



Air Force – Respected, Reliable, Relevant Chief of Air Force: Air Marshal Geoff Brown

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(Check with delivery)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to again be with you tonight.

I wish to sincerely thank Peter Jennings and the members of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute for the opportunity to be here this evening. I congratulate ASPI on continuing to be a leading force in raising the level of national debate on matters that shape the future of this country. I also thank Fabrice Rochereau and EADS for their continued support of Defence.

As a middle power, Australia must be able to shape its security environment; be a shaper not just a taker.

As Chief of the Air Force, my job is to balance the structure and posture of the force such that it is fit for Government's purpose across time. I say across time because the dimensions of the future and the present are really inseparable.

Today, we have an Air Force capable of both responding to current events and postured to meet future challenges. And while the future is impossible to predict, Australia will always seek to assure its decision making and exercise its strategic preferences.

Therefore, the force I deliver needs two characteristics. It must be able to quickly adapt to emergent demand and also be strategically adaptable for the longer term. Therefore, the force I deliver must be able to adapt but also be adaptable.

Delivering a reliable force to Government 24/7 is essential. Delivering on Government's expectations defines a force's relevance. Delivering reliable and relevant air power across time through a professional workforce of character earns respect.

How do I deliver an Air Force that is respected, reliable, and relevant?

I do this by raising, training, and sustaining capabilities that deliver air power across a spectrum of operations up to and including conventional deterrence. The capacity to deter assures Australia's capacity to make its own decisions without undue coercion.

As Chief of Air Force I manage this across time. I manage the present but also manage the future. We are a unique first world air force that is respected, reliable and relevant.

So why do I say unique?

No other country in the world has a comparative force that is raised from such a small population, with such a huge amount of air, land and sea to cover. But the accomplishments of this force give us a track record that has the respect of the Government and that of our

partners. Our ability to respond rapidly to any tasks, nationally or regionally, demonstrates our reliability. Our flexibility to adapt to challenges across the full spectrum of operations demonstrates our relevance to the Government as a tool of national power.

Be assured that Air Force will be as salient tomorrow as it has been across our past 92 year history. The current force is more than capable of responding to all non-discretionary tasks.

On top of this I provide Government with a set of response options that are scalable. I also set the conditions for the future force so it is able to adapt to those discretionary tasks directed by Government.

For this to occur we need to understand the nature of our capabilities. I don't mean being able to describe what our capabilities do, though that is important, but we need to appreciate the strategic relevance of our capabilities. We have to understand that we owe the future a debt that must be paid in the present.

So why is this important to all of us?

Because Australia's way of life, the freedoms we take for granted, and our economic prosperity, are intrinsically linked to our national security. The Air Force is out there every single day defending Australia with the most reliable and influential means available to the Government of Australia. Of course I refer to air power, and its integral relationship with the other forms of national power.

I mentioned that the ability to raise, train and sustain a force is an important part of my job as Chief of Air Force. To raise the force requires us to continually review the skill sets that we need in our people. I cannot recruit people that only have the ability to perform today's jobs. I need people with the potential to develop skill sets we will require in five or ten years time. Frankly, we cannot stand on the laurels of the excellent team we currently have. We must never lose sight that today's recruits are tomorrow's leaders.

The debt we owe the future is more than just financial.

We have an obligation to raise a professional workforce that is adaptable to the evolving character of technology. The current generation of school leavers have a greater propensity to embrace change than those in the past. We must ensure we can recruit those with the potential to excel in both our traditional air power roles as well as new-age capabilities. This may sound simple, but the marketplace for this group is becoming increasingly competitive. I only have to glance around the room to see who some of my competition are.

As Chief, it is my responsibility to provide a work environment that makes Air Force an employer of choice. In an environment where the team outcome is what is typically measured, I want a workforce that values each member of the team. Individuals need to be able to excel as much as the group. In this area, I believe Air Force is making great advances in reshaping our workplace. While we value our heritage, we don't look to the past as the model of how we do business.

Air Force is on a journey of adaptation and improvement. We aim to raise and train a workforce that will remain relevant to Government expectations and community norms.

Education and training systems assure competitiveness and seed superiority, as indeed it does in the larger national system. But Air Force's commitment to excellence in developing our people is another avenue to ensure we pay our debt to the future.

I realise that many will argue that the corporate world faces similar training challenges. However, the consequence of a business not investing in training is the collapse of its market share. In my business, failure to educate and train my force adequately can lead to lapses in national security. Such a failure can lead to a loss of regional or global relevance, reduced prosperity and in the extreme, loss of sovereignty.

This is why Air Force's training requirements are rigorous, and reliant on a sound national base. It is why exercises like *Aces North*, *Talisman Sabre*, *Red Flag* and *Pitch Black* are vital to the sustainment of current capabilities and the development of our future ones. Education and training underpins our ability to stay responsive and reliable.

Many people, even within my own service, see sustainment as just the maintenance of the current capabilities. It is seen as the logistics behind an aircraft or system, or is the infrastructure that supports our operations. What I have just described is what I refer to as the little 's' or operational sustainment.

Operational sustainment is what we do today. It is the provision of fuels that enable aircraft to fly. It is the buildings that support people and our systems. It is the maintenance that keeps our aircraft serviceable and at the leading edge of their performance. All are critical to operations today and into the medium-term.

But it is not this area of sustainment that keeps me up at night.

It is the big 'S', strategic sustainment, that gives me the most pause. It is area of greatest risk to Air Force's future relevance.

Big 'S' sustainment is what Air Force does to ensure we have a force capable of meeting future expectations. Past Chiefs of Air Force have set the conditions for the success in the delivery of air power we witness on a daily basis. My Commanding Officers and their teams undertake today's tasks because of the previous work done on strategic sustainment.

Big 'S' sustainment is the higher-order logistics that allows a force to adapt to, and posture for, operations as the strategic environment evolves. It is about being both a smart customer as well as being a smart operator. Smart sustainment underpins the principles we use in our enterprise-level decision-making.

Air Force Headquarters is where most of our big 'S' sustainment occurs. It is my strategic Headquarters but spends a lot of time responding to the crises of today. We must or we would be irrelevant to Government. But Air Force Headquarters' role is also to sustain our future, and lead the Air Force's development across time. Its true measure of effectiveness

is the work undertaken to ensure our people, process, and platforms are shaped to meet the challenges of the future.

Our future reliability and relevance depends on the actions we take today in the big 'S' sustainment.

I have long been a fan of Jack Welch who stated that you should '*control your own destiny or else someone else will*'. I think this is an adaptation of the teachings of Sun Tzu that you should shape the enemy and not let him shape you. It proves the concept of shaping your destiny is timeless.

As a middle power, Australia seeks to shape through influence rather than direct intervention, but we do retain the capacity for that if needed. That is part of deterrence.

But by preference, Australia looks to shape our security environment.

We seek to assure both its stability, and that of the global commons, rather than pursue any notion of an enemy. We look to work with partners that share common goals. This is what I contend is shaping in the strategic sense.

Capabilities inherent in the Air Force today, and those we will raise in the future, are the essential elements of strategic shaping. They underpin our ability to act, our ability to adapt, and our ability to respond to current or emerging events.

Shaping is not just what we can do for our own country, but also how we support others. Our partners, both regional and global, must know that we are able to respond in meaningful ways if they are in need. We cannot shape the strategic environment from a position of fragility.

Our Air Force is not fragile and has proven its ability to respond when called upon. Whether in the aftermath of a cyclone in Fiji, an earthquake in Christchurch or civil unrest in the Solomon Islands, the Air Force has been rapid to respond. Our neighbours know that Australia is reliable, and in every case the Government has relied upon the Air Force as the go-to response option.

I appreciate we shape the environment through engagement and partnering. However, the capabilities we own today and those in our future are designed for deterrence, and if called on, employment.

As professional airmen we employ force as the last resort.

But our force structure both needs to be effective and seen to be effective. This is the hard edge of shaping and really what deterrence is all about.

Shaping is about preventing a conflict emerging rather than acting after conflicts starts. But, when engagement falls short we need to be in a position to respond. We must remember.

As Geoffrey Blainey remarked, *warfare is a legitimate human activity*. It is the ultimate court of appeal.

Our capacity to respond goes to the heart of reliability and relevance. Without either there can be no respect. Without respect there can be no deterrence; today or tomorrow. Though effective raise, train and sustainment we have an Air Force capable of operating with decisive force if called upon.

Australia needs to ensure that our neighbourhood does not become a source of threat to Australia.

The challenge for a middle power such as Australia is to find the right balance between engagement and force posture to achieve these goals. We are very much invested in maintaining a stable global commons.

As a first world Air Force, we have also grown, not always in size but certainly in capability. Our first world command and control and air power capabilities, if called upon, have the capacity to take a leading role in Pacific and South-East Asian operations. This has ensured we remain relevant to our Government's ability to sustain its middle power influence.

I highlighted that engagement is our preferred method of shaping the strategic environment. However, effective engagement needs to occur both domestically and internationally. I believe the most effective form of domestic engagement is between the public and private sectors;

And here I mean industry.

Since Defence adopted a corporate model of service providers, such as DMO, there has been less direct contact between Air Force group and industry. However, the Air Force team within DMO are probably more engaged with industry than any time in recent history. This relationship underpins the capability Air Force develops from its people, processes, and platforms. We need to ensure industry involvement leads to both corporate success and sustainability, but also delivers maximum capability for Air Force.

Our ability to engage on the regional stage depends on a secure and sustainable Australian industry.

Of course international engagement has long been a core element of defence policy through a number of iterations of White Papers. Indeed, engagement lives more broadly at the heart of our foreign policy.

The Prime Minister in his recent address in Jakarta reiterated the importance of the development of regional relationships. If we are to maintain our successful engagement in our region, we must continue fostering partnerships. We must respect each other and trust others to keep commitments.

If I can take away one key word from the PM's address it would be trust. Trust underpins all elements of engagement and it is here that Air Force has excelled. The regional and global Air Forces we engage implicitly trust our abilities. But trust cannot be gained overnight. We have developed this trust and respect through our actions in operations and in exercises.

Respect is earned through long-term engagement in activities such as the Five Powers Defence Arrangement. Since 1971, Air Force has been engaged with the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore in the security of Malaysia and Singapore. The Integrated Air Defence System is headquartered in Malaysia under the command of an Australian Air Vice-Marshal.

The relationships we build through engagement underpin our successes in operations and exercises. Being able to meet the operational expectations of the Government when called upon is one of our measures of success.

I can raise, train and sustain the Air Force such that it can shape and engage, but unless we are able to operate when tasked it is all for show.

So what is expected of the Air Force?

Our tasks can be broken into two categories: non-discretionary and discretionary.

The non-discretionary tasks are our bread and butter. These are the tasks we are most often called upon to perform. They are the permanent standing tasks that we are undertaking every single day, such as border protection. Right now an Air Force aircraft, probably an AP-3C Orion, is flying patrol along our borders, conducting surveillance across vast expanse of waters.

What you may not be aware of are the other Air Force capabilities supporting this activity.

Vigilare is the core of our air defence surveillance network. It provides enhanced battlespace management to support operations, such as border protection. To achieve this level of awareness, it takes data feeds from over 245 sensors across 45 different systems. In near real-time, *Vigilare* integrates information from the Jindalee Over the Horizon Radars, along with tactical platforms such as the AEW&C Wedgetail, Orions and Hornets to produce complete pictures of everything airborne in our area of interest.

Vigilare is a 24/7 capability that supports a 24/7 task.

In addition to the permanent standing tasks are those non-discretionary operations that occur with little to no warning. Most commonly they involve humanitarian assistance or disaster response. If we were not able to respond adequately, Air Force's relevance to the Government would rightly be questionable.

I am proud to say that Air Force has a long history of standing up and delivering when called upon.

Our credentials are solid. We have repeatedly been the Government's first respondent in humanitarian assistance or disaster response missions.

December 26 this year marks the ninth anniversary of the tsunami that struck our regional friends in Indonesia and across many parts of Asia. Within 24 hours, Air Force C-130s were enroute to Jakarta loaded with humanitarian aid. The first C-130 landed in Banda Aceh within 48 hours of the waves that devastated this Sumatran community.

From Cyclone Tracey in 1974, through to the Bali Bombings in 2002, and Cyclone Yasi in 2011, Air Force rubber was the first Defence response to hit the ground.

On top of these are the counter-terrorism activities we regularly undertake.

From the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, through to the G-20 and APEC, Air Force is ever-present. Some of it is a noisy presence, but the majority go unseen; and that is the way it should be.

Through reliability we gain respect, and from respect we maintain relevancy. But to be relevant to the Government, Air Force must be able to respond across the spectrum of operations.

