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**RAAF POLICY, PLANS AND DOCTRINE**

**1946-1971**

**Alan Stephens**

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The Director  
Air Power Development Centre  
Level 3  
205 Anketell Street  
Tuggeranong ACT 2600  
Australia

Telephone: (02) 6266 1355  
Facsimile: (02) 6266 1041



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# RAAF POLICY, PLANS AND DOCTRINE

## 1946-1971

As the RAAF celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1971, Australian defence policy was changing fundamentally. After decades of relying principally on either the United Kingdom or the United States, Australia's security outlook was becoming more self-reliant. In part that change was motivated by forces beyond Australia's control: the United Kingdom's intention to withdraw from east of Suez, announced in 1967 and to be completed by the early 1970s; and President Nixon's Guam doctrine of 1969, which informed the United States' allies that in future they would have to assume more responsibility for their own defence. But there were also internal forces for change; in particular, a growing sense of national independence. This paper examines the way in which the RAAF's strategic thinking responded to those kinds of influences during the quarter century between the end of World War II and 1971, a year which marked both the Air Force's 50th anniversary and a turning point in Australian defence thinking.

Australian defence policy between the wars had been based on a dual approach. First, the Defence Forces were supposed to provide local protection against small-scale raids, a role which implied a certain level of self-sufficiency. The parlous state of the Australian services in September 1939 suggests that level was not achieved. Second, premiums were to be paid on collective security by having expeditionary forces ready for duty overseas with the Empire should the call come. If a major threat to Australia materialised, the insurance policy would be redeemed by the arrival in the Antipodes of Imperial forces. Epitomised by the Singapore strategy, the second component of the dual approach had proven no less flawed in practice than the first.

Still, in view of Australia's size, geography and limited economic base, the theory was sound even if Great Britain had been incapable of keeping its side of the bargain in 1941. The dual strategy of forward defence and local defence was again endorsed after the war and was to remain the basis of Australian security planning until the 1970s. Once the strategy had again been endorsed after World War II, two major policy issues had to be addressed: which 'great and powerful' friend should Australia seek to secure as its guarantor; and where overseas should Australian forces be sent to pay the national security premiums? The answers to those questions were to see the RAAF deployed to wars in Asia for almost the entire quarter-century from 1946 to 1971.

Before 1939 the forces the RAAF might have deployed overseas would have been determined solely by what was available rather than by strategic circumstances, so thin was the order of battle. The material gains and planning experience of the war made a much more systematic approach possible. Worst-case planning reasonably assumed that the maximum force the RAAF could raise and maintain in a future global conflict necessitating full mobilisation would be similar to that achieved during World War II.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 18-9-45, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, Australian Archives (AA).

Outside that extreme contingency, the RAAF would have to be shaped to meet the most likely defence emergencies.

The RAAF's first proposal to government, prepared in 1945, was titled Plan 'A' and was characterised by unjustified optimism over the future of the post-war Air Force. A strength of 34 squadrons was envisaged, operating 134 Liberators, 250 Mosquitoes, 455 Mustangs, 105 Dakotas, 56 Catalinas and a 'certain' number of other 'lesser operational types and essential training aircraft'.<sup>2</sup> By any standards other than those of World War II, that would have amounted to a very powerful air force. Notwithstanding the perceived threat to the West from the Soviet Union, the need for the RAAF to retain 1000 front-line combat aircraft, supported by many more, was not readily apparent. Prime Minister J.B. Chifley gave the proposal short shrift.

While the size of the organisation proposed in Plan 'A' was unrealistic, the structure based on an expeditionary force and a home defence force was sound. Negotiations over the final size of the RAAF saw Plans 'B' and 'C' also rejected even though their common premise was accepted. It was Plan 'D' with its total of 16 operational squadrons that finally won government endorsement in July 1947 as the blueprint for the development of post-war air power in Australia. Plan 'D' was preceded by a foreword by the chief of the air staff that defined Australia's strategic setting. It was the RAAF's assessment, Air Vice-Marshal Jones wrote, that notwithstanding the development of devastating weapons during World War II, any future conflict was likely to be a long, drawn-out struggle in which all the resources of the nations concerned would be used.<sup>3</sup> Strategic circumstances indicated that if Australian forces became involved, the most probable locations were the mainland of Asia or the Middle East. The Australian armed services would not, however, be used in those or other theatres until national security against invasion or raids was assured, a responsibility that remained the defence forces' prime role.

Jones discussed the size and composition of the RAAF in relation to the other two services and suggested that Australia's misfortunes in the early years of the war were attributable primarily to the paucity of air power, arguing that in particular allied army and navy commanders (including Australians) had been slow to appreciate that control of the air was now a prerequisite for victory in any form of warfare. Because of that failing, allied forces had been unbalanced; and as a consequence, when manpower-intensive land and sea actions which lacked protection from air attack had been mounted in the early months of the war, a succession of defeats had followed. 'It is universally accepted,' the CAS concluded, 'that air superiority is the first requirement for success, and this is accepted by the other services.'

Air Vice-Marshal Jones then emphasised some of the characteristics of air power, especially its potential to apply pressure directly against an enemy's 'vital centres' such as production, infrastructure and morale. In future, he continued, it would be essential to use offensive air power against those kinds of targets before any land operations were started; indeed, under some circumstances an air attack might be decisive and the army would only have to act as an occupation force. Those kinds of

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<sup>2</sup> Air Board Agendum 6795, 28-2-46, RAAF Historical Section (RHS).

<sup>3</sup> Air Board Agendum 8091, 16-10-47, RHS.

possibilities were likely to be reinforced by the further development of air-released weapons, including rockets. Research and development consequently would be an integral component of any modern air force. All of those factors, Jones stated, had been taken into consideration during the development of Plan 'D'.

Plan 'D' represented a great deal of hard work. It was an enormously detailed set of papers which presented strategic assessments, estimates of the influence of air power on future conflict, force structure deliberations, costings, organisational arrangements, and scores of establishment tables covering all elements of a modern air force, from people and aeroplanes through to buses and buildings.<sup>4</sup> Five fundamental objectives for the RAAF's development were listed.<sup>5</sup> First and most important, a permanent air force consisting of 16 operational squadrons trained in the techniques of modern warfare and capable of rapid expansion in an emergency was to be established and maintained. That operational force would be supported by training and maintenance organisations, including Citizen Force and Reserve personnel, which would be adequate for peacetime and capable of rapid expansion during mobilisation. The operational force, training organisation and maintenance services would all be dependent to some extent on a modern aircraft industry, which again had to be capable of quick growth. Finally, a system of air bases to enable strategic deployment and tactical operations was essential.

An Air Force comprising four main components would meet those objectives.<sup>6</sup> The main operational organisation was to be a Mobile Task Force consisting of Permanent Air Force fighter, heavy bomber and transport wings; a tactical reconnaissance squadron; and supporting units (see Table 1). The Mobile Task Force was to be capable of rapid deployment to 'any part of the British Commonwealth which may be threatened'; while RAAF planners also envisaged supporting the activities of the Security Council of the United Nations Organisation. In the event of a major defence emergency in Australia or its immediate region the Task Force would be rapidly deployed from its home bases on the East Coast. Strategically important local areas in which it was thought the Force might be used were identified as New Guinea, Cape York Peninsula, Darwin, Perth/Albany and Sydney/Brisbane.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Air Board Agendum 8091, 10-10-47 to 10-11-50, RHS.

<sup>5</sup> Air Board Agendum 8886, 5-5-49, RHS.

<sup>6</sup> Air Board Agendum 7314, 5-9-46, RHS.

