



ASPI National Security Dinner

A 10 Year Plan – An Air Force Strategy

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Check against delivery

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like start by specifically acknowledging Peter Jennings and ASPI for the opportunity to speak with you tonight, and for the continuing great work the Institute does in providing a strategic canvas on which some of us can add a little colour. I have to say Peter, that your invitation to discuss Air Force's strategic direction for the next decade could not have been timed better, as I expect to release Air Force's new strategy in the next few months. So in effect, I am about to show you the 'trailer' for the main feature. Ken – thank you for the sponsorship and engagement of Boeing as Air Force supports current operations and tries to understand the future.

Now, while we are very close to releasing Air Force's Strategy 2016-2026, I have to admit that we have arrived at this point by a roundabout route. The journey started earlier this year when I sat down with my key staff and outlined my requirement for a communications plan. I wanted to inform Air Force members, and our other key stakeholders, of where Air Force was going in the next ten years and their role in helping us get there. Those of you who know me will recognise that I have always placed great importance on the people element of capability so, by extension, I have also placed great importance on effective communications.

However, having sat down to develop a strategic communications plan, we almost immediately ran into a problem – what was the strategy we wanted to communicate?

This was a wake-up moment for us. Despite having a range of classified and unclassified strategic level documents, an unprecedented capability modernisation program and a strong record of recent operational success, we did not have a single high-level document that collated and outlined where Air Force was heading as an organisation. In other words, we did not have a formally documented and widely-accessible Air Force Strategy. Certainly, *Plan Jericho* is a good start but its focus is principally on issues directly related to warfighting so it cannot fully substitute for a comprehensive Air Force strategy.

So to cut a long story short, while we met to develop a communications plan we realised we first needed to articulate what we wanted to communicate and we instead started work on developing a formal Air Force Strategy.

With this background in mind, it is my pleasure to be able to address you tonight on the topic of *Air Force's strategic plan for the next decade*.

Air Force today

As an Air Force - we have been busy.

In combating the very real threat that is Daesh, Air Force is operating its first modern self-deployed task group as part of Operation OKRA. This successful deployment is testament to our current strengths, our force design and our training as the air power element of the ADF international contribution to the mission against terrorism.

We have provided humanitarian assistance to Nepal and Vanuatu following their devastation by natural disasters in 2015, whilst we continue to play a vital role securing our northern borders on Operation RESOLUTE.

We continue to showcase our broad and sophisticated abilities through multi-national, high-end exercises such as RED FLAG; our awareness of the need to look for future pathways through our involvement in US Air Force wargame experiments like *Future Game*; and through the evolution of the JSF, P8 and OneSKY programs – to name a few.

Air Force is a vital part of a successful One Defence strategy. Emerging from the First Principles Review, it has given us a focal point and a broader framework within which we can align *Jericho*, Air Force's *New Horizon* program and our many raise, train, and sustain initiatives already underway.

As I mentioned, a clearly articulated Air Force strategy is essential to focus Air Force's organisational effort, internal decision-making, external decision-shaping and engagement and communication. Air Force also needs a framework in which *Jericho* can sit. Innovation and modernisation are not in themselves a strategy, even though they are a good start.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the many people here tonight who have contributed to *Jericho*'s early success. And to think that in late 2014 some folk said to the former Chief when he last spoke here: 'Geoff don't mention *Jericho* at ASPI, it might be a bit premature'. While I do not intend to spend much time talking about *Jericho* now, I do want to single out one of the lessons from *Jericho* that we have incorporated in our Air Force Strategy.

We have reaffirmed the requirement for Air Force to be a truly integrated joint force in order to maximise our effectiveness. The sum of the Services operating together is clearly greater than any of us operating individually. To this end, integration and jointness are driving Air Force's development. I will return to this in a moment.

Evolution of an Air Force Strategy

Even though Air Force has not had a contemporary and comprehensive Air Force strategy document, a highly effective Air Force strategy has been in play to bring us to where we are today.

This has involved the evolution of the Air Force Order of Battle in a deliberate and structured way, planned against our anticipated needs and it has involved the achievement of technical mastery by all Airmen. This strategy has evolved through the succession of previous Chiefs of Air Force, who drove Air Force strategy coherently but personally.