My team gain a great deal of personal and professional satisfaction responding to humanitarian and disaster relief and counter-terrorism operations. These are both important to stability and strategically salient. However, it is further along the spectrum into stability operations and higher-end warfighting where Air Force can exercise its true breadth.

The real test for Air Force came in 2003 when we needed to move further across the spectrum into high-end warfighting. The deployment of a squadron of F/A-18 Hornets to the Middle East was a milestone for the Air Force. Our really high-end warfighting skills had not been called since Vietnam.

The fundamentals of our raise, train and sustain activities, along with the engagement we had undertaken with our partners, set us up for success.

Though not without its challenges, we integrated our fighters into the coalition operations seamlessly. We conducted combat air patrols around Baghdad, and strike missions against key Iraqi targets.

However, one of the more satisfying missions of the war was a close air support task performed by our F/A-18s. During the taking of Al-Asad air base in the west of Iraq, Australian Special Forces soldiers came under enemy fire. Australian Hornets on call provided close air support to Australian ground forces in contact. Australian air power integrating with Australian land power.

Airman protecting soldier.

I may be a pilot but being a country lad from southern Queensland I like to use an agricultural analogy to look at capability. I often describe capability in terms of bamboo, seed-corn and old growth.

In times of crisis, we must have the capacity to rapidly grow a capability to meet an urgent requirement. I refer to this as a bamboo capability. It grows rapidly from an established base and may or may not have longevity.

We introduced this type of capability into Afghanistan in the form of the Heron Unmanned Air System. In a very short time we introduced into service a capability we had little prior experience with. We achieved this because we grew the capability alongside similar capabilities of our coalition partners. We leveraged off their experience, and our existing skills in ISR, to go from contract signature to capability in less than 6 months. Just like bamboo, we achieved rapid growth from an established base; albeit a base not completely resident in our force.

Bamboo capabilities can only occur with the right conditions. They must be closely monitored to ensure they add to rather than adversely influence our long-term capabilities.

In the Heron we grew the right capability at the right time for our force. I believe it is a capability that will remain relevant to our security needs long after we leave Afghanistan.

The next level of capability forms the basis for our immediate and next generation force. I like to call these seed-corn capabilities because they grow from the skills we maintain today and the requirements we envision for the future.

Seed-corn capabilities are those that we are transitioning to or are contained within the Defence Capability Plan. Seed-corn is what you invest in today to ensure you have capabilities that fill your future national security requirements.

These capabilities are represented in platforms such as the Growler, P-8, Triton, Space Surveillance Telescope, and of course the Joint Strike Fighter. They could provide depth in our force structure today; however, their real value will be to future Governments. Air Force is growing a new line of capability to assure relevance to emergent context, that of Force Level Electronic Warfare, or FLEW.

In the emergent environment, Force Level Electronic Warfare assures theatre and national operations over air, land and sea, in peace and in conflict. The confluence of Growler, P-8, Wedgetail, Super Hornet and JSF, Navy's Aegis-equipped AWD and Army's Special Force operations presents an extraordinary development for Australia. It assures relevance in operations across time. I am proud Air Force has a leading role in bringing Force Level Electronic Warfare to Australia.

Future capability, leveraging excellence in the present, is the seed that will grow to deliver future air power needs.

In that, the final capability I wish to talk about tonight is not materiel based, rather our most valuable capability; people. I have always believed great people will prevail in almost any circumstance, and are the tipping point in tight places.

Great people are the old growth forest of our organisation. They are the element of capability that takes generations to mature and they can never be given up lightly.

I am not talking about the individual, more so the breadth and depth of experience we hold in aircrew, engineers, logisticians, intelligence and administration. The quality of these people, their character, the breadth and depth of their experience, and their capacity to adapt and re-adapt is the true determinant of the effectiveness of an Air Force.

But commonly, analysts compare platform against platform to determine relative effectiveness. However, capabilities are much more than platforms. The ability to employ multiple eight-ship formations of fighters in a coordinated strike, in a complex electronic warfare environment, takes generations to develop.

Your Air Force is more than capable of launching such a mission.

We are capable because for decades we have been undertaking raise, train and sustain, alongside shape, engage and operate activities. Respect, reliability and relevance are all bred from experience.

However, given the size of our population and economic base, there will always be a difference between the minimum force to meet every task and fiscal reality.