<sup>7</sup> Air Board Agendum 6799, 16-10-45, RHS.

*TABLE 1*  
*STRUCTURE OF THE MOBILE TASK FORCE, APRIL 1947*

*Fighter Wing*  
Two Long-range Fighter Squadrons  
Mobile Fighter Control Unit  
Headquarters  
Maintenance Squadron  
Base (Support) Squadron

*Heavy Bomber Wing*  
Three Heavy Bomber Squadrons  
Maintenance Squadron  
Headquarters

*Transport Wing*  
Two Transport/Lift Squadrons  
Maintenance Squadron  
Headquarters

*Tactical Reconnaissance*  
One Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron

Source: CRS A5954, Box 1842, Defence Policy, Post-War RAAF - Nature, Organisation and Strength, April 1947, AA.

The concept of the Mobile Task Force was a good one as it exploited the inherent ability of an air force to move rapidly to a trouble spot. Moreover, by giving each component its own wing headquarters and maintenance support, Air Vice-Marshal Jones and his staff had extended that operational flexibility, as by adding or subtracting the amount of support necessary to meet a particular contingency, units could quickly be deployed either independently or as part of a wing or the complete Task Force. The concept of the Mobile Task Force also resolved a sensitive political issue. During the war in Europe the dispersal of RAAF personnel throughout scores of British squadrons had both disguised the magnitude of the overall contribution and denied Australian airmen senior command opportunities. In its endorsement of Plan 'D', the Defence Committee stated that RAAF expeditionary forces should in future be employed as Australian formations and not be dispersed into British or allied forces as smaller formations or units, and noted that the Mobile Task Force provided the framework to achieve that objective.<sup>8</sup>

Underpinning the mobile force would be a 'static' Home Defence Force, which would be responsible for the air defence of Australia and would comprise Area and Command Headquarters, fighter and reconnaissance squadrons, and

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<sup>8</sup> Report on Visit of the RAAF Planning Team to the Air Ministry, Middle East and Far East, January/February 1951, CRS A5954, 1636/3, AA.

telecommunications, photographic, hospital and airfield construction units. Home Defence Force units would be based permanently in one of five geographic Area Commands according to role and function. The fighter aircraft which constituted the main operational element of the air defence system would be operated by five Citizen Air Force (CAF) squadrons located near each of the mainland state capital cities. During peacetime the CAF squadrons were to function essentially as training units so their staffing was based on 75 per cent citizen force and 25 per cent permanent personnel, with the latter responsible for supervision and standards. Also allocated to the Home Defence Force were two General Reconnaissance/Bomber squadrons, one at each of Townsville and Perth.

The Mobile Task Force and the Home Defence Force were to be supported by a Training Organisation—which was to establish ‘the highest possible standards’—and a Maintenance Organisation. Plan ‘D’ also stressed the RAAF’s joint warfare responsibilities to the Army and Navy, especially with regard to reconnaissance and air transport; and the importance of supporting the local aircraft industry.

Substantial difficulties were encountered by the Air Board when it tried to implement Plan ‘D’, primarily because the government refused to give assurances on conditions of service until the direction the post-war Defence Force should take became more certain. Consequently, the great majority of RAAF personnel were only offered two-year contracts, with no guarantee of renewal, in what was known as the ‘Interim Air Force’. Many of those who might have signed on were not interested; in particular, technical airmen of the required quality and numbers were reluctant to commit themselves to the RAAF until their prospects were clear. On top of that, the general indifference of politicians to defence suffocated decision-making and restricted funding. Under those rather depressing circumstances the Air Board battled on and, to its credit, had at least formed all of the Plan ‘D’ units at their permanent locations by April 1949, even if those units were neither fully staffed nor properly equipped.<sup>9</sup>

Government indifference did not deter the Air Board. Following the replacement of the Chifley Labor Government by the Menzies Liberal Government in 1949, Air Marshal Jones presented an expanded development plan to Minister for Air T.W. White, in which he made the extraordinary claim that Plan ‘D’ had *not* (his emphasis) been designed to meet Australia’s strategic needs, but rather to satisfy the ‘arbitrary [annual] financial limit of £12.5 million’ imposed by the previous Labor government. Perhaps Jones thought he might be able to take advantage of a different government and a new minister—particularly one who was a former Australian Flying Corps pilot - to expand the RAAF from the 16 squadron structure to the 25 he now argued was necessary. If so, he was wrong. His ‘Twenty-five Squadron’ plan was passed to White on 15 February 1951, after which, according to an Air Force file note, ‘no trace of it’ was ever found again.<sup>10</sup> The minister and his staff had demonstrated classic bureaucratic skills, and Plan ‘D’s general strategic outlook and 16 squadron structure provided the RAAF’s basic guidance for the next 25 years.

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<sup>9</sup> Air Board Agendum 9497, 28-4-49, RHS.

<sup>10</sup> Air Board Agendum 10856, 1-2-51, RHS.

As noted, the rationale behind the Mobile Task Force was to organise the RAAF so that it could be despatched overseas to help pay the premiums on Australia's collective security policy. For the first five years after the war that policy was lodged with the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding the important links that had been established with the United States during the fighting in the Pacific, the ties that bind remained strong. As early as 1944 concern over growing American influence in Asia had prompted Australian Prime Minister John Curtin to write to his British counterpart, Winston Churchill, regarding the need to restore British prestige in 'our Far Eastern Empire'.<sup>11</sup>

Curtin's Imperial outlook (a curious view of the world for a socialist politician) was reiterated by his successor, Ben Chifley, who argued that all British nations had a vital interest in maintaining the Empire and that their defence responsibilities had to extend beyond their own territories.

Chifley at least believed that any Australian contribution to the defence of the Empire should be focused in the Asia-Pacific region, identifying the Imperial interests of immediate concern as the security of Australia, New Zealand and Western Canada; the defence of possessions and dependencies in the Pacific and Indian Oceans (for example, Ceylon, Malaya, Borneo and Manus Island); and the sources of raw materials in the Netherlands East Indies (shortly to become Indonesia), India, Persia, Malaya, New Guinea and various Pacific Islands.<sup>12</sup> British officials endorsed Australia's renewed commitment to forward defence but suggested Chifley's emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region was short-sighted and that the Commonwealth countries should look beyond their own backyards. For Australia, that meant focusing on the Middle East, which Whitehall saw as 'an indispensable bridge which joins East to West ... [it] ... is the link which should join [Commonwealth] strategic policy to our own'.<sup>13</sup> The British Chiefs of Staff therefore argued that Australia's priority in a global conflict should be the deployment of the RAAF's Mobile Task Force to the Middle East, where the key areas to protect would be the Suez Canal, Alexandria, Cyprus, Israel, Malta, the Straits of Hormuz and the South West Persian Gulf oil fields.<sup>14</sup>

Australia's military leaders agreed with that assessment. While they identified the defence of Australia and its territories as their first duty (it would have been cause for grave disquiet had they thought otherwise!), when the relative importance of Europe and Asia was debated in the Defence Committee, precedence was given to reinforcing the Middle East over Malaya.<sup>15</sup> Precisely how the Middle East could be more vital to Australian security than the neighbouring landmasses of South East Asia—which only recently had almost provided a bridgehead for a Japanese invasion, with all of its horrific possibilities—was not explained.

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<sup>11</sup> MP 1217, Box 560, Australian Archives Victoria (AAVIC); Air 8/997-999, Public Record Office (PRO).

<sup>12</sup> Air 8/997, PRO.

<sup>13</sup> Air 8/999, PRO.

