

By Dr Carlo Kopp

Implementation of defence policy, rather than the rhetoric used to sell it, needs to be the issue in the election campaign

The Coalition sees itself as having a commitment to security issues. This reflects the conservative core constituency's commitment to maintaining a strong military and using it to protect or further the national interest.

This core value is common to Australian conservatives as it is abroad, especially in the US. From a conservative policy perspective, national military power is important and must be invested in systematically, as it is as much a component of foreign policy as legal and moral imperatives.

At a philosophical level, the Coalition is committed to an assertive and, as required, an interventionist defence policy. Australia's participation in Afghanistan and contribution to the controversial invasion of Iraq provide the proof. The Prime Minister also says Australia intends to launch pre-emptive military operations in the region if required – another reflection of this pattern.

Sadly, there is a chasm between the Coalition's philosophical basis

for a defence policy and the force structure investment patterns within Defence. Over the last three years we have seen several major investment decisions, which are diametrically opposed to what a political conservative expects.

The decision to kill off the F-111 and downsize the RAAF's offensive capability by half is the most recent example. The decision to ignore the top-end F/A-22A, in favour of the JSF, optimised for battlefield strike is another. Limiting the tanker buy to five airframes is yet another.

What we see in ADF force structure investment, especially in air power, reflects the pattern followed by EU socialist governments over the last decade: Downsizing offensive capability and strategic reach and replacement of top-tier assets with less capable, second-tier assets. The Defence Capability Plan is a recipe for a Euro-socialist force structure model for the ADF.

Responsibility lies largely with the Defence leadership, which has placed short-term expediency above the political aims of the defence policy they are to implement.

This will be cold comfort to Aus-

tralia's conservative community, who are presented with the ugly reality of a DCP which is Euro-socialist in its aims – despite the clearly neo-Reaganite values of the Coalition leadership. Having canvassed the views of many conservatives, this observer found much unhappiness over the issue.

If the Coalition fails to tackle this dichotomy between its philosophies and long-term force structure investment patterns, it will deeply alienate many conservative voters, especially those with an appreciation of defence issues. How big a protest vote this alienation might produce is an open question.

The Defence bureaucracy cannot be relied upon to produce advice which is consistent with the philosophy of Coalition defence policy. If the Coalition is returned it has an obligation to its core conservative constituency to undo the damaging decisions of the last two years and impose upon Defence much more rigorous intellectual discipline in ADF force structure planning.

Defence: a conservative dilemma

9/11 significant – 90 years ago

CANBERRA – We forget September 11 is also a memorable date in Australia's history. Ninety years ago an Australian expeditionary force landed on the island of New Britain (now part of Papua New Guinea) to seize the German wireless stations at Bitapaka, part of a network capable of providing intelligence to Vice Admiral Von Spee's East Asiatic Squadron of the German Navy.

Naval troops from the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force landed at dawn on 11 Septem-

ber 1914 and began to make their way inland, encountering German resistance. Reinforcements landed during the day.

By the end of the day the Australian forces had captured the stations. However, Australia suffered its first casualties of the war. Four sailors and an Army medical officer were killed and four naval personnel were wounded.

Able Seaman C.V. Williams was the first Australian wounded in action in World War I – he died that afternoon.

The following day Rabaul was secured and the remaining German forces surrendered

Success of the operation was marred by the unexplained disappearance of the submarine *HMAS AE1* with all 35 crew on September 14.

.CIAS sold to Emirates

SINGAPORE – Temasek Holdings has agreed to sell its 78.4 percent stake in airport ground handler Changi International Airport Services (CIAS) to Dnata, which handles baggage at Dubai and is a unit of the Emirates Group.