



Strategic Air Forces: Choosing a Framework for the Future Air Force

by Mark Hinchcliffe

FOREWORD

The strategic circumstance that Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) finds itself in today has undergone considerable change in the past decade. Foremost is the way Government has chosen to employ the military in a broader range of situations. There have also been significant shifts in the global and regional security environments. Australia's military is today more involved in inter-agency operations regarding the nation's security and interests, and this pattern is likely to continue for some years.

In response to these factors, and because Air Force has by choice formed the intent to be able to better shape, influence and direct its future as a responsible and engaged partner within Australia's security and military communities, Air Force is pro-actively examining the type of organisation it is now, and that it believes it will need to be. This paper explores several options available to Air Force for the future, and how it can most effectively meet the challenges it faces in evolving over time while simultaneously maintaining the capacity to produce first class air power for Australia's security.

While Air Force has historically been, and is currently, an excellent tactical force capable of delivering flexible and precise air power across the spectrum of conflict, *Strategic Air Force: Choosing a Framework for the Future Air Force* argues it could be disproportionately more effective if its perceptions of itself and what it values change. This paper describes why Air Force might move beyond the technical mastery of air power, important as it is, in order to exert more strategic influence. It describes how Air Force can achieve strategic influence through comprehensively embracing the professional mastery of air power through its people, their education and their lived culture. Professional mastery would deliver comprehensive improvements to the Air Force enterprise at every level of its organisation, its workforce and its thinking, and so its actions and outcomes.

The notion of an air force of influence – a strategic force – is one that is examined in some detail in this paper. It is an idea that, like Air Force's evolving operating environment, holds particular consequence for the RAAF. As a smaller but excellent air force it is imperative that the RAAF leverages its technical mastery to develop professional mastery of air power to achieve a level of strategic influence disproportionately greater than its physical size.

This paper describes the attributes of a strategic Air Force of influence and why these are both desirable and necessary for Air Force as it transitions through the DCP force out to about 2018 and beyond. It also illustrates that although a product of its particular history, Air Force is not captive to it and is capable of shaping its future in a means and a direction of its choosing. *Strategic Air Force: Choosing a Framework for the Future Air Force* proposes that an expansive understanding of decision superiority as, simultaneously, an outcome, a process, and an attribute of the force that frames all aspects of its thinking and operating, is a key enabler to superior

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performance. Combined with appropriate change in its culture, education, strategy and perhaps structure, Air Force can achieve the level of strategic influence it seeks and its circumstances demand.

Group Captain Tony Forestier
Director, Air Power Development Centre

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wing Commander Mark Hinchcliffe is currently the Deputy Director - Development at the Royal Australian Air Force's Air Power Development Centre.

Wing Commander Hinchcliffe graduated from 61 Navigator Course in May 1985. He has had two operational tours on C130H tactical transport aircraft with No. 36 Squadron as well as an operational tour as exchange officer with the 41st Air Lift Squadron USAF. He has had two operational tours on B707 Tanker Transport aircraft including Executive Officer of No. 33 Squadron and detachment commander in Iraq in 1998. He has been a navigation instructor at the RAAF's School of Air Navigation.

Staff appointments have included postings as: Staff Officer Air Operations HQNORCOM; Wing Safety and Standards Officer No. 84 Wing; Personal Staff Officer to Air Commander Australia; and Staff Officer to Chief of Air Force. Wing Commander Hinchcliffe has also worked as an exchange officer instructing at the USAF Air University Air Command and Staff College.

Wing Commander Hinchcliffe has completed the RAAF Aircraft Systems and the USAF Air Command and Staff Course gaining a Masters of Military Operational Art and Science. Wing Commander Hinchcliffe holds a first class honours degree in Politics from the University of New England, a Graduate Diploma in Applied Science and a Doctorate of Philosophy in International Relations.

INTRODUCