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The Root Cause of What Ails Defence Today

A SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUSTRALIAN MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM

26 January 2005

by Peter Goon, BE (Mech) FTE (USNTPS) and The Firm Consultancy Group, *et al*

"We need to learn from our mistakes.

We need to encourage open and honest reporting.

We need our people to feel confident that we will support them."

Statements by Chief of Air Force at Address to Australian Command and Staff College,
September 2001

APA-2005-01 Overview

This submission presents the results of a root cause analysis into the Department's performance over the past 5 years, since the initiation, in 1999, of what became the Defence 2000 White Paper. The analysis identifies the organisational culture of 'groupthink', in its institutionalised form, as being at the root of the ailments that have plagued the Department in the past to the present day. It concludes that this 'institutionalised groupthink' culture will continue to be at the root of what ails Defence into the future until appropriately treated.

This submission consists of three separate documents, being:

1. Letter of Transmittal and the Body of the Submission with Endnotes;
2. Case Studies recently published by the Centre for Defence Command, Leadership and Management Studies (CDCLMS) of the Australian Defence College, Canberra; and,
3. A Leadership Primer attributed to General Colin Powell (Power Point Presentation).

These three documents make up Submission No 71 to the Senate Inquiry. The original copy of this submission may be found on the Senate Committee's web site.

(http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/fadt_ctte/miljustice/submissions/sublist.htm)

**Volume II - APA-2005-01 - "The Root Cause of What Ails Defence, Today"**

From: The.Firm [the.firm@internode.on.net]
Sent: Sunday, 6 February 2005 9:43 PM
To: Kathleen Dermody (E-mail 2)
Cc: 'David Johnston, Senator'; 'David Fawcett, MP <david.fawcett.mp@aph.gov.au>'; 'The Firm Distribution List'
Subject: SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO EFFECTIVENESS OF AUSTRALIAN MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM

Our Reference: 606/01/13 Pt1 (13)

To: The Chairman of the Senate Reference Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade –
Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Military Justice

References:

- A. Telephone communications between Senator David Johnston and Mr Peter Goon.
- B. Senate Inquiry Terms of Reference.
- C. Centre for Defence Command, Leadership and Management Studies (CDCLMS) Australian Defence College. "Command, Leadership, Management and Military Ethics: Case Studies" (as at Nov 2004) – Endnote 4 to Submission.
- D. Powell, C.L., Jan 2000. "A Leadership Primer".

Dear Senator Hutchins,

Following the discussions at Reference A and subsequent requests for us to provide input, this E-Letter and its attachments form our submission to the Senate inquiry into the effectiveness of the Australian Military Justice System.

This submission analyses one of the major, if not dominant, influences on "the effectiveness of the Australian military justice system in providing impartial, rigorous and fair outcomes, and mechanisms to improve the transparency and public accountability of military justice procedures" of Reference B. It shows how actions belie the words, even at very senior levels within the Department.

The submission presents the organisational model of the groupthink culture; shows how this is reflected in the present culture in and behaviour of the senior leadership group of the Department; and, how this goes to the very core of all 'Defence Matters'.

The analysis highlights the nature and the dangers of groupthink and, more particularly, identifies the additional traits and seriousness of the version of this 'organisational disease' currently resident in the Department.

The analysis demonstrates that the existence of the traits or symptoms of groupthink within the Department is not new, dating back well over a decade. That even with the exponential rate the Department has become more imbued with groupthink in recent years, the most recent writings on leadership, management culture, command and ethics in the Department (Reference C - Endnote 4) still fall well short of the mark – falling prey to censorship and conformity of the existing culture.

Note: For convenience, a copy of these writings is attached and the Committee is encouraged to review them in the context of the groupthink model. These writings and their originating construct are seen as a valiant attempt by middle management in trying to break the groupthink mold, albeit through a slow, tortuous and risky approach of academic education to promote critical debate. This is seen as a 'generational approach' which history shows is at high risk of being suborned by the groupthink culture.



The submission concludes by presenting the first step for curing an organisational disease, like groupthink, as the identification and then acknowledgment of the root cause of what ails the organisation, using standard Root Cause Analysis (RCA) methodologies. Generalised treatment for such organisational ailments are well known and understood. Treatments specific to the variety of groupthink described in this submission have already been provided to the Australian Department of Defence. These can also be provided to the Committee but due to the need for focus on the first step to treatment, were considered beyond the scope of this particular Submission.

This Submission has drawn upon over a thousand man years of experience in defence matters; the submissions and findings to relevant inquiries into defence matters dating back to 1991; and, observations of defence matters from both outside and within Defence since the Strategic Policy for Defence and Industry of 1998.

We have further case studies, data and other evidence that confirm the results of the supporting analyses. These have been provided previously to the Department of Defence, over the latter period. No engagement in discussions nor positive outcomes have been forthcoming from the Department; only negatives. We would welcome being granted the opportunity to share these with your Committee and the broader Australian community.

Finally, we have enclosed the views on leadership of one of the most acknowledged military leaders of our time, General Colin Powell Chairman (Ret), US DoD Joint Chiefs of Staff. This is in the form of an 18 point 'Leadership Primer' which recognises that "*Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.*"

The 18 points in this primer provide stark relief and contrast to the observed behaviour of the civilian and military appointments in the senior leadership group of the Department of Defence (as opposed to the Australian Defence Forces - ADF).

Could you please acknowledge receipt of this E-Letter and associated attachments; advise its acceptability to the Committee; and, whether we will be granted the opportunity to share the supporting case studies, data and evidence with your Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Goon
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Attachments:



Senate
mission_Groupthink



CASE STUDIES List
Nov04.pdf



Leadership_Primer.
ppt

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Statements by Chief of Air Force at Address to Australian Command and Staff College, September 2001

**A SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUSTRALIAN
MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM**

26 January 2005

by Peter Goon, BE (Mech) FTE (USNTPS) and The Firm Consultancy Group, *et al*

These words of the Chief of Air Force echoed the publicly declared views, which pre-dated them by up to several years, of many in the Department's top jobs. These included statements by the Secretary/CDF Diarchy to those of the Undersecretary of the Defence Materiel Organisation to pre-White Paper Values Statements and Charters¹ endorsed by Generals and Deputy Secretaries alike. Over four years on, these espoused words were clearly divorced from reality. Why is this so?

The root cause of what ails the Department of Defence today and, *inter alia*, results in our men and women in the ADF being put at higher risk resides in the departmental senior leadership group; is manifested in its culture and their resulting behaviour; and, is easily described.

Much has been written that alludes to failings in the culture^{2 3} of the Department, even as recently as November 2004⁴, but none of these writings has sought to describe let alone analyse the culture, identify what the deficiencies are, and what needs to be done to fix the problems.

"However, the evidence gathered by this Review leaves little doubt that there needs to be more change, that it needs to be more rapid and more fundamental in reshaping systems, structures, and organisational culture. To do otherwise will add more risk to what is already a difficult and high-risk international environment for the nation, and to the safety of the men and women of the Australian Defence Force who are tasked with its protection."

Kinnaird Review 2003²

Instead the prevailing view has been that the Department's cultural problems are systemic and will take 'generations' to change. The inference one is encouraged to draw here is that 'time will heal all'. Such 'generational' timeframes, even if referring to the time in departmental appointments, go well beyond the term of government in the federal parliamentary system. Even the most junior of parliamentarians knows to effect change, let alone achieve sustainable change, over such a period would be highly problematic. Sir Humphrey Appleby KCB, MVO, MA(Oxon) would be proud.

However, looking beyond this predilection for maintaining the status quo, if you were to examine the health of the culture within the Department today you would find it pathogenic and malignant, not benign; being infected with something akin to a cancer - the organisational cancer called 'groupthink'. Some academics and current day 'management gurus' might use different terms. Some argue that continued advocacy of Professor Janis' 32 year old groupthink model is itself "*a form of organisational Tonypantry*"⁵ and that groupthink has been surpassed by more enlightened albeit complex psychological theories.⁶ This may very well be true. However, to experienced management practitioners, the traits and outcomes are the same. Moreover, the value of any management model or theory may be measured in how readily it can be presented, understood, accepted and applied to engender changes in behaviour to achieve delivery of the desired outcomes.

The groupthink model has been shown, over time, to more than amply meet these criteria.⁷

In succinct terms, groupthink may best be described as one of the ways that individually very smart people can, collectively, make very dumb decisions. History is littered with examples of this organisational phenomenon. These include the lack of preparedness in the defence of Pearl Harbour, The Bay of Pigs Fiasco, and the loss of the Shuttle Challenger and crew.⁸ Closer to home, in the defence acquisition area, the *Westralia*, Seasprite and Kalkara procurements bear the hallmarks of the influence of groupthink while Australia's largest single defence capability acquisition project already presents with the symptoms. In the personnel management area, the ongoing experiences of the victims of the fuel tank Deseal/Reseal fiasco provide a chilling testament to how insidious and persistent over long periods of time the effects of groupthink can and continue to be allowed to be.

Groupthink's origins and traits are well understood with the eight main symptoms being defined as ⁹:

Illusion of Invulnerability:	Members ignore obvious danger, take extreme risk, and are overly optimistic.
Collective Rationalization:	Members discredit and explain away advice and warnings contrary to group thinking.
Illusion of Morality:	Members believe their decisions are morally correct, ignoring the ethical consequences of their decisions.
Excessive Stereotyping:	The group constructs negative stereotypes of rivals outside the group.
Pressure for Conformity:	Members pressure any in the group who express arguments against the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments, viewing such opposition as disloyalty.
Self-Censorship:	Members withhold their dissenting views and counter-arguments.
Illusion of Unanimity:	Members perceive falsely that everyone agrees with the group's decision; silence is seen as consent.
Mindguards:	Some members appoint themselves to the role of protecting the group from adverse information that might threaten group complacency.

All eight of these symptoms are clearly evident in pronouncements and actions of the senior leadership group of the Department of Defence. However, in the Department's case, these symptoms or traits have been amplified and added to over time, aggravating the effects of groupthink. This is due, in part, to the Department (under successive governments) not being able to address the consequential deskilling that has arisen from the overall down sizing of the Australian Defence Organisation since the early 1990s. This causal extension to the groupthink model is very much akin to the observations made by Whyte in his 1998 article ¹⁰ on "*decision fiascos*" which he says "*are attributed, in large part, to perceptions of collective efficacy that unduly exceed capability*".

The effects of this deskilling have generated two additional cultural traits or symptoms of groupthink that may be observed in the Department – '**The Illusion of Infallibility**' and '**The Hierarchy of Rightness**' ¹¹ – the higher up in the organisation the more right one's views become. One related yet equally significant generational effect of this deskilling has been the progressive shallowing of the gene pool of appropriately skilled and experienced candidates for the top jobs in Defence, with the management challenges this brings. ¹² Unfortunately, the current thinking of the 'in-group' in the Department, particularly the military members, will lead them to actively resist and be dismissive of any of the proven, albeit lateral, solutions to these challenges.

A world wide search was conducted for the position of CEO of the Defence Materiel Organisation. This search sought someone with the requisite skills, knowledge and experience plus the ability to provide the much needed injection of experiences from outside the Department. One needs to ask why such an approach should not be countenanced for other top jobs in Defence, particularly at this time. As a consequential corollary to the deskilling within defence, there is a pool that exists in the broader community today of ex-military personnel with the requisite expertise and ranks who now have 'external to defence' experiences and competencies. Many of these individuals have also gained a highly refined perspective of the organisation, having been able to closely observe its operations from outside the defence culture of groupthink. There are precedents for such solutions in the global military and commercial communities. ^{13 14 15}

A relatively recent article on the Shuttle Columbia disaster ¹⁶ referred to groupthink as "*a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive 'in-group', when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action*".

Put simply, the particular strain of groupthink observed in the Department today is the triumph of concurrence over good sense and authority over expertise. It is fuelled by group narcissism which, though an important element of any military culture when kept under control, becomes a volatile accelerant of groupthink when it takes control. It is fanned by the self vested interests of individuals being placed above what is right, often coercively by the 'group loyalists' and 'mindguards'. Compliance is achieved by being held up as the way to promotion as much as countervailing views are seen as dissidence and the actions of 'non-team players' who then get 'asked' to leave the field. Invariably, this behaviour is enshrined in the mantle of 'loyalty to the organisation' when, really, it is protectionism for the group and those responsible for the groupthink behaviour. Look no further than the influence The Defence Legal Service (now known simply as Defence Legal) to observe how an all-pervasive sub-group in the department can spread an ethos of 'protecting the group' regardless of the ethics, morality or even legality of that protective position. Submissions to various Parliamentary and other inquiries into Defence Matters contain many examples of this sub-group's influence within, as well as on, the senior leadership group. Note the number of defence pronouncements, submissions and decisions that carry the imprimatur of "*on legal advice*", often times as some form of estoppel on the provision of any further explanation or the acceptance of any further questioning on the matter.

Just as the origins and traits of groupthink are well understood, so too are the cures. In his treatise on the phenomenon and follow up writings, Janis detailed the things that management and managers need to do to cure the disease and ensure its eradication is permanent. The fixes are simple, easy to understand, and should not take generations to effect. In fact, as with all cures, the quicker the better.

However, various attempts that have been made to encourage successive leadership groups within the Department of Defence to, firstly, acknowledge the existence of groupthink within their ranks and, secondly, adopt appropriate cures, have been met with intense resistance in both overt and covert forms. This has led to the cures and any proponents of these cures being perceived to be, then held up as, anathemas by the Department. Then, through the traits of 'excessive stereotyping' by the 'mindguards', underpinned by the 'illusions of invulnerability, morality and infallibility', this perception is projected by the Department as the 'reality', often times with the catch line of "*couldn't find the evidence to support*" the countervailing view when their 'reality' is challenged.^{17 18 19}

However, in a learning organisation that is committed to values like 'people matter' and 'continuous improvement' as the Department of Defence proclaims itself to be, then 'perceptions', though important, are only a part of the overall equation of '*Perceptions + Knowledge of Facts = Reality*'.

An obvious example is seen in the Department adopting the credo of 'People Matter' and projecting this to government and the community as their *modus operandi*.²⁰ As may be observed through various case studies and materiel provided to Parliamentary Inquiries on Defence Matters, the reality is that only some people matter and others can and are cast aside without a second thought.²¹

The facts are that the symptoms of groupthink appear, repeatedly, in the various inquiries, reviews, and studies into defence matters since the Industry Commission Report No 41 into Defence Procurement dated 01 August 1994 (and even earlier studies). Enlightened reading of the submissions and the reports from these various inquiries, reviews, and studies²² shows this to be the case. In essence, successive governments over the years have spent hundred of millions (or billions if one includes staff salaries) of Australian Tax Payers' money on trying to fix what ails the Department of Defence.

This activity has become an industry in its own right with many from the government bureaucracy (both active and retired) finding lucrative employment through its existence. The list is expansive and eminent in its membership^{23 24 25} and the reporting voluminous and eloquently diplomatic in its findings. Yet, throughout, there has been little acknowledgment of any root cause and, consequently though not surprisingly, also little improvement. Graduates of Management 101 and basic courses in T&E²⁶ can attest, the starting point to sustainable improvement is to firstly identify and acknowledge what needs to be improved. In other words, to apply the much prescribed 'lessons learned' and 'continuous improvement' ideals, firstly one must acknowledge that things are not optimal or, in plain speak, what mistakes are being made. As any mother knows, making mistakes is one of the most powerful ways of learning – the failure to do so is where any culpability lies; not in the making.

The improvements that have occurred have been mostly ‘around the edges; somewhat fragile; and, more often than not, incomplete. As history shows, most will need further change to survive or, even worse, will revert back to the old practices but under new names. This latter phenomenon is, in part, due to the turnover of personnel and changes in appointments as well as the lack of a robust ‘corporate memory’ within the Department. One need look no further than today’s defence filing system (under the DRMS²⁷) compared with the subject based, hierarchical and relational systems that preceded it to see why ‘corporate memory’ has faded over the years. This one aspect has severely limited the organisation’s ability to adopt and apply the ‘lessons learned’ or ‘capability maturity modelling’ practices for ‘measurably improved performance’ and ‘achieved positive outcomes’.

The resulting ‘re-invention of the wheel’ approach, so commonly observed in defence’s processes, has been at enormous cost to the tax payer as well as to those who have earnestly tried to engender proper reform. In the meantime, the ‘cancer’ of groupthink has grown at an exponential rate from its roots in the very core of the organisation – the senior leadership group. It is now rampant in its propagation throughout the Australian Defence Organisation, even starting to invade the ADF itself. The way departmental senior management hide behind the good reputations and deeds of our fighting men and women within the ADF when they themselves have been found wanting is considered by many who have served to be a consequence of this cancer – but also a less than honest response.²⁸

No better examples of this cancer and its destructive effects on the Australian Department of Defence may be found in the departmental submissions to the current Senate Reference Committee’s Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the Australian Military Justice System. These submissions are replete with the bureaucratic double speak, misrepresentations and distortions of the facts, dissemblance, disingenuousness, and self protectionism, intentional or otherwise, that typify the thinking and actions of individuals who are steeped in organisational ‘groupthink’. As negative as this may seem, the concentration of such examples in this very important activity being undertaken by the oversight level of governance of the Department of Defence presents a unique opportunity for those responsible for the organisation’s well being and, thus, its ability to perform and develop.

We suggest the effectiveness of the outcomes from this opportunity will very much depend on the ability of the Committee, Defence and Government to, collectively, connect this inquiry’s findings, particularly in relation to culture, and the findings of previous inquiries that have looked into defence matters. Identifying and acknowledging the existence of the traits of groupthink as being common and self evident in defence matters is an important first step in curing this organisational affliction.

It is our sincere hope this inquiry will be the catalyst for bringing to an end this type of behaviour; beginning with removal of the resistance to acknowledging the root cause of what ails the Department today. This vital, first step opens the way for the instigation of appropriate and sustainable reform that is focused on real outcomes rather than just re-inventing process.

The published literature and individual views of domain experts in management and organisational psychology may be diverse, even disparate, on how to improve organisations of groups of people and their performance, but on one aspect they converge. It is only through identifying and, then, acknowledging the root cause of what ails the organisation can such an organisational disease, like groupthink, be prescribed the right treatment and, more importantly, provided the focus and the means for the treatment to have the desired and measurable effects.

It may take the political will of the whole of the Parliament, both Government and Opposition, to not only put this cancer into remission but to cure it once and for all, with appropriate and continuing diligence to ensure it never, ever returns. However, for the sake of the present and future generations of Australians, such a unity of purpose is well worth the effort. Our men and women of the ADF and the hardworking people within the Department deserve nothing less as well do our children.

“I believe ... each generation of Australians is obliged to leave our country in better shape than they found it.”

Prime Minister John Howard, July 2004

Endnotes :