The difference between expectations and what we are equipped to do, is risk. Of course, risk exists in every enterprise. It is spread across all our fundamental inputs to capability.

As I look around the room I am confident that each of you deals with some level of risk daily. At the strategic level, risk is held by Government.

In the private sector it is accepted by the CEO or COO.

Understanding the consequences of risk being realised is critical in developing a force. It is essential decision-makers appreciate the strategic limitations on each of our capabilities. I won't expand on these limitations but they all contribute to the degree of risk that is carried. However, in almost all cases we strive to mitigate risk to the maximum extent.

National security level risk can best be described as the delta between the capabilities we need and the capabilities we have. To some extent we offset risk by the relationships established through industry contacts, domestic and international partners, and our foreign policies.

In regard to our weapon systems we must seek to remain as close to the leading edge of technology as we can. This approach reduces the level of risk in our present as well as in our future.

The future of tomorrow will be our sons and daughters present.

The capabilities we acquire must be relevant to the range of potential missions we will be expected to perform. Operational missions could involve any of our four core roles of air mobility, ISR, strike, or control of the air.

However, the real strategic value of a weapon system, their value to the Government, is not their actual employment, but their combat potential.

A classic example is the F-111.

Acquired in the 1970s, it was never used in anger by any Australian Government. A short-sighted argument could be made that because it was never employed operationally it was a waste of taxpayers' money.

But that is far from reality.

From a more strategic perspective, it made a significant contribution to our national security interest because of its incredible strike potential.

The value of deterrence should never be under-rated. This value is at the heart of our position as a middle power.

A middle power seeks stability through influence rather than action.

A middle power must have the ability to influence, be it diplomatically, economically or militarily. Ideally it will be a balance of each.

Many of our response options have been developed around our approach to engagement. For more than 60 years the cornerstone of our engagement has been based around our ANZUS alliance. Alliances can determine the level of capability an Air Force can deliver. Our partnership with the US has allowed us to punch well above countries of similar size and economy to us.

As reliable and respected allies we have access to technology, systems and expertise that we have integrated into many of our capabilities. Alliances and partnerships allow risk to be mitigated so all parties can carry reduced capabilities across some aspect of their force.

The IADS of the Five Party Defence Arrangement I mentioned earlier is a great example. No one country in the relationship has the ability to provide the level of security we cooperatively can deliver. Our Classic and Super Hornets, P-3s, C-130s and AEW&C all regularly contribute to this stability. Australia does not have the capacity to maintain regional stability all on our own.

No middle power has. This is why Air Force will continue to value our alliances and partnership.

It is why the Prime Minister recently stated that we must continue to develop relationships with neighbour such as Indonesia as matter of urgency.

My final point is on the relevance of Air Force in the conduct of discretionary operations. Discretionary tasks are those that the government choose to engage in. The measure of a force is its ability to adapt its capabilities to support unforeseen operations. This adaptation can be a change in the character of a mission.

We demonstrated this ability to switch our P-3 Orions to overland ISR in Afghanistan and Iraq. Normally a maritime asset, we were able to provide real-time imagery feeds to Australian and coalition troops on the ground. This was a mission not practiced before the Middle East, but the thirst for ISR remains almost insatiable, so the mission quickly evolved into a core task.

In each case I have discussed tonight, Air Force has proved its relevance to both our operational forces and the Government. We have programs across the Defence Capability Plan to transition our force so we remain relevant to future Governments.

Our relevance will endure as we continue to undertake raise, train, sustain, shape, engage and operate activities across all our Air Force capabilities. Each function comes with its challenges but also opportunities.

As Chief of Air Force it is my challenge to sustain current capabilities to meet today's responsibilities.

Equally, I must set the conditions for a force to meet future expectations.

My challenge is to balance the resources needed to sustain the current force with the resources needed to manage future force requirements. It creates a natural tension between the operational and strategic planning.

But I see my greatest challenge as Chief is to ensure the future will be served by capabilities that remain relevant.

I want to ensure that the debt we owe to our future is paid today.

The team we recruit, the training programs we have in place, the little 's' and big 'S' sustainment programs, will all contribute to paying that debt.

Our activities to raise, train and sustain the current force, and the policies that shape our environment alongside engagement with our allies and regional partners, all provide the basis for our forces to support future Government needs.

These are the currency that will service our debt and ensure that that Air Force remains respected, reliable and relevant well into the future.

Thank you