Society is now more connected than ever before; the espoused Strategic Corporal has never been more effective as a result of the reach and speed of social media. It is clear in this context that a strategy capable of being read and understood at all levels of Air Force is required to ensure consistency of focus, rather than being just the province of the Chief. The idea is to empower Air Force people to be able to move forward with an integrated, coherent set of objectives in support of the joint mission.

Finally, Air Force knows integration is critical to contemporary air and joint power. It generates strategic advantage in individual domains and across warfighting more broadly. All three Services, our Defence civilian specialists and our partner Groups are increasingly aware that our individual strengths are shallow. On their own, they will fall short of delivering the combat power needed to assure Government, the Australian people, our coalition partners and regional neighbours of the extent of our capabilities.

So integration is the baseline of the Air Force Strategy. It is where we need to go; it will help us get there; and it will further our mission as part of the joint ADF.

Air Force's 10 year strategy

Our 10 year strategy can be articulated under five distinct vectors. These are:

1. Joint Warfighting
2. People
3. Communications
4. Infrastructure
5. International Engagement.

These vectors have been chosen for their simplicity, and because we can tailor appropriate language around them for clarity. Vectors have both direction and magnitude and we can measure success against them. These vectors will enable coherent communications in Air Force and empower Air Force leadership's decision-making.

Delivering this strategy also recognises that Air Force needs to embrace a new, coherent, comprehensive and inclusive view of leadership. It is not just me and my team in the headquarters who lead the delivery of air power. Leadership belongs at

every level of Air Force. With the Flight Lieutenants who have to provide leadership in their sphere of influence to make sure we can deliver our fifth-generation strategy effectively, and with the Corporals, our most junior leaders, and a critical part of Air Force's leadership team.

So our strategy is also about empowering our Airmen to do their job, and letting them empower others. The Air Force strategy will help leaders at all levels of our organisation to know what we expect of them, and what they can expect of their leaders.

A fully fifth-generation Air Force will either not be realised or will take quite some time to deliver without a strategy to guide us.

The quote attributed to Sun Tzu is right: 'Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory [but] tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat'.

Vector 1 – Joint Warfighting

Our first vector, Joint Warfighting, is fundamental to the current and the future ADF.

But the reality for Air Force right now is that we operate from the premise that we 'able to do joint' if required. Going forward we know that 'fighting jointly' only comes from *being* joint. This is a basic tenet for us – jointness is a force-design driver. This requires a fundamental step-change in our approach to warfighting as well as to acquisition, sustainment and how we shape ourselves to meet this joint intent.

We are driving for an integrated not a federated Air Force organisation.

This will mean moving beyond the 'philosophy' of joint into an integrated reality where Air Force trains, exercises and deploys as the air power element of every ADF operation. We know we have to support and be supported by whole-of-Defence elements, particularly within the domains of space and cyber, data collection and intelligence product. 'Joint by design' means we must invest in gaining the trust of our Navy and Army partners. This trust – between Navy, Army, Air Force, APS, JOC and CASG as well as national and international stakeholders outside Defence – will be critical to Air Force's success.

Joint warfighting – learning to fight together, plan together and design our force together – will take daily interaction, commitment and resourcing. It will also require acknowledgment that sometimes the priority will be to support Exercise HAMEL or the readiness of HMAS CANBERRA, and not to obtain a proficiency or skill upgrade to become an expert pilot, or get your first live weapon launch. Successful integration does not happen in a few months, but it will be the foundation of the way Air Force does business in every element of its activities. Air Force will institute the expectation of whole of government, joint, coalition and allied operations from the first point of training; and we will enforce it in our daily business.

Vector 2 – People

Our second vector is our People. Air Force is fundamentally about our people. Whether we have the most advanced or the most basic air power system, Air Force's capability edge is generated in large part by the people who operate our systems.

The advanced technological nature of our machines means the preparation of our people is vital to Air Force as a combat effect. Technology has matured to a point that the careful preparation of Airmen, including their technical, social and personal proficiencies, will greatly shape their influence on the air domain. We must prepare our Airmen for this.

The Warrant Officer of the Air Force's recently released Warrant Officer Continuum is one part of the military education, training and career planning framework that will underpin our evolution in air power knowledge and employment.

We have to train our Airmen effectively from the outset and provide them with ongoing career opportunities to develop, adapt and re-develop their skill-sets over a career. I will amplify Thomas Jefferson and Dr Martin Luther King here and say while all Airmen are created equal, diversity is the key to our success. Generating diversity through people is not the sole province of the Air Force: we will generate a broad and adaptive skill base from within and without. This will mean importing skill-sets, training and insight from globally advanced industries such as the technology and aerospace sectors; as well as using Air Force's own system of personnel management to develop the workforce. From the inside, Air Force must push to ensure that our training remains relevant and keeps pace with the continued evolution of technology and world's best practice.