- 1 Defence Service Charter, July 1998; Defence Acquisition Organisation/Defence Materiel Organisation *Vision Statement* (1996-02); DAO/DMO Aerospace Acquisition Division *Values Statement* (1998-01)
- 2 Kinnaird Review, [Defence Procurement Review 2003 \(Kinnaird Review\)](#), 18 September 2003 (http://www.defence.gov.au/dmo/dpr_report.pdf)
- 3 Senate Reference Committee on FADT, [Inquiry into Materiel acquisition and management in Defence](#), 27 March 2003
- 4 Centre for Defence Command, Leadership and Management Studies (CDCLMS) Australian Defence College. “*Command, Leadership, Management and Military Ethics: Case Studies*” (as at Nov 2004)
- 5 Fuller, S.R. & Aldag, R.J. (1998). Organizational Tonypany: Lessons from a quarter century of the groupthink phenomenon. *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 73(2-3), 163-184.
- 6 Kramer, R.M. (1998). “*Revisiting the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam decisions 25 years later: How well has the groupthink hypothesis stood the test of time?*” *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 73(2-3), 236-271.
- 7 Moorhead, G., Neck, C.P. & West, M.S. (1998) “*The tendency toward defective decision making within self-managing teams: The relevance of groupthink for the 21st century.*” *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 73(2-3), 327-351.
- 8 Esser, J.K. (1998). “*Alive and well after 25 years: A review of groupthink research.*” *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 73(2-3), 116-141.
- 9 Janis, I. L. & Mann, L. (1977), ‘*The Eight Main Symptoms of GroupThink*’, [Decision making: A psychological analysis of conflict, choice, and commitment](#). New York: Free Press. Link found on the Air Power Australia Web Site, Policy & Defence Reform page, <http://www.ousairpower.net/policy.html>
- 10 Whyte, G. (1998). “*Recasting Janis’s groupthink model: The key role of collective efficacy in decision fiascos.*” *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 73(2-3), 185-209.
- 11 AFTS (2000/01). Communications with Dr Allan Hawke, DEFSEC, *et al* in response to requests for Industry Contributions to Defence Reform.
- 12 White, Hugh. *Filling the gap in the frontline*. Sydney Morning Herald, 24 Jan 05.
- 13 General Peter J Schoomaker, Current US Army Chief of Staff, recalled out of retirement in June 2003 http://www.dcmilitary.com/army/pentagram/8_24/national_news/23733-1.html
- 14 General Maxwell Taylor, recalled out of retirement in 1962 to serve as chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- 15 Harry Stonecipher, CEO Boeing Co. Recalled out of retirement, November 2003.
- 16 Schwartz, J. & Wald, M. L. (2003, March 03). ‘*Smart people working collectively can be dumber than the sum of their brains: “Groupthink” is 30 years old, and still going strong.*’ *NY Times*. Retrieved February 20, 2004, from Ebsco database.
- 17 Blunn, A. (2002). *Report of a Review of Departmental Actions Resulting from Complaints by Australian Flight Test Services Pty Ltd*.
- 18 Carnell, I. (30 Nov 04). *Report to the Minister for Defence on Claims by LtCol Lance Collins*.
- 19 Blick, W (Bill) (2003 et al).
- 20 Houston, A.G. “*Chief talks leadership*”. Air Force News. 25 April 2002
- 21 Dept of Defence (2004). Approved Responses to Questions on Notice for 01 August 2004 Hearings on the Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the Military Justice System, *et al*.
- 22 Refer to reports listed in the Related Links section on the Policy and Defence Reform page of the Air Power Australia web site, <http://www.ousairpower.net/policy.html> .
- 23 Defence Annual Reports, 2000 – 2004. Listings of Expenditure on External Consultants – “.....the total expenditure by Defence on consultants in 2000-01 was \$5,966,569; in 2001-02 was \$7,571,075; and in 2002-03 was \$14,700,874”. DAR 2003-04 , reported an expenditure of \$22,072,839.
- 24 Defence Annual Reports, 2000 – 2004. Listings of Expenditure on Legal Services.
- 25 Defence Annual Reports, 2000 - 2004. Listings of Contracts Exempt from Publication in the Purchasing and Disposal Gazette.
- 26 Test and Evaluation (T&E): a robust collection of skilled disciplines and domain experts working as a feedback loop with a governance structure that allows it “to be integrated withbut independent of...” the core capability for assuring and, thus, ensuring achievement of stated requirements in the most cost effective way with minimal risk exposure. AFTS T&E Functions and Roles Model – © May 1991
- 27 DRMS – Defence Records Management System.
- 28 Ministerial Media Release, 19 Apr 04. MINASSIST 15/04–‘*Labour should apologise for slur on ADF*’.