

By Dr Carlo Kopp

Defence – deep reforms are needed

Last week's public criticism of Defence by Professor Paul Dibb and Dr Richard Brabin-Smith was an accurate summary of the problems within the Department, which are progressively eroding Australia's strategic weight.

Force structures can be dismantled very quickly, yet in practice poor force structure decisions once made can take two or three decades to repair. Dysfunctional force structure planning – even over a few years – will have consequences lasting for decades.

Dibb and Brabin-Smith identify problems in a developing trend to “short-circuit the force-structure decision-making process in defence and go direct to the minister with proposals to purchase their favourite weapons, preferably without competition”.

This recent behaviour has been manifested in the JSF decision and the ill-considered F-111 decision. It is now abundantly clear that a lack of intellectually rigorous analysis – another problem identified by Dibb and Brabin-Smith – produced decisions which damage the national interest and the Air Force.

For instance, the Defence leadership argued before a parliamentary committee that the F-111 wing

test article breakage, the occupational health and safety problems associated with now historical practices in fuel tank overhauls and the fuel tank overpressure resulting from a wiring problem, were all “surprises”. Yet the problems with inadequate prior fatigue testing effort on the F-111 wing were known for years.

The occupational health and safety problems were also known for years. The risks in flying with degraded fuel tank cabling were identified earlier by the F-111 engineering community. The conventional approach to force structure planning starts with intelligence analysis of potential opposing capabilities projection and estimation of future capabilities in the timeframe of interest definition of an operational concept to defeat future opposing capabilities and then definition of technical requirements and numbers.

Both the F-111 and JSF decisions are case studies of the impact of arbitrary “short circuiting” of the analytical method. Current and future costs for the F-111 will not reflect the guessed and inflated figures used by Defence. The regional environment is expected to be more competitive than when the gapfiller

F/A-18 strike capability was devised to replace the F-111.

There is no reason to believe fully capable JSFs will arrive when planned – and every reason to believe the JSF will not be competitive in the future regional environment.

The region is in the grip of an arms race, especially in terms of the strategic reach being acquired by larger regional nations. Imported Russian systems are producing significant power projection capabilities.

Defence was warned of these developments six years ago.

The call for reform by Dibb and Brabin-Smith is one which cannot go unheeded. The last three years have shown that Defence is unable to reform itself – the problems with deskilling, erosion of values, breakdown of processes and internal resistance to change are too deeply entrenched for management reshuffles and divisional name changes to fix.

Defence needs a large injection of leadership and technical talent, and deep changes to its internal mechanisms for decision-making and accountability, to preclude more damage to the national interest and public purse.

Intelligence wins Army award

CANBERRA – It must have been a morale-booster for the spook trade when the Australian Army Intelligence Corps was presented with the Governor-General's banner for outstanding service.

Governor-General Mike Jeffrey made the presentation at a ceremony at Canungra.

Which raises the question of whether the government is trying to push the G-G firmly into the back-

ground. The long media released prattled on under Defence Minister Hill's quotes, naming Lieutenant General Peter Leahy and tin-pot MPs. But it didn't once mention the GG by name or his former rank in the Army.

Pitch Black draw to busy close

DARWIN – Exercise Pitch Black 2004, Australia's biggest Air Force exercise, ended last week. It was

commanded from Glenbrook.

Joint Force Air Component Commander, Air Commodore John Quaife, thanked international personnel from the Republic of Singapore Air Force, the Royal Thai Air Force and the French Air Force.

About 1600 sorties were flown.

“The Exercise was not designed to provide a winner or a loser,” Quaife said. “Pitch Black was all about providing our personnel with experience that will equip them to deal with challenging air combat scenarios in the future. We aim to train as we would fight if required.”