Women represent 19.2 per cent and indigenous Australians represent 1.1 per cent of our Air Force. That means we do not have the best that Australia has to offer.

We still see significant instances of unconscious bias, failure to meet Air Force values and outright sexist behaviour. *New Horizon*, as our language of Defence's *Pathway to Change* program, will remain a core element of our people policy and education. We have established a clear vision to grow female representation to 25 per cent by 2023 – as a minimum and not as a goal.

Let me be clear – Air Force must change our approach to recruiting, training, educating, retaining and career managing our people. It is just as important as the hardware they use.

Vector 3 – Communications

To our third vector – Communications.

We live in a communication-agile age and there are two parts to the Air Force communications strategy. One part is improving our physical hardware to allow secure and unhindered communication between our decision-makers. By that I mean data links, information, cyber and network security. The other part, and important to

me, is improving our internal and external communications to ensure consistent and effective messaging and advice.

Communication and data transfer is a key component of air power. Our latest capabilities rely on sharing data to inform our operators and allow more efficient and effective decision-making. Mission-assurance will only be achieved if we have fast, coherent and secure information flow; and effective command and control to assure our decision-making. Interoperability has not, to date, been a force design requirement. Our communications strategy must therefore include managing the delta between what we already have and what we are acquiring.

The Vice Chief of the Defence Force is driving the combat 'joint by design' construct for the ADF. We need to work actively to manage the seams in our existing capabilities as well as those that continue to emerge. The recent airborne gateway demonstration at Puckapunyal is an example of a tactical effect Air Force can achieve. But we do not have a longer term strategy that captures how we will evolve our communications capability more broadly.

For example, establishing coherence between communications in the space, cyber and air domains is a desirable end-state for any combat force. But we have not begun to articulate the structure, the redundancy options in terms of denial or disruption, or the potential security vulnerabilities that drive our next decision-points. Redundancy and resilience will have to inform our approach to communications, even as we seek the highest forms of technology to speed up and enhance our war-fighting and air power.

Our common operating picture has limitations. It does not have the fidelity to which we aspire. The reasons are disparate. It depends on:

1. who is trying to use the picture,
2. the missions we are executing, and
3. the external stakeholders contributing to the missions.

Clarifying this common operating picture and increasing its fidelity will require more than just the next technology. It will require an Air Force strategy to drive resource allocation and coherency in our plans.

Moving past hardware, the second part to the communications vector relates to our internal and external messaging. Currently, the Airman on the hangar floor at Edinburgh does not have a reliable mechanism to read and understand, provide feedback or contextualise decisions made by Air Force. I want to change this.

Our Airmen today are educated and motivated with an increasing need for engagement and relevance. If my headquarters cannot articulate a clear way ahead, then how can I expect the Leading Aircraftman or the Flight Sergeant or the Air Commodore to use their inherent skills to reinforce the message, to improve the message and to ultimately improve the outcome. As I have said before, Air Force leadership is about coherence through all levels of the organisation, not just about me.

Vector 4 – Infrastructure

Vector number four is Infrastructure.

The broad basing template for Air Force developed in the 1930s, and refreshed in the 1960s, is in many aspects no longer suitable for the 2020s. Infrastructure is about more than just messes, flight lines and whether they are in the Northern Territory or Victoria. It is about our ability to generate and sustain air power.

Bases are intrinsic to air power. Air Force fights from our bases while Army prepares from theirs and Navy sails with theirs. Bases are Air Force's home, our launch point and arguably our centre of gravity. They provide the fundamentals of maintenance, ordnance, mission-data and real-time, mission-critical information to our warfighters.

The Air Force demographic is also changing. Stability, job opportunity for spouses and social consistency for teenagers are featuring as recruiting and retention factors driving tenure and job satisfaction. Today we have over 1000 members who are classed as 'married with dependents working unaccompanied'. This means they are geographically dislocated from their families for the whole duration of a posting. We need a strategy to manage the complex and changing demographic environment that is modern Australia.

We need to understand our workforce better, in terms of their needs and their desires, and match our infrastructure to best suit. It is about who they are, where they can work, and how we can work to ensure they stay with us as part of Air Force's future.

