presence, a treaty of mutual cooperation and security between the United States and Japan means that, should conflict occur on the Korean peninsula, Australia, through its proximal defence security relationship with the United States as well as the United Nations, will retain access to mainland Japan from which to base operations.¹³

Dr Tom Richardson, a lecturer in history at the University of New South Wales, Canberra, is the author of *Destroy and Build: Pacification in Phuoc Tuy, 1966–72*.¹⁴ His

contribution here, in Chapter 6, focuses on some of his previously made arguments suggesting that Australia-specific methods of counterinsurgency and jungle combat in Vietnam were no more effective in their execution than similar tactics employed by the United States and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Dr Richardson insists that the Australian Army's own 'pacification' program created genuine challenges for Australian commanders and their advisers that in some respects continued until well after the end of the Vietnam War, in 1975.

'Pacification' is a term long associated with the history of the Vietnam War. While it is typically related to winning over the 'hearts and minds' of the affected civilian population, the term is not often well understood, as it also emphasises political, social and economic reform when it comes to finding a lasting solution to defeating insurgencies. Critical to this is also an acknowledgement of the broader societal conditions that can often impact good order and security: wealth distribution, entrenched rural poverty and political powerbases. In making this point, Dr Richardson could easily be talking about some of Australia's more recent military operations since the end of the Vietnam War. In the case of the most easily compared operation, Australia's nearly two-decade commitment to Afghanistan, one cannot help but wonder why Australia does not seem to have learnt anything from Phuoc Tuy province that could have assisted in its understanding of why and how the Australian Army was expected to be successful in Uruzgan province. The chapter concludes by inviting readers to ask themselves two important questions: 'How could we not learn from past mistakes?' and, in the case of the deployment of the 1st Australian Task Force to Vietnam, 'What did we achieve overall?'

Chapter 7 comes from one of the most important military historians of the post-Cold War period. Professor Craig Stockings brings caution to the Army's current exploration of access and persistence in the context of accelerated warfare. His soundings in this regard are both welcome and relevant. Using as a case study the Australia-led intervention in East Timor in September 1999, Professor Stockings considers a series of events that occurred at this critical time, emphasising the importance of access, influence and persistence. These qualities proved vital in setting the conditions for an Australian military operation that involved a coalition of 23 nations and nearly 11,000 soldiers and in terms of regional leadership constituted Australia's most complex strategic challenge, whose success or otherwise was certain to chart the course of Australia's role in the Asia-Pacific for decades to come.

The relevance for the Army today could not be more obvious. Of particular note is the emphasis that Professor Stockings places on how much effort the ADF, and the Army in particular, made when it came to managing its relationship with the Indonesian military in the wake of the result of the referendum endorsing independence for the East Timorese. Early in 1999, as the crisis in East Timor unfolded, any sense of access

and influence in terms of the Army's investment in its TNI counterparts was rigorously tested. Despite serious investment by Australian policymakers stretching all the way back to the 1960s, it seemed that no amount of materiel, senior leadership engagement or joint exercises gave the Army the degree of access and influence it needed (and felt it had gained) to protect Australian interests – namely, to request the TNI to assert control over the pro-integration militia perpetuating violence and conflict against the East Timorese and potentially against the Australia-led coalition upon its arrival later that year. From Professor Stockings's perspective, the ADF's access to the TNI gave Australia little when it really mattered.

To be fair, Professor Stockings balances his analysis by providing instances where access and influence on the part of the Australian Government were effective – namely, in its ability to shape and influence the UN mandate (resolution 1264) regarding East Timor through defence officials and the resident Military Attaché in New York.¹⁵ He distinguishes this example, however, from the previous instance by pointing out the presence of coercion. In this case, Australia achieved a degree of leverage in its UN negotiations in the form of statements regarding the expectation that the TNI would act appropriately or risk undermining Indonesia's standing in the eyes of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and its most influential member, the United States.

Professor Stockings skilfully lays out further instances where Australia, in leading the International Force East Timor, gained access and influence to a greater or lesser degree. This included relationships with TNI regional commanders, other regional partners and global superpowers. All in all, he makes clear the benefits of increasing access and influence throughout Australia's near region and argues that the Army is critical in this regard. His well-founded caution, however, is a reminder that access and influence are policy *means*; they are not *ends* in themselves. To paraphrase what I assess as the true meaning of this chapter: access was never a synonym for direct influence.

Part 2 ends with Chapter 8, which comes from Dr Stephen Clarke and focuses on one of the foundational elements of the Australian Army: its relationship with New Zealand through the prism of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, formed as an expeditionary military force despatched to Europe (via the Middle East) upon the outbreak of hostilities in the First World War. Dr Clarke's long-term interest is in the social and cultural impacts of war on New Zealand society, with a specific emphasis on the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. His research relates military service to national identity, a relationship whose enduring aspects are a feature of how both countries relate to their geography, particularly when it comes to building the layers of trust necessary for future partnering and burden-sharing.

If Australia and New Zealand are to gain the necessary degrees of regional influence, access and engagement over the coming decade, they must use their collective identities as a way to frame conversation with others, especially in South-East Asia, where

suspicion of both countries remains and where historical allegiances to former colonial powers still rankle. Dr Clarke provides a timely and important reminder of the role that is played by soft power in the modern international system. Australia and New Zealand must work harder at becoming more culturally competent if winning access and gaining influence are to be realistic goals for the future.

Part 3 of the book shifts towards the future. Dr Garth Pratten begins it, in Chapter 9, with a summary of the past 50 years of engagement between Australia and arguably its most important regional security partner, Indonesia. In many ways, the Australia–Indonesia army-to-army relationship has proved to be both diverse and adaptable. The partnership begins with a reminder that in 1942, during the dark days of the Second World War, the armed forces of Australia and Indonesia (then known as the Netherland East Indies) served side by side and fought in the defence of Java, Ambon and Timor. Later, during the liberation operations of 1945, including the amphibious landings at Tarakan and Balikpapan, Australian troops were accompanied by a company of Indonesian soldiers who, importantly, given their local knowledge and jungle-fighting skills, acted as pathfinders.

Like Professor Stockings, Dr Pratten, while supportive of the Army's efforts in the modern age to increase its access and influence in the region, cautions that access does not necessarily lead to increased influence. He also uses the examples of the International Force East Timor, negative press reporting and cultural missteps to highlight the limits of demonstrated influence, particularly when the relationship between the two governments is under strain. That said, Dr Pratten does balance his critique by noting instances where influence and cooperation for common causes, such as regional stability, have achieved positive effects. The standout example he notes is the collective effort of Australia and Indonesia, and other countries, to support the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in the early 1990s.

The tools of military cooperation are especially relevant in the relationship between Australia and Indonesia. Individual and collective training, capability development, surveying and mapping, and key leader engagements throughout the past 50 years have been beneficial to both military forces. This historical insight is important in understanding how the Australian and Indonesian armies may seek to enhance their relationship in the future. On the topic of key leader engagement, the Australian Army must continue to value and invest in personal relationship development through postings, training appointments and planning exercises. Where friendships have been formed in the past – the relationship between General Peter Gration and his counterpart General Try Sutrisno is a particular example – cooperation, influence and access have seemingly flourished. Where these relationships are not formed, both countries risk losing their sense of exclusivity and access, increasing the potential for mutual misunderstanding going forward. It is for this reason that Dr Pratten emphasises