

**CAF SPEECH**  
**AIRPOWER CONFERENCE OPENING 2018**  
***AIR POWER IN A DISRUPTIVE WORLD***  
**FINAL**

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Introduction

- Good morning ladies and gentlemen.
- It is absolutely my view that we live in an age of disruption.
- The information and communications revolution, the global increase in economic development, economic linkages and interdependencies, and competing forms of political and ideological movements have, together, made the early 21<sup>st</sup> century a more dynamic strategic environment
  - and nowhere is this more evident than right here in our region of the Indo-Pacific.
- With this unprecedented sharing of economic wealth and technical development it gives the wherewithal for more players—states, actors, businesses, communities—to exert influence.
  - This means that sometimes these disruptors cause friction. And this friction requires management:
    - shaping where necessary, but certainly influencing, and—at times—direct action.
- The airpower characteristics of reach, speed and precision effects remain important elements of a nation's defence strategy.
- The question for us to ponder at this 2018 Air Power conference is whether we are postured to apply this significant capability in a way that counters these disruptors.
- So as we open up the Pandora's box, we will also be taking the opportunity to explore possible solutions.

Slide 2 Strategic context

- Let us begin with the strategic environment.
- In one of the most significant developments in the modern era, we are experiencing a shift of the geostrategic centre from the North Atlantic and Europe to the Indo-Pacific.
  - This is the most significant shift in the global balance of power since the end of World War Two.
- There are a myriad of factors driving this change. I'd like to focus on two. These key trends are altering the security landscape and are creating a 'disruptive world'.
  - The first of these trends is the relative rise of the economic, military and political power of the Indo-Pacific.
    - The growth of the Asian economy, led initially by Japan and more recently by China and Korea, has significantly elevated the strategic influence of nations in our region
      - In the past 20 years, Asia's share of global manufacturing has increased from around 30% to over 50.
      - And rising economic powers will continue this transformation.
      - We must be mindful however that economic prosperity has typically been associated with increased military capability and, at times, international competition.
  - This is occurring at the same time as the United States of America—a prevailing 'underwriter' of global security—is facing challenges that are driving a refocus of its foreign policy:
    - The new US National Defense Strategy identifies the 'reemergence of long-term, strategic competition' with 'revisionist powers' as its principle priority. This is a shift

away from its more recent focus on asymmetric warfare—including counter-terrorism operations—and the maintenance of peace and order in an otherwise relatively stable global environment.

- Dealing with the very real threat of major powers as well as many ongoing security issues requires a rebalance of investments across nuclear deterrence and support to its global network of alliances and partnerships – the backbone of global security.
- Alliances and partnerships are of particular importance in the Indo-Pacific region, which is home to five of the US’s seven bilateral defence arrangements. Excluding the particular arrangements of NATO, our region is home to more—and more-varied—formal defence relationships with the US than any other region in the world.
- The impact of economic power will become even more pronounced as military power grows to match.
  - Prosperity has enabled nations throughout the region to invest significantly in militaries; a legitimate response aimed at protecting their national interests
  - They also have easy and affordable access to sophisticated technologies, enabling pre-industrial societies to leap straight to the digital age, bypassing industrial development.
  - More nations are investing in high-end warfighting capabilities, challenging what historically had been a western advantage.
  - Investments in stealth, networks, ISR and precision weapons are no longer a guarantee of capability overmatch. We now

need to seek alternate solutions to reinstate a military superiority.

- Indo-Pacific nations now have greater means by which to pursue national agendas.
- This new power balance is emboldening some states to challenge the post- World War Two international rules-based order.
  - The legitimacy of multinational security organisations and global arbitration systems is being questioned, challenging the future of the international liberal and rules-based order that has been the basis of stability for the best part of the last century.

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- The second trend is the growth in depth and breadth of security issues.
  - Today, would-be aggressors are seeking means to threaten all aspects of national power.
  - Terrorists and organised crime have always looked for ways to get around the system; we are used to them not playing by the rules.
    - But now some states are also looking to operate in the grey zone, exploiting the vulnerabilities of free societies, markets and global communications.
    - Historical Indo-Pacific security frameworks are coming under increasing pressure, in many instances from frontiers beyond the comprehension of those who designed them.
  - The ubiquitous nature of contemporary communications is seeing propaganda as an effective element of Information Warfare, giving rise to the exploitation of ‘fake news’ as a means to incite a response; everything from the use of chemical weapons to civilian workers striking, and even the presence of mass conventional troops in other countries.

- Technology is providing the means to contest every domain via integrated kinetic and non-kinetic effects, often originating from an asymmetric platform
- Social networks now provide the means for ideologies to unite globally, challenging state boundaries and the basis of the Westphalian System
- The Indo-Pacific region has never been more complex or challenging.
  - And the rate of change is faster than at any other time in history.
- The convergence of these trends is creating a new set of national security challenges
  - We have **new** and **historical** strategic actors that continue to abide by the international rule of law;
  - It is however the emergence of **new** strategic actors that **don't abide** by the international rule of law that are the catalysts to the disruptive world confronting us.
  - It is the latter category that we need to focus on.
- Our challenge is to adapt and respond to this new order.

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#### Implications for the application of airpower

- The role of the Australian Defence Force, to protect Australia and its national interests, remains as relevant as ever in this dynamic and disruptive world.
- For Air Force this equates to the delivery of the seven airpower roles (control of the air, strike, air mobility, ISR, C2, force protection, force generation & sustainment)

- We have seen that air power can strike deep; integrated with the joint force, it can generate decisive effect.
  - Today, air power provides support to troops on the ground, and critical visibility for commanders. It is the analytic, situational awareness and communications capabilities that increasingly provide the full range of air power support to our joint and coalition engagement.
  - However we need it to do more.
- Our Air Force is already capable. But it is now facing the greatest evolution of airpower in its history
  - The 2016 Defence White Paper has committed around \$195B to new Defence investments, of which almost \$100B will directly impact airpower systems employed by the ADF
    - This will not just bring into service new platforms, but also a transition to ‘information warfare’ with unprecedented demands on data collection, processing and exploitation
    - We now must be able to integrate and C2 a networked force, not just a physical one.
    - Effective employment of an integrated and networked force, to gain decision superiority and enable manoeuvre despite any intent to deny the same, is the hallmark of a 5<sup>th</sup> generation force.
  - Such a change demands ingenuity, requiring a workforce that is empowered to think and act outside of the traditional norm. Innovation is essential to the realisation of the full potential of this investment.
  - Our next generation of airmen must develop professional mastery that extends beyond mission specialisations. It must promote

critical thinking, strategic understanding, innovative problem solving, collaboration and leadership – this is not business as usual.

- Airpower begins and ends with people and teams. A technical network alone is nothing.

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### Challenges we need to address

- This 2018 Conference is both a ‘strategy’ and an ‘airpower’ conference.
- It is structured to aid our collective understanding of emerging challenges – many of which I have already discussed – and our possible responses.
- This conference is deliberately designed to take a measured approach to the problems we are presented with;
  - But this is no closed loop; despite the challenges, we are not ‘destined’ for war. But the complexity of the environment and severity of the possible consequences means we cannot be complacent.
- In the Royal Australian Air Force we are tackling this through our own dynamic strategy. But we need a broad community to help us shape this strategy. We need your help.
- This is my call to like-minded Air Chief’s. Those of us who share these challenges and common values, to engage collaboratively in order to better understand and shape the role of airpower as an instrument of national security.

### Conclusion

- The disruptive world is presenting new challenges to the role of airpower in supporting national security objectives.
- I **don’t know** what the next conflict will be, but I **do know**:
  - Many of the tools of trade are now more freely available to potential adversaries than ever before

- In future conflicts we can expect bases and support infrastructures, including civilian infrastructure, to be targeted through the use of physical and non-physical effects
  - These are no longer sanctuaries immune from attack
- Emerging technologies will revolutionise the application of air power but also give rise to new challenges.
- Success in the future battlespace requires the coordination of joint effects across all domains – a system of systems.
  - Airpower must be comprehensively integrated across the joint force to contribute meaningfully to the future fight.
- These obstacles and challenges are real, but so are the visions and the ideas we will bring to meet them.
- I have confidence in our Airmen to deliver on our vision.
- I am reminded of the words of Henry Parkes, our father of federation, as he looked to the challenges at the creation of our nation, ‘In one hand I have a dream, in the other I have an obstacle. Tell me, which one grabs your attention?’
  - My proposition is that we ‘grab’ both, and collectively chart a new path for airpower in this disruptive world.

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## MINDEF Introduction

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