<sup>14</sup> Report on Visit of the RAAF Planning Team to the Air Ministry, Middle East and Far East, January/February 1951, CRS A5954, 1636/3, AA.

<sup>15</sup> RAAF Purchase of Lockheed P2V5 Aircraft 1951, Policy, 22-10-51, CRS A4940, C265, AA.

Contingency plans were drawn up in February 1951 for the deployment of the Mobile Task Force to either the Middle East or Malaya. Air Marshal Jones believed that if the Mobile Task Force did have to fight in the Middle East, it would be engaged in the general struggle for air superiority, the close support of land forces, and medium range bombing of enemy supplies and bases. For Malaya only, the composition of the force listed at Table 1 would be supplemented by a squadron of eight Lincoln reconnaissance aircraft to patrol the maritime approaches.<sup>16</sup> Five thousand personnel were to be in place by D+60 days, after which the build-up to an eventual total of 12,000 would continue at the rate of 1000 per month. All units were to start operations within two weeks of D-Day and reach maximum rates of effort within two months.

The perceived importance of the Middle East justified the deployment of the RAAF's No. 78 (Fighter) Wing to Malta from 1952 to 1954. But even before then the imperatives of geography, bolstered by shifting patterns of power and concern over communist uprisings in South East and North Asia, had turned Australian attention more towards its own part of the world. The enthusiasm for the British Empire expressed by Curtin and Chifley was stated even more fulsomely by the Menzies Government, which was elected in 1949. Consequently Australia's post-war involvement in South East Asian security arose in the first instance through its role as a junior partner in the Commonwealth. The first of a series of alliances and arrangements intended to bolster regional security was the Australia, New Zealand and Malaya arrangement, which was replaced first by the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement after Malaysia achieved independence in 1957, and then by the Five Power Defence Arrangements in 1971. Australia was not a member of the Anglo-Malaysian agreement but became a major partner in the Five Power pact, whose other members were Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The key element of the Five Power Defence Arrangements has been an Integrated Air Defence System, in which the RAAF has played a prominent role. Underpinning all of those alliances was the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, a force raised under British sponsorship for the defence of Malaysia and Singapore, and under which RAAF units were based permanently in Malaysia from the mid-1950s.

Strengthening Australia's engagement in Asia by using the established ties of the colonial past was one component of a dual approach to security adopted by successive governments. The other was to involve the United States in the region. From the end of World War II it had been an Australian foreign policy objective to secure the commitment of American forces to the defence of Southeast Asia against the perceived threat of international communism. The conclusion of the Australia, New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) pact in September 1951 was seen to have achieved that objective. It is not widely known that the RAAF's No. 77 Squadron played a small but important part in persuading the Americans to conclude the treaty. At the time when the negotiations between Australian and American diplomats were taking place, United Nations forces fighting in Korea were under severe pressure. No. 77 Squadron's ground attack Mustang aircraft made a vital contribution in the fight to prevent American forces from being over-run. The squadron's efforts not only drew praise from senior United States commanders in Korea but also were recognised in

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<sup>16</sup> Report on Visit of the RAAF Planning Team to the Air Ministry, Middle East and Far East, January/February 1951, CRS A5954, 1636/3, AA; and Air Board Agenda 12295 and 12296, RHS.

Washington, where they helped predispose the administration of President Harry S. Truman towards concluding a pact with Australia.<sup>17</sup> Since its ratification over 40 years ago the ANZUS treaty has dominated Australian foreign policy.

Those regionally focused agreements were supplemented by broader security pacts. As part of its strategy to combat world communism, the Western Alliance, and especially the United States, arranged a series of encircling pacts, which were intended to contain and geographically isolate the USSR and the People's Republic of China. By the end of the 1950s the West had in place the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Central Treaty Organisation and the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) pacts which stretched from Europe through the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and North Asia.<sup>18</sup> Australia again paid its security dues through its membership of SEATO, a commitment that was to see RAAF Sabres deployed to Thailand in 1962 and pave the way for the much larger Australian involvement in the second Indochina war during the 1960s.

Constructing and successfully implementing foreign and defence policies constitutes the high ground of a national government's intellectual endeavour, together with economic management. For a defence force a comparable organisational and intellectual challenge is associated with the development of doctrine. Doctrine is at the heart of military activity. As the central body of beliefs about the conduct of war it provides the guiding force for action, structure, organisation and development. Its influence should be evident to some extent in all practical activities. More than that, doctrine represents the highest expression of a defence force's intellectual foundations. The continuing process of considering, endorsing and revising doctrinal beliefs is fundamental to an organisation's intellectual vigour. By presenting an orderly and endorsed interpretation of theory and accumulated experience, doctrine should make clear why the organisation is structured the way it is, what its objectives are, and, in broad terms, how those objectives should be achieved.

Before the war the RAAF had not developed any Australian air doctrine, primarily for the good reason that its leaders were preoccupied with institutional survival in the face of persistent Army and Navy hostility.<sup>19</sup> Circumstances after the war were enormously more favourable: the RAAF had grown some fifty-fold in size, participated in the full range of air warfare operations and shared in a great victory. Further, in the atmosphere of uncertainty which accompanied the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of nuclear and missile technologies, governments were looking for direction. The years immediately following World War II were the RAAF's best chance since 1921 to promote air power in the defence of Australia in an innovative and constructive fashion.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53, Vol. I, Strategy and Diplomacy*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1981, p 111; and *Vol. II, Combat Operations*, 1985, p. 316.

<sup>18</sup> NATO: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation founded in 1949; Cento: the Central Treaty Organisation, developed in 1955 and based on the Baghdad Pact; and SEATO, the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (also known as the Manila Pact), founded in 1954.

<sup>19</sup> See Alan Stephens, *Power Plus Attitude*, Canberra, AGPS, 1992, pp. 15-49.

The RAAF was not up to the challenge. It lacked either the will or the capability to prepare its own fundamental guidance, instead formally endorsing the concepts presented in a journal article titled ‘Air Power and the Future’ written by the commander of the United States Army Air Forces, General H.H. ‘Hap’ Arnold. The circumstances surrounding the RAAF’s endorsement of General Arnold’s work seem curious. Air Vice-Marshal Jones sent two copies of the article, removed from the journal in which it appeared, to the Secretary of the Defence Department, Sir Frederick Shedden, and asked Shedden to forward the item to the prime minister and the minister for defence. Jones told Shedden in his covering letter that although written for the United States, Arnold’s paper contained ‘conclusions and proposals [which] are in most instances equally applicable to Australia, and I may say they are in close agreement with the policies which we are endeavouring to follow in the RAAF’.<sup>20</sup> That was the extent of the CAS’s professional comment on the paper.

Arnold’s work was a masterful examination of air power doctrine, in both its existing and likely future forms. However, notwithstanding Jones’ assertion that the paper’s content was ‘equally’ relevant to Australia, the fact remained that it had been written by an American to meet American strategic goals. Thus, among other things, Arnold focused on global influence and nuclear arms, neither of which concerned the RAAF. Those issues alone would seem to make the CAS’s sweeping endorsement of Arnold’s paper questionable. Perhaps more disappointing, though, was the missed opportunity to establish an independent, indigenous, intellectual foundation for the RAAF, based on Australian ideas and developed to meet Australian conditions. The capacity was there: at the time, Jones had at his disposal scores of officers who had just experienced the full range of air power strengths and weaknesses in a world war. What was missing was the vision.

The RAAF’s inability to seize the unique opportunity offered by post-war strategic uncertainty to develop and publicly articulate Australian air power doctrine was a major institutional failure. That failure adversely affected the Air Force in two different spheres. First, the promotion of doctrine within the RAAF itself was severely circumscribed.<sup>21</sup> New recruits at all levels received almost no formal education on the fundamental business of the organisation they had joined. Second, that dearth of corporate knowledge naturally carried over into the public arena. To the extent that the military can interest civilian decision-makers in their profession, the RAAF was denying itself the fullest development of the intellectual justification for requesting more or better aircraft, or for a revised force structure. Given the intensely competitive nature of defence procurement—the process to decide who gets what—there can be few more important activities for the services than fully understanding the intellectual rationale for their existence and arguing their case to the widest audience.

That is not to say the basics of air power doctrine were not well understood in the RAAF; on the contrary, there is no doubt that at the highest levels they were. But for any doctrine to make sense to the politicians and the Defence bureaucrats, let alone the rank and file in the Air Force, it needed to be set in an Australian context and

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<sup>20</sup> Letter, Jones to Shedden, CRS A5954, Box 1634, Future of Air Power - Report by General Arnold, ‘Air Power and the Future’, 30 November 1945, AA.

<sup>21</sup> Stephens, *Power Plus Attitude*, pp. 119–56.

presented to as wide an audience as possible. It was all very well for Air Vice-Marshal Jones glibly to endorse General Arnold's argument that control of the air was the prime task of air power, that aircraft are inherently offensive, that the control of ground attack aircraft should be centralised, and so on. The point was, how did those concepts apply to a small air force which did not possess hundreds of fighters and a chain of defensive radars, or could not mount 1000 bomber raids; and which in any case was structured to deploy overseas at the first sign of hostilities and become a subsidiary unit of either the RAF or the USAF?

The RAAF's British chief of the air staff from 1952 to 1954, Air Marshal Sir Donald Hardman, presented a thoughtful discussion of doctrine in an Australian context in a paper he prepared on local aircraft production in mid-1953.<sup>22</sup> Hardman was a protege of the distinguished British strategist, Marshal of the RAF Sir John Slessor, and as a scholar of military history himself was fond of quoting the noted American air power theorist, Alexander de Seversky. The setting for Hardman's discourse was a review of the kinds of aircraft that might be built in Australia, given the limitations of local manufacturers and government finances. Hardman started, properly, with the prime campaign of control of the air. In his opinion, 'true and enduring air superiority' could only be won by air striking forces which, by attacking an enemy's 'vitals', would not only deprive him of the means of conducting air warfare, but would also drive him onto the defensive so that the war would be fought over his country. Fighter aircraft might be the symbol of air defence but as Hardman pointed out they were likely only to gain a degree of local and temporary superiority. For example, Spitfires and Hurricanes may have won the Battle of Britain, but it took until 1944 to make the United Kingdom secure against air attack, and that security was achieved not by Fighter Command but by the combined bomber offensive which took the war to the Axis powers.

But that doctrine applied to Great Britain in World War II, not to Australia in the post-war years. Applying the kind of logic absent from Air Vice-Marshal Jones' endorsement of the Arnold doctrine, Hardman argued that, as the RAAF could never expect to mount the scale of effort the bombing of Germany required, Australian air doctrine had to emphasise the defensive. In Hardman's opinion the RAAF's most important task therefore would be to establish local air superiority with its fighter force over key areas, with the objective of holding a defensive line until reinforcements arrived from England or America. Hardman's advice was doubtless well-intentioned, but it did seek to reinforce persistent British pressure for the RAAF to regard itself only as an adjunct to the RAF, an attitude which would not only serve the United Kingdom's strategic interests but also those of its aircraft industry.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the RAAF's history of subservience to the RAF, Hardman's doctrinal advice was ignored when, in 1954, a team was formed to travel overseas to examine new types of fighter, bomber, transport and training aircraft. Headed by the AOC Home Command, Air Vice-Marshal Alister Murdoch, the team was in effect going to revise

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Aircraft Industry, Review 1953, 15-6-53, CRS A4940, C2796, AA.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Cipher Message WX 1482, RAFLIA Melbourne to Air Ministry, 17-1-46, Air 8/1417, PRO.

the RAAF's basic force structure. Of interest here is the doctrine implicit in the strategic requirement and priorities Murdoch was given before his departure.

Murdoch was instructed to look only at aircraft which were directly relevant to the RAAF's broad tasks under endorsed strategic guidance, namely, the defence of Australia, national commitments under the Cold War, and the defence of Malaya.<sup>24</sup> The Hardman doctrine notwithstanding, the RAAF accorded first priority to its bomber force, which would act as a deterrent in the Cold War and take the offensive in the fight for air superiority when operating from either Australia or Malaya in a 'hot war'. Bomber crews, not fighter pilots, were considered to be the cutting edge of national air defence, with a bomber offensive constituting 'the first line of air defence' and the only method by which general air superiority could be gained.<sup>25</sup> Any bomber Murdoch recommended therefore had to be nuclear-capable and able to fly from Darwin to Singapore, and Singapore to Bangkok, with a maximum bomb load. The acquisition of nuclear weapons would overcome the problems of scale inherent in the RAAF's small size. Fighters were accorded second priority for their role in the air defence of Malaya and Australia. 'As and when the air situation permit[ted]', fighters might also be used to provide tactical support for land forces. Murdoch was only to look at fighters with performance characteristics equal to that of their communist opponents and which could fly from Australia to Malaya bypassing Indonesia. Transport aircraft came third in the RAAF's doctrinal priorities, a judgment that might have disturbed those Army and Navy units, which depended on airlift to meet their Cold War and Malayan commitments. Finally, Murdoch's guidance noted the need for 'other aircraft' for 'maritime operations, communications, training, etc'.

Air Vice-Marshal Murdoch was being despatched overseas to rearm the Air Force because of a major shift in policy initiated by Defence Minister Sir Philip McBride. After three years in the job McBride had concluded that an imbalance existed between endorsed strategic guidance and the respective strengths of the armed services. In particular, he believed that Australia could not afford two air forces, one operated by the RAAF and the other by the RAN. He therefore decided that the RAAF should have the sole responsibility for protecting the fleet from air attacks whenever ships were within the range of land-based aircraft. That was a decision with profound implications for the Air Force and the Navy because as RAAF air defence and maritime strike and reconnaissance capabilities were built-up, those of the RAN would be disbanded.

For those changes to be effected a dramatic shift in the allocation of defence funding had to be made in the RAAF's favour. In January 1954 McBride presented Cabinet with a paper titled 'Defence Policy, the Vote and the Programme', which proposed weighting defence spending in favour of the Air Force for the three years from 1954/55 to 1956/57. During that period the RAAF was to receive £270 million, the Army £211 million and the Navy £165 million,<sup>26</sup> numbers which must have made happy reading for survivors of the pre-war Air Force like Air Marshal Richard

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<sup>24</sup> Air Board Agendum 12511, 30-6-55, RHS.

<sup>25</sup> Air Board Agenda 12423, 3-5-54; 12511, 30-6-55, RHS.

<sup>26</sup> Summary of Objectives for the Re-balancing of the Programme Endorsed by the Defence Preparations Committee in February 1954 on Agendum No 31, CRS A5954, 1337/11, AA.

Williams and Air Vice-Marshals George Jones, Bill Bostock and Henry Wrigley, who could remember struggling along with less than nine per cent of defence appropriations for their first ten years while the RAN received about 60 per cent.

McBride's policy was actioned by Minister for Air Athol Townley. The three-year program prepared by the RAAF for Townley to present to Cabinet in mid-1954 was a watershed in the Air Force's post-war development.<sup>27</sup> First, the program defined a force structure which, with due allowance for new technologies, remained in place for the next three decades. And second, it precipitated a re-equipment program which not only was the largest in the RAAF's peacetime history, but which also led eventually to the acquisition of the F-111 bomber and the C-130 transport, the two most important aircraft operated by the RAAF since World War II.

Townley's program restated the RAAF's objectives in war as the air defence of Australia and its Territories; the defence of sea communications in the Australia, New Zealand and Malaya region in conjunction with the Navy; and the provision of forces for overseas deployments. Cold War objectives, like those of the other services, were simply to resist communist aggression 'whenever and wherever it occurs'.<sup>28</sup> This responsibility was, according to Townley, being 'readily executed' because of the Air Force's 'exceptional mobility'. Because there was no foreseeable requirement for the direct defence of the Australian mainland or regional sea lines, a large RAAF commitment had been made to Cold War operations. At the time the program was presented, No. 77 Squadron was still on a war footing in Japan and its pilots were ready to resume ground attack operations in Korea with their Meteors if needed; the Dakotas of No. 36 Squadron continued to provide logistic support between Korea and Japan; Lincoln bombers from No. 1 Squadron were the mainstay of the Commonwealth's offensive air operations against communist terrorists in Malaya; and the Vampire fighters of No. 78 Wing were stationed in Malta under the operational command of RAF Middle East.

That impressive level of commitment would be sustained by rearming the RAAF, for which an ambitious program had been prepared. During the period covered by Townley's plan the intention was to place orders for 97 jet fighters, 39 medium jet bombers, 12 four-engined transports and 73 jet trainers. The fighters were to replace the Sabre and would be built in Australia, with deliveries to commence in 1958. One of the British V-bombers—the Vulcan, Victor or Valiant—was the preferred replacement for the Canberra, and would be fully imported, as would the four-engined transports. Additional work for the local industry would, however, be created by building the new jet trainers in Australia.<sup>29</sup> Also listed for acquisition in addition to the operational and training aircraft were three VIP transport aircraft for the use of the governor-general, the prime minister and 'visiting international figures', an order considered by Cabinet to be of 'great importance' to the 'prestige and efficiency of the Commonwealth of Australia'.

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<sup>27</sup> Defence Program 1954/55, Air Force Program, 16-7-54, CRS A4940, C1079, AA.

<sup>28</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>29</sup> loc. cit.

The aircraft were to be supported by an extensive range of new ancillary services, such as air defence and air traffic control radars and ground test equipment. Underpinning the purchase of hardware was a commitment to remain at the leading edge of aviation technology through an extensive research and development program, with special reference being made to funding for the Aircraft Research and Development Unit at Laverton—which at the time was conducting trials with 20 different aircraft types—and the Long Range Weapons Project at Woomera; and a number of trials associated with aeronautical engineering, armaments, telecommunications and aviation medicine. In sum, the three-year program from 1954/55 to 1956/57 was an impressive and visionary document, which became the blueprint for the greatest modernisation program in the RAAF's peacetime history.

When the new aircraft eventually began to appear on the RAAF's order of battle—the C-130A was the first in 1958—it was notable that none of the three operational types was from the United Kingdom. Despite the continuing strong emotional ties to the old country, geo-strategic imperatives were continuing to impel the shift towards the United States. The lessons of World War II were reinforced by France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, an event which alarmed the Australian Government as the French Army in Indochina had been regarded as an outer bastion of Australian security. Further, the United Kingdom's influence and presence in Asia was waning as British politicians increasingly diverted their defence resources towards their concerns in Europe. Only the Americans could fill the vacuum in Asia for the West. Following months of discussions with Whitehall and Washington, the Australian Government took a decision of the first moment when it decided in October 1956 formally to align its defence system as closely as possible with that of the United States.<sup>30</sup> Defence and foreign policies would seek to accommodate American preferences regarding the role Australia should play in SEATO; while where possible only military equipment which was fully compatible with that of the Americans would be acquired.

Wartime Prime Minister John Curtin had signalled Australia's shift towards the United States in December 1941 when fears of a Japanese invasion were palpable. Ten years later the ANZUS pact was considered by Australians at least to have formalised that security relationship. Prime Minister R.G. Menzies added another important plank to the structure at a meeting in Canberra on 10 October 1956, which was attended by Minister for External Affairs R.G. Casey, Minister for Defence Sir Philip McBride, Minister for the Navy Senator N. O'Sullivan, Minister for Air Athol Townley, and the three service chiefs of staff, Vice-Admiral Sir Roy Dowling, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Wells and Air Marshal Sir John McCauley.<sup>31</sup> Menzies had recently returned from an overseas trip during which he had attended a Prime Ministers' Conference in London and had held discussions with President Eisenhower in Washington. Menzies told the meeting that the acceptance of the nuclear stalemate—the concept of 'Mutual Assured Destruction'—by both East and West was likely to change the face of war.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Review of Defence Policy 1956, 10-10-56, CRS A4940, C1615, AA.

<sup>31</sup> Review of Defence Policy 1956, 10-10-56, CRS A4940, C1615, AA.

<sup>32</sup> Menzies told the meeting that during a recent visit to the United Kingdom, Soviet leaders Bulganin and Khrushchev had been left in no doubt that the West would use thermo-nuclear weapons 'immediately' in the event of a global war, a point the Soviets understood 'clearly'. Review of Defence Policy 1956, 10-10-56, CRS A4940, C1615, AA.

The 'mass' conflicts typified by the First and Second World Wars had become much less likely, a development which increased the probability of local and limited wars as communist insurgents tried to gain influence. Highly mobile, flexible forces thus had to become the West's priority. Translating that outlook to the home front, Menzies suggested that the task of the armed forces was not the territorial defence of Australia: if that were necessary, it would mean that things had been left too late. The only sensible approach, he argued, was to have forces that were organised and ready to move rapidly to oppose the spread of communism in South East Asia; and which also were equipped and trained to be compatible with the emerging major regional Western power, the Americans.

The chiefs of staff concurred with the prime minister's assessment. Each was then invited to comment on his service's broad approach to national defence. 'Blackjack' McCauley (so named for his swarthy appearance in his younger days) had been the RAAF's chief of staff since January 1954 following Sir Donald Hardman's return to the United Kingdom. Like many of his senior colleagues, McCauley had been deeply angered by the implied insult of Hardman's appointment that no Australian was suitable to lead the RAAF. There should be no doubt that McCauley, at least, was just as ready to become CAS in 1952 as he was in 1954. A graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, McCauley had spent four years in the Army before transferring to the RAAF in 1924. His shaky reputation as a pilot was occasionally an issue among those of his contemporaries whose own limited horizons led them to value little beyond flying ability. The fact remained, though, that McCauley had qualified as a flying instructor from the RAF's prestigious Central Flying School and later commanded the RAAF's No. 1 Service Flying Training School. More to the point for an officer of his seniority and responsibility, he was a thoughtful and intelligent man in a service that did not always appreciate those qualities. He had attended the RAF Staff College at Andover in 1933, and was one of the few pre-war RAAF officers to hold a degree, having graduated from Melbourne University as a Bachelor of Commerce in 1936. During the war McCauley was again in a distinguished minority, as one of a handful of senior RAAF officers who succeeded both in operational command and staff duties. Post-war experience as the deputy chief of the air staff, chief of staff of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan, AOC Eastern Area and AOC Home Command had rounded out his preparation for the RAAF's highest position.

McCauley presented the prime minister's meeting with two concepts for the air defence for Australia. Each involved operations from South East Asia, the first from Indochina and the second from the Malay Peninsula. Time would be critical in the case of Indochina, as RAAF squadrons would have to deploy to the region—and here McCauley specifically mentioned Vietnam as the most likely location—and be ready to fight immediately on arrival. The CAS believed the second concept was the more practicable and relevant to Australia. His experience as the commander of RAAF forces during the disastrous Malayan campaign of late 1941/early 1942, when the rapid Japanese advance down the Malay Peninsula through Sumatra and Java had seemed likely to threaten Australia with invasion, had left him with a strong and lasting appreciation of the importance of the north-western approaches to his country's security. In McCauley's opinion the protection of that landmass was the key to the air defence of Australia. The RAAF's established presence in Singapore represented an important step in pursuing that objective.

McCauley concluded his statement by outlining some of the more critical issues affecting the RAAF's ability to defend the north. Until the arrival of the C-130 Hercules recommended by the Murdoch mission, the Air Force lacked the long-range transport aircraft essential for rapid deployment, reinforcement and resupply. Offsetting that deficiency to some extent was the route to Malaya via the Cocos Islands which the Canberras and Sabres could use. Neither of those aircraft, however, was entirely suitable for the most likely operations. Citing the Vietminh as representative of the kind of enemy the RAAF might have to attack, McCauley suggested that the obsolescent Canberras should be replaced by a supersonic light bomber which could accurately strike hostile bases and supply lines. Australia's F-86 Sabre fighters would also be obsolescent by 1960, but in the meantime the planned acquisition of Sidewinder air-to-air missiles would enhance their effectiveness against the most probable opposition, Russian-built MiG-17s. McCauley then assured the meeting that the RAAF was standardising its equipment as far as possible with the United States. At that point an interesting comment was made by External Affairs Minister Richard Casey, who advised the meeting that a year or two ago he had been told by the Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, that American equipment would be readily available for Australian forces as long as its use was not confined to Malaya.<sup>33</sup>

A professional foundation was placed under Air Marshal McCauley's brief strategic review when shortly afterwards the RAAF adopted as its first authoritative reference on air power doctrine the RAF manual AP1300, *Operations*.<sup>34</sup> As had been the case with Air Vice-Marshal Jones' adoption of General Arnold's American doctrine in 1946, the British outlook contained in *Operations* was not entirely suited to Australian circumstances: for example, the manual's content related to a nuclear air force, a point the British CAS, Sir Dermot Boyle, made plain in his foreword. Still, it was a fine piece of work, clearly written and presented, and containing a great deal of information on the full range of air power activities. The AP1300 was to serve as the RAAF's air power 'bible' for a quarter of a century, and for a generation of officers some knowledge of its content was essential for success in a variety of promotion exams.

The manual's contention that the primary agent of air power is a weapons system capable of delivering enormous firepower over great distances reaffirmed a fundamental belief of airmen. That belief aside, the major point to emerge from the AP1300 as far as the RAAF was concerned was the notion of a 'balanced' air force, that is, an air force capable of conducting or supporting any air, land or maritime operation. 'Balance' is a concept which does not have universal relevance: it is unlikely, for example, that the air force of a land-locked country like Switzerland would need too much in the way of an air/sea warfare capability; while few countries have ever possessed a truly potent bomber fleet. In general, and especially during peacetime, air forces have been structured to meet a nation's most pressing security needs.

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<sup>33</sup> Extract from Diary Record of R.G. Casey, 10-10-56, CRS A4940, C1615, AA.

<sup>34</sup> Royal Air Force Manual, AP1300, *Operations* (4th ed), Air Ministry, 1957.

The argument might therefore be made that to some extent 'balance' as a concept is indicative of intellectual laziness, of an unwillingness to analyse a particular set of conditions and then select the most appropriate force structure. There is also a danger that by trying to maintain a little bit of everything, a small air force may dangerously dilute its essential capabilities. While acknowledging those points, several former RAAF chiefs of staff have stated that 'balance' was not an idea that was accepted in Australia by default but rather was adopted after careful consideration. They have argued that, given Australia's over-riding strategic imperatives of geography, population and economy, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to ignore any of the possible air campaigns of control of the air, air strike, and air support for combat forces.<sup>35</sup> The concept of 'balance' would have been foremost in McCauley's mind as he briefed the Prime Minister and his colleagues on the RAAF's role in the defence of Australia.

The attitudes and beliefs indicated by Australia's defence strategy represented a response to broader world events. Four decades on, it is sometimes difficult to appreciate the intensity of the ideological confrontation between the West and communism that dominated international relations during the 1950s. Visiting British Defence Minister Duncan Sandys reflected that intensity when, during discussions with Prime Minister Menzies and his most senior Cabinet colleagues in 1957, he asserted that American nuclear weapons alone stood between the free world and war:<sup>36</sup> such dramatic pronouncements from a senior partner made it much easier for the Australian Government to send the RAAF to wars in regions like Korea and Vietnam, about which it knew very little. Sandys used the same visit to restate his belief, first widely publicised in a British Defence White Paper earlier that year, that developments in offensive and defensive ballistic missile systems would reduce the need for manned strike and fighter aircraft.<sup>37</sup>

Sandys' provocative opinion was taken into account in 1958 when the RAAF conducted a long-term review intended to provide the strategic justification for the major expansion based on the Murdoch mission and the Townley program.<sup>38</sup> Air Staff planners started by confirming the existing broad strategic judgments along which the lines of the Cold War had been drawn; in addition, Sandys' comments were noted, as were recent developments in the military capabilities of China and Indonesia, which were believed to have been 'rapid and considerable'. A conceptual basis for the role of air power in the defence of Australia was then presented, and placed considerable emphasis on the notion of 'deterrence'. According to the Air Staff, military strength was the most important deterrent to war and, in turn, air power was the 'primary deterrent'.<sup>39</sup> If an air force were to generate a deterrent effect, it needed a credible strike force ready for immediate action. An air defence/fighter force was also essential,

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<sup>35</sup> Interviews, Air Marshal Sir Charles Read, 19-6-90; Air Marshal Sir James Rowland, 14-3-90; Air Chief Marshal Sir Neville McNamara, 13-8-90. The argument for a balanced air force was also put effectively by Air Vice-Marshal F.R.W. Scherger in an article written when he was DCAS: see 'Strategy of the RAAF in War', in *Aircraft*, April 1951, pp. 29, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Defence Discussions with Mr Duncan Sandys, UK Minister of Defence, 1957, 26-8-57, CRS A4940, C1917, AA.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 19-8-57.

<sup>38</sup> Composition of the Force, 2-4-59, CRS A7941/2, A11, Part 1, AA.

<sup>39</sup> Composition of the Force, 2-4-59, CRS A7941/2, A11, Part 1, AA.

not only to achieve control of the air but also to support surface forces. In peacetime, the argument continued, those air power capabilities provided a valuable prop to diplomacy. The Air Force's case was summarised by the claim that aircraft had become the pre-eminent expression of military force, both for deterrence and warfighting. It seemed to the RAAF, however, that that conclusion had not been accepted in Australia, where only 36 per cent of the services' vote was going to the Air Force, compared to between 42 to 54 per cent in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

Having dealt with the theory (at least to the RAAF's satisfaction), the Air Staff turned its attention to the practical by preparing a list of existing deficiencies. The list was a long one as most of the RAAF's main force elements were obsolescent. Four years after the Murdoch mission only C-130A transports had been ordered. Little progress had been made towards modernising the strike and fighter forces; additionally, maritime patrol and reconnaissance capabilities needed to be improved, as did search and rescue and support for the Army. Finally, if the defence of Australia as a strategy was to be taken seriously, adequate bases in the north of the country were needed.

Growing government concern over South East Asia generally and China and Indonesia in particular ensured that the modernisation of the RAAF in accordance with the Murdoch and Townley initiatives would finally proceed. Following a series of meetings between 29 October and 24 November 1959, Cabinet endorsed the latest review and set in train the greatest rearmament program in the Air Force's peacetime history.<sup>40</sup> Four major equipment purchases were approved, including two—helicopters and an air defence surface-to-air missile system—which had never before featured in the RAAF's operational inventory. The helicopter type was not specified, but eight were to be acquired for search and rescue and Army support. One complete 'fire unit' of Bristol Bloodhound Mk I surface-to-air guided missiles was ordered, incorporating 20 missiles, 16 launchers and all associated equipment, spares, works and buildings. The question of where the system would be located was left open. Also boosting the air defence system would be 30 new fighter aircraft, which would constitute the first step in eventually replacing the entire fleet of Sabres. Four years ago Murdoch had recommended the Lockheed F-104 Starfighter but the RAAF was now having second thoughts. Consequently the new type was not specified, but funds were provided for a full submission to be prepared, which was to include a recommendation on local manufacture or overseas purchase. Finally, 12 Lockheed P2V7 maritime patrol aircraft were to be brought into service to supplement the P2V5s and replace the wartime-vintage Lincolns.

Two important infrastructure and organisational decisions were also announced. Since the end of the war the Air Force had been urging the construction of a second major airfield in the Darwin region, which it believed was the most likely mainland area for air operations. Funds were at last allocated for that development. Second, the five Citizen Air Force (CAF) squadrons were to lose their flying role, with the permanent personnel from those units being used to form a fourth Permanent Air Force fighter squadron. Philosophically and symbolically the decision to downgrade the role of the

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<sup>40</sup> Composition of Australian Defence Forces, 1-12-59, A7942/1, C151, AA; Air Board Agendum 12787, 2-4-59, RHS.

CAF was more important than the order for new aircraft and missiles. Since 1921 the RAAF's peacetime organisation had included a substantial percentage of citizen forces. By definition, those units were part-time and, therefore, non-professional. Successive chiefs of the air staff and operational commanders had opposed the practice on the grounds that it was inconsistent with the demands of professional aviation, and that with the best will in the world, part-time crews were a luxury a small force could not afford. That fundamental point had finally been accepted.

Subsequent endorsed strategic guidance confirmed the judgments on which the RAAF's planned expansion was predicated. The 1959 Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy paper concluded that limited war was more likely than global war and that the Cold War would continue; it also reasserted the need to develop armed forces which could either make a prompt contribution to the defence of South East Asia as part of an allied coalition or take independent action against aggression in Australia's north-west approaches, a contingency which above all would demand control of the air and sea approaches.<sup>41</sup> Australia's Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) was conscious of the need to achieve a fine balance in the overall shape of the three armed services, as a force structured primarily to participate with allies in combined operations might not necessarily be capable of independent action in the defence of Australia. In that context, it was significant that the prime task for the Army was viewed as forward operations with allies in South East Asia; while the Air Force priority of strike and air defence operations was equally relevant to either contingency.

The COSC's assessment of the air threat to Australia in the event of limited war was confined to China and Indonesia, which were regarded as the region's most probable aggressors.<sup>42</sup> Neither seemed especially dangerous. Communist China had no aircraft capable of conducting two-way bombing missions against Australia; furthermore, the chiefs did not believe that the Soviet Union would supply the Chinese with long-range Bear or Bison aircraft in the near future. By 1964 China's existing fleet of obsolescent Tu-4 Bull piston-engined bombers was expected to be augmented by about 50 Tu-16 Badgers, but without in-flight refuelling those aircraft still would not be able to mount a round trip attack. The possibility of one or two Badgers conducting non-return attacks with nuclear weapons to dissuade Australia from becoming involved in any hostilities in South East Asia was also considered remote. Nor did the chiefs think that Australia would become a retaliatory target if the Chinese themselves came under attack or threat of attack from America or Jiang Kaishek's Nationalists. Indonesia's strike aircraft were equally unimpressive, consisting of 20 Il-28 Beagle light jet bombers and 17 obsolescent B-25 Mitchells. At worst, in a limited war small scale attacks could be expected against military installations in the Darwin area and shipping in the north-western waters.<sup>43</sup> If, however, any Indonesian aggression were supported by major communist bloc countries, the air threat to Australia would increase significantly.

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<sup>41</sup> Composition of the Forces, 6-4-59, CRS A7941/2, A11, Pt 1, AA.

<sup>42</sup> Assessment of the Air Threat in Limited War, 3-2-60, CRS A7941/2, A23, AA. The chiefs were Vice-Admiral Sir Roy Dowling (CCOSC), Lieutenant General Sir Ragnar Garrett (CGS), Rear Admiral O.H. Belcher (CNS) and Air Vice-Marshal I.D. McLachlan (representing the CAS).

<sup>43</sup> Assessment of the Air Threat in Limited War, 3-2-60, CRS A7941, A23; Policy for the Active Air Defence of Australia and its Territories, 15-2-63, CRS A7941/2, A4, AA.

Notwithstanding the obsolescence of the Chinese and Indonesian Air Forces, the mere fact of their proximity to Malaya and Singapore created some sort of threat. The Australia, New Zealand and Malaya (ANZAM) Defence Committee believed that any danger to the Malay Peninsula would come primarily from China's IL-28 Beagles supplemented by a small number of Tu-4 Bulls, with the latter capable of striking targets from mainland China or North Vietnam with a 9000 kilogram load.<sup>44</sup> The Bulls might be supported by Soviet Badger medium jet bombers which could reach Malaya and Singapore with a 4500 kilogram bomb load from well inside China. Any air threat from China was considered likely to increase should the United Kingdom deploy RAF V-Bombers to Butterworth or Tengah. Indonesia was rearming with Badgers, it also might present a threat after 1962. However, ANZAM planners were confident that the air forces of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve based in Malaya and Singapore would defeat any such threat. The Commonwealth's radar network was capable of detecting and tracking any intruders flying at medium and high altitudes (the expected level of any attack) before they were within range of major targets. By day, the RAAF's Butterworth-based Sabre fighters could be scrambled to deal with intruders; while by night the RAF's Javelins and Hunters would do the job. The high speed and rate-of-climb of the Commonwealth fighters was regarded as a crucial advantage in the task of intercepting and destroying hostile bombers, as were the Sidewinder air-to-air missiles recently fitted to the Sabres.

President Sukarno's policy of 'Confrontation' towards the proposed State of Malaysia, combined with apprehension over his intentions towards Dutch-controlled West New Guinea, sharpened fears of Indonesia in the late 1950s/early 1960s. As far as any air threat was concerned those fears were misplaced. The Indonesian Air Force's ability to mount attacks against eastern New Guinea (over which Australia held a United Nations mandate) was severely constrained by the lack of airfields, as only Borokoe and Mokmer, both on the south side of Biak Island, were suitable for sustained jet operations; and Indonesia's capacity for developing other bases was limited.<sup>45</sup> However, those major limitations and the generally dilapidated condition of the Indonesian Air Force were not well known. Tensions peaked in 1963 following the politically motivated and mischievous claim by Australia's Leader of the Opposition, Arthur Calwell, that the Indonesian Air Force could destroy any Australian city. It was in direct response to the subsequent public alarm, and, with an election looming, the need to be seen to be doing something, that in October the Menzies Government ordered 24 'TFX' bombers (later known as the F-111) because they had the range to attack Jakarta.<sup>46</sup> Menzies' announcement that the RAAF would be equipped with the revolutionary 'swing wing' bomber quelled public concern and helped him win the election.

In the event the F-111s never had to bomb Indonesia; nor did Bulls, Badgers or Beagles ever attack eastern New Guinea or Australia from Biak Island. The United

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<sup>44</sup> ANZAM Defence Committee Agendum 5/1961, 11-9-61, CRS A1209/79, 61/800, AA.

<sup>45</sup> Threat to Australia and Territories up to end of 1969 from West New Guinea under Indonesian Control, 31-8-59, CRS A7941/2, A22; and Joint Intelligence Committee, The Likelihood of War, August 1962, CRS A7941, W6, AA.

<sup>46</sup> Stephens, *Power Plus Attitude*, pp. 150-4.

Nations brokered an agreement for the peaceful transfer of West New Guinea from the Netherlands to Indonesia in August 1963 and, in one of those perverse ironies which characterise international relations, just over ten years later RAAF Canberra bombers, converted to the photographic survey role, were flying out of Biak on mapping operations as part of the Australia/Indonesia defence cooperation program.

That was in the future. Responding to pressure from its American ally to do more to oppose the spread of an apparently monolithic communist movement in South East Asia, in September 1962 the Menzies Government initiated the second phase of the rearmament program it had started in 1959. This time Cabinet's strategic thinking was directed towards air defence and battlefield mobility. Forty French Dassault Mirage fighters had been ordered in 1960 to replace the Sabres, and a follow-on order for another 30 was now placed. Simultaneously, the RAAF was instructed to make an 'urgent evaluation' of short take-off and landing fixed wing transports and heavy lift helicopters to provide tactical mobility for the Army.<sup>47</sup> Within weeks the RAAF had recommended the Caribou and Chinook and orders had been placed for 12 and eight respectively. An 'accelerated' review of the Defence program conducted in 1963 maintained the momentum. In May authorisation was given to buy eight more Iroquois helicopters, bringing their total to 24; while the Caribou order was increased to 18. A third batch of Mirages, this time 40, was also approved. The 100 new fighters were to be complemented by two new Control and Reporting radar systems and increased war reserves of weapons.<sup>48</sup> More equipment meant more people. Forward projections showed the RAAF's personnel establishment growing from about 16,000 to 21,000 over the next five years, an increase of 25 per cent.

Those planned acquisitions were all related to deteriorating conditions in Indochina and an impending major Australian commitment to the war in Vietnam. Responding to communist successes and pressure from the United States, in 1962 the Australian Government had sent a small number of Army advisers to South Vietnam and a squadron of RAAF Sabres to Ubon in Thailand. Since then the possibility of bolstering the Army contingent had been raised periodically. If that increase occurred, it was probable that the RAAF would have to provide tactical air support. That air support in fact began to arrive in Vietnam well before the army build-up, with the first three of what was later to become a squadron of Caribou transports touching down at Vung Tau on 8 August 1964. When two Army battalions landed in Phuoc Tuy province in May/June 1966 to form No. 1 Australian Task Force they were accompanied by No. 9 Iroquois helicopter squadron, which was to provide their battlefield support. The arrival of No. 2 Canberra bomber squadron at Phan Rang in April 1967 completed the RAAF's contribution towards what had become a major expression, first, of Australia's strategy of forward defence; and second, of its policy of paying a security insurance premium by supporting its American ally.

The assessments justifying Australia's substantial commitment to the war in Vietnam were reaffirmed by the 1967 Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy paper, and again by the 1969 Chiefs of Staff Committee's review of Australia's strategic concept

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<sup>47</sup> Cabinet Decision No. 437, 7-9-62, in Air Board Agendum 13000, 3-7-63, RHS.

<sup>48</sup> Cabinet Decision No. 768, 7-5-63, in Air Board Agenda 13000, 3-7-63; 13073, 27-9-64, RHS.

and military capabilities.<sup>49</sup> Direct attacks against Australia were still considered unlikely, with any military pressure against the West instead continuing to come from insurgencies in South East Asia. In the chiefs' opinion the correct response to that pressure was already being made through the presence of Australian forces in Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and New Guinea; and through the nation's membership of SEATO and ANZAM. The chiefs noted with satisfaction that in the preceding six years there had been a marked increase in the size and capability of Australia's regular forces, a development consistent with the strategic aims they had defined. The modernisation of the Air Force that was under way was considered especially pleasing; in particular, the strike capability which the F-111s would confer was regarded as crucial to deterring aggression.<sup>50</sup>

By the early 1970s Australian threat assessments had eased significantly. China had not become directly involved in the war in Vietnam and, despite increasing signs of a communist victory, there were few indications that the pro-Western states of Thailand and Malaysia would also fall should South Vietnam capitulate; on the contrary, there were sound reasons for confidence. Closer to home Indonesia had not developed a long-range strike capability, preferring instead to construct an air defence system for Java and Sumatra and to strengthen its airlift and counter-insurgency capabilities. It was clear that Indonesia's leaders were now concerned primarily with internal security, a sensible priority for an administration which had suppressed a major uprising, allegedly initiated by the communists, only five years previously. Further cause for optimism came when the pragmatic General Suharto assumed the full powers of president in 1968 in place of the volatile Sukarno.

The withdrawal of all Australian forces from Vietnam which was well under way by the end of 1971 constituted clear evidence that the national defence strategy was changing. While some degree of forward presence would continue, it was apparent that in future Australia's armed forces were likely to be organised primarily to defend their own country. Acknowledging that change, in 1970 the chiefs of staff issued a memorandum which redefined the common functions of the services, which were to deter aggression, ensure the security of Australia and its Territories, and uphold Australia's interests by military means.<sup>51</sup> The single-service roles assigned to the RAAF in pursuit of those objectives are listed at Table 2.

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<sup>49</sup> Australian Forces, Strategic Concept and Military Capabilities, 1969, 4-3-69, CRS A7941/2, S32, AA. Committee members were Air Marshal Sir Alister Murdoch, CAS; Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, CGS; and Vice-Admiral V.A.T. Smith, CNS. See also F-111 Aircraft, 20-10-67, CRS A7941/2, F14, AA.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Forces, Strategic Concepts and Military Capabilities, 1969, 4-3-69, CRS A7941/2, S32; Review of the Tasks, Capabilities and Structure of Australian Defence Forces, 1-12-66, CRS A7941/2, R20, AA.

<sup>51</sup> COSC Memorandum 5/1970, The Functions and Roles of the Australian Armed Forces, CRS A7941, M27, AA.

*TABLE 2*

*ROLES OF THE RAAF, 1970*

1. To organise, train and equip air forces for timely and sustained combat operations:
  - to defend Australia, its Territories and Australian forces against air attack;
  - for offensive air strikes against enemy forces and installations;
  - to control vital air areas and establish local air superiority when required;
  - for air reconnaissance; and
  - for maritime air warfare and ocean surveillance.
2. To provide close offensive and tactical air transport and air support for the Army.
3. To provide strategic and other military air transport support for the Australian Armed Forces.

Source: COSC Memorandum 5/1970, Functions and Roles of the Australian Armed Forces, CRS A7941/2, F17, AA.

The modernisation program of the 1960s and the extensive experience gained in Asia over the past two decades had without question given the RAAF the operational capabilities to conduct those roles successfully. But possessing capabilities is only part of the answer to a security challenge. In this instance the RAAF had also to develop strategies and doctrines which reflected the shift from forward defence to the defence of Australia; and from fighting as a junior partner in an alliance to fighting as an equal partner in an Australian joint force.

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