Air Force will partner with Defence's Estate and Infrastructure Group to ensure we get our basing and infrastructure element right. We need to do this for our people, for our platforms and ultimately for their effective delivery of air power. This means hardening and adjusting Australia's onshore basing as well as considering carefully the future of Air Force's basing footprint.

It means thinking in versatile ways about basing as both an operational and personnel sustainment concept. Agile and mobile basing may become critical to our operations dependent on where we expect to be deployed. In a high-end conflict, the ability to operate easily between bases may be key to our mission success.

Only through Air Force people is air power delivered. I know I am sounding like a stuck record, but the point is too easily missed. No bases means no air power; no people means no bases. So we will use the three-point spectrum of people, infrastructure and air power to triangulate our basing needs.

I am prepared to be bold about our basing.

Vector 5 – International Engagement

Our fifth and final vector is International Engagement.

The White Paper has emphasised the importance of Defence's international engagement in advancing Australia's security interests. Air Force has a role to play in delivering this outcome. We will embark on a cultural change around how Air Force has typically regarded international engagement.

In the past, we have taken a somewhat transactional approach to international activities, especially at the tactical level. We have often centred on exercises that directly meet our own training, qualification and certification requirements. We have focused on particular engagements to improve our intelligence sharing or for exposure to advanced technologies. Given how critical air bases are to Air Force, engagement has also extended to maintaining access to key overseas airfields. These are all valid reasons for pursuing international engagement, but they are not the only reasons.

To misquote a former US President, this means Air Force needs not only to ask what international engagement can do for us, but what can we do for international engagement?

In answering that question, Air Force will start by strengthening our relationship with Defence's International Policy Division to support implementation of the White Paper. This will include increasing the priority Air Force places on broader Defence international engagement activities, including cultural awareness and language training.

Further to meeting the White Paper's articulation of international engagement, Air Force will focus on building and encouraging a rules-based global order. Air Force will work closely with our allies, partners and other like-minded Air Forces to determine how we can make practical contributions, including ensuring freedom of navigation.

Air Force will continue to pursue international engagement opportunities through individual and collective training and exercises as part of Defence's International Engagement Plan. Our purpose will be to build transparency and trust with other nations, especially those in our region. This will likely mean a purposeful increase in the focus and level of our overseas activity.

We understand that the world is networked – we, in the air domain are networked. So we will seek to strengthen our international person-to-person relationships at all levels. We will also work on developing new relationships with a view to increasing our global reach and access, at the same time deepening the transparency and trust I have already spoken about. We will do this, as always, as part of Air Force's provision of mission-assurance in the air domain for the ADF and our partners.

Next steps

So, Air Force has a strategy. What next?

Because we have a strategy, under it we can now coherently plan our next steps. Here, tonight, I have only outlined the vectors—the five general directions—in which we will travel over the coming decade to achieve our goal of becoming a fully fifth-generation, networked and integrated Air Force. These are the organisational activities we will emphasise alongside our business-as-usual of being professional masters in the air domain.

In the spirit of communication with which tonight's journey began, I will in coming months release a formal strategy with these vectors, our goals and the pathways to get us there. I welcome your feedback in the interim as we finalise this work.

This release will be but a first step. It will outline where we are going and what our plans are. We will also align our internal planning processes and structures with the vectors of our strategy, so that Air Force's directions are firmly set and can be realised.

The next ten years

Air Force's strategic plan over the next ten years will centre on Air Force's modernisation and integration – of its people, capabilities and relationships to ensure that Air Force can continue to contribute meaningfully to ADF operations as part of allied and global partnerships.

We must realise the full potential of fifth-generation systems and networking in warfighting. To do so will require Air Force to communicate our aims effectively, and articulate our needs to ensure our expected end-states are achieved.

Because the strategic environment is constantly evolving, we need to ensure we maintain our organisational constants of technical excellence, readiness and force preparedness to meet any future challenge.

Additionally, we need to ensure we have a clear view to the long game of strategy that will see Air Force evolve in the context of the information age. This is an age dominated by technology but ultimately controlled by the people at the centre of all our military systems.

Air Force's vectors will set us on a path to success in this age – both to adapt to change coherently but also to prevail against the challenges that will be inherent to Air Force's future as we become the first fully fifth-generation Air Force in the world.

I look forward to working with you on this journey

Thank you.