



## Army – Into the Future

Lieutenant General David Morrison AO, Chief of the Australian Army spoke to the USI of ACT in Canberra on 19 March 2014

*The United Services Institute of the ACT hosted a presentation by the Chief of Army who gave an insightful view of the challenges and opportunities facing the Australia Army over the next decade. He spoke with specific emphasis on the cultural change issues facing the Army. Following are the speaking points he used in his presentation.*



LTGEN Morrison addresses the USI of ACT  
*RUSI Photo*

### Speaking Points

- My thanks. The bar is set high in some respects – ASPI and Lowy in the last three weeks. This completes the trifecta. I don't want to reprise those speeches but it is useful, by way of beginning to just touch on the key points I made.
  - In both I covered themes of strategy and strategic practice.
  - I spoke with concern about the lack of a national oceanic mindset. This can impede and restrict our ability to look out beyond our continental landmass – not ideal for an island nation dependant on the sea for its trade. In that I probably echoed some of Michael Fullilove's excellent speech to the Australian
- Press Club this week.
- I addressed, again, issues that pertain to Defence Forces and particularly armies at the end of long periods of operational commitment. This has been a consistent theme in my many public addresses during my tenure.
  - In both I took heart from two key matters.
  - First, from even a cursory analysis it is possible to discern the long strategic practice of successive governments of all political hues, shaped by pragmatism and careful analysis, of aligning ourselves with the dominant maritime power of the day, which has seen the ADF on operations for over a third of our time as a constituted national state in all four corners of the globe. In doing so we have helped secure Australia.
  - This is such a constant as to be an entirely reasonable and logical predictor for the future. It is a clear sign that the ADF exists to protect Australia's sovereignty, not just its geography.
  - Secondly, I took heart because the lessons learned from the operations of the last 15 years, reflected in three White Papers, and soon a fourth, all point to the absolute requirement for a balanced ADF with the capacity to project force from the Australian mainland.
  - So instead today I want to take a different approach and speak about the journey your Army has been on during my tenure as your Chief, at tenure which concludes in early Jul

of this year.

- This is not a personal account by any means, more a reckoning with hopefully some useful insights around the three broad priorities that I set almost in the first week of assuming my appointment.
- Those priorities are – support to troops deployed, deploying or returned from ops; ensuring a robust and relevant Army in the 3rd decade of this Century, and matters pertaining to our people – especially as became the case, the culture of the Army.
- I plan to cover each in turn and leave plenty of time for questions.
- I will begin with operations and my first observation is to recognise the outstanding and sustained service by thousands of service men and women in every military endeavour from HA/DR in Indonesia, PNG and the Philippines, to border protection in our North, to stabilisation operations in Timor L'Este, to support to constabulary actions in the Solomons, to major warlike operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is much to proud of and the Army has been in the forefront of almost all that has been done and achieved.
- What I say next in no way reflects on either operational success achieved, nor the bravery and commitment of all concerned, but there are three insights I would offer.
- All, less Timor in October 1999, have allowed a degree of strategic comfort in determining what forces we, as a Nation, would deploy and what they would do in theatre – their tactical left and right of arc if you like.
- There is nothing new in this. The same could be said of almost all of our operational commitments since WWII.
- But we need to recognise that in designing comparatively niche forces, we have not had to operate at a joint level in escalated, high end warfighting.
- Lets hope we never do, but let me assure you that should there be a requirement, it will require a joint response from the ADF and further that the joint force will only be as strong as its weakest Service.
- Let me state categorically that your Army in the 70s, 80s, and early 90s was consigned, by design, to be that weakest service. There is an absolute need now and into the future for a balanced ADF.
- Secondly, while I think that the recent past is probably a reasonable predictor for the near future, in terms of the type of operations we will conduct, its critical that we don't benchmark ourselves against the Taliban.
- They possessed no accurate indirect fire, flew no aircraft, drove no armoured vehicles, did not contest in the electromagnetic spectrum. Australia is a middle weight power. We should appropriately benchmark our armed forces against a peer, or near peer adversary.
- As an adjunct to that observation it is most certainly not in our interests as a professional Army to "believe our own press". There are areas that require urgent attention – joint war-fighting capabilities are paramount in that regard and they have not been a dominant feature of almost any of our operations in the last decade.
- If Afghanistan teaches us anything it should be that while our technology is first rate, there is an enduring character to war and we mustn't lose sight of that fact.
- The view that military operations of the future will break with our past and become neat, clean, bloodless in their execution, entirely discretionary in terms of how long we will commit forces, conducted on our behalf by technologically enabled remote weapon systems is to me naïve at best.
- I would offer our recent operational experiences as an exemplar of how the promise of technological impact is almost always challenged and countered through human agency and adaptation.
- Afghanistan has been perhaps the most intensely "surveilled" battle space in the history of warfare. The military operations

that have been waged against an unconventional enemy and it has been a bloody and protracted fight. I am no modern day Cassandra, foretelling woe, but surely there are strong lessons for our future operating environments in this that we ignore at our peril.

- And so to our plans to be robust and relevant in the third decade of the century. That is encapsulated in Army force structure plan called Beersheba. At its heart it recognises that in generating land forces, with all of their required fighting and logistic capabilities, it is by far the best to focus on Brigade groups.
- Those Brigades must have the ability to fight, or to threaten sanctioned and appropriate violence. In an Army of 30 000 regular soldiers you can, if you are efficient, have three combat brigades and in efficiency's name, they should be as alike as possible. That allows for them to be rotated if operations are protracted – and they are inevitably protracted. That is the lesson of every major military commitment since WWII.
- That demands that you place in those Brigades the equipment and capabilities that will allow the Brigade to train as they will fight. That's what we are doing, including our current and future armoured vehicles.
- You need to have your enabling assets – helicopters, logistics, intelligence, surveillance and targeting units brigaded as well. That's what we have done – three enabling brigades able to supplement fighting capability in the three combat brigades.
- You need to make much better use of the talent and capacity of your Reserve component. We done that as well with our 2nd Division now restructured to produce operational effect like we saw from them in the Solomons and Timor L'Este.
- And you need to be an equal part of the great joint initiative that will make our ADF an amphibious force in years to come, capable of conducting a true maritime strategy. That is underway with the tasks laid on the 2nd Battalion in Townsville, as well as helicopter

and logistic units.

- And in our plans for the future, what is *the must have* with regard to land forces? I know the budget is constrained. Given that I made the decision to forgo self propelled artillery, a long awaited capability, so that the defence budget could be balanced in a way that supported national fiscal objectives, no one knows better.
- I realise that there are many demands on the DCP – JSF, Triton, AWD, replacement replenishment vessels for Navy and eventual replacement for our frigates, let alone replacement for Collins. They are all imperatives and it is most unlikely that the 2015 White Paper will conclude otherwise.
- But so to is the critical land force capabilities – remember a joint force is only as strong as its weakest Service.
- We must replace our armoured vehicles, less tank. L400 will be subject to significant public and Government scrutiny. I make no comment about eventual decisions as to the numbers of vehicles or levels of capability that they will furnish. That is for a Government to balance with other national priorities.
- But replacements, in sufficient numbers, with sufficient capability will have to be procured. There is only one major operation that we have committed to since I began my service in the 70s, where we have no sent armoured vehicles and that was to the Solomons, a constabulary action. Everywhere else they have formed the backbone of what we have been required to do on the ground.
- There are some in the defence and security commentariat who set aside this fact and attempt to hold Army to a level of account that is illogical and gravely irresponsible. They say in one breath that we must have JSF and submarines, but not the means by which land forces actually operate and fight. So be it – we live in a democracy, but that also allows me to add my voice of considerable practical experience.

- So it is clearly a priority for the future – the means to provide protection to our soldiers, and to threaten or visit violence on those who would do us harm.
- The other priority is that Army must stop being an analogue force in a digital age. We still are at this time, although it is changing with the introduction into service of equipment procured under several projects – JP2072, L 200, L 125 and L 75.
- Information is good, intelligence derived from information is better, intelligence disseminated across a battlespace to those who are delivering the military effect the nation requires is essential. Digital communications and battlespace management is the key.
- And finally to my other area of priority that I set myself almost three years ago – people, or as it became, through incidents and public scrutiny, the issue of Army culture.
- Time is pressing, and I want to give you the opportunity to question me, or take issue with what I have said, so let me distil what I have learned as a leader who has attempted cultural change.
- First, culture is essential to any organisation. It is vital in an institution that is charged under our constitution with the protection of Australia in order to ensure its future prosperity.
- Actually vital, if anything, is not strong enough. Your Army exists to fight and win the Nation's wars. To do that, its ranks need to be filled with those who are prepared to give all in putting service before self. There are over 100 000 names on the walls of our war memorial belonging to men and women who did just that.
- A culture that inspires that level of service is to be treasured. It is to be respected and managed with great care.
- Yet when I assumed command of the Australian Army in July 2011 it was apparent that we needed to squarely face some serious cultural problems, in particular the manner in which we treated our female soldiers, those from ethnic minorities and those with alternative sexual preferences. There was, and still is, a recurring problem with alcohol abuse and social media which has periodically detracted from our reputation.
- And here is the crux of the matter. As altruistic and fair-minded as I am, or at least try to be, its not about a “fair go”, or being politically correct or “new age”. Its about being better able to deliver military effects, sometimes in the most challenging and dire circumstances imaginable.
- To a degree, our monopoly on violence and the particular place we occupy in our national psyche, demands that we must earn and maintain a high level of trust among our community. They are entitled to expect more of us than other institutions. After all, we in uniform keep telling ourselves that we are special and custodians of the best of our military heritage.
- And yes, as the professional head of this great institution I know that we need to bond our soldiers to one another and instill toughness and resilience into them.
- But when this goal is invoked to degrade and demonise women and minorities it is undermining rather than enhancing capability.
- So in demanding changes to our culture I am doing so out of love for the Australian Army and for the men and women who serve in its ranks.
- As the Chief of the Army, I ultimately set the tone for the organisation and exemplify its values. Those values – Courage, Initiative, Teamwork and Respect are noble when they are lived as intended.
- My motives are essentially pragmatic. Organisations with high levels of what can be termed as ‘social capital’ are more effective, both in their performance and ability to retain their highly skilled personnel much longer.
- In other words making the most effective use of our female soldiers, or men and women

from ethnic groups who have been reluctant to join our military, makes good sense. It enhances our capability. That is the simple truth.

- Indeed, given the demographic changes affecting the Australian workforce over the next few decades, the Army will simply not be able to meet its recruiting targets or maintain its range of skills unless we become fully representative of the community from which we draw.
- In that regard the Anzac legend – as admirable as it is – has become something of a double-edged sword. Many Australians have an idealised image of the Australian soldier as a rough hewn country lad – invariably white – a larrikin who fights best with a hangover and who never salutes officers, especially the Poms. This is a pantomime caricature. Every soldier is Mel Gibson in Gallipoli and frankly it undermines our recruitment from some segments of society and breeds a dangerous complacency about how professional and sophisticated soldiering really is.
- I can talk about the specific initiatives that we are undertaking to ensure cultural change at length, but I will leave that for your questions if you wish to explore this matter further. Its more carrot than stick, but there is an absolute requirement, from me, to live up to our values or not be a part of our Army.
- Is it working? Well I am sure it is – I get plenty of feedback and it is overwhelmingly positive. We have significantly increased both our recruitment and retention of women. We have tangibly increased their opportunities to realise their potential.
- But cultural change, especially in an institution as old as our Army, is tough. It is not the work of days, but years. It is not made possible through YouTube clips, but through

the involvement and behaviour of 50 000 soldiers day in day out. It certainly won't be achieved in my time as your Chief, but when I leave I know that the momentum for change will be unstoppable. It's the best thing I have ever attempted because it will ensure that your Army is not just robust and relevant in the third decade of this Century, it will also ensure that it reflects the values of our Nation as it secures Australia's future prosperity.

- Your Army is in the best shape I have seen in my 35 years of service. It is getting better every day.



Members and guest of USI of ACT attend the presentation in the R1-Theatrette  
*RUSI Photo*



Patron of USI of ACT MAJGEN Mike Jeffery AC CVO MC (Retd) together with USI of ACT President AIRCDRE John Kentish CSM (Retd) congratulates Chief of Army after delivering his presentation.  
*RUSI Photo*

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### Biography:

**Lieutenant General David Morrison AO** joined the Army in 1979 and graduated from the Officer Cadet School, Portsea to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He was the Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, and commanded the 3rd Brigade from December 2002 until December 2004. He was appointed as Land Commander Australia in December 2008 and became Army's first Forces Commander on 1 July 2009. On 24 June 2011, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and on 27 June 2011 he assumed his current appointment of Chief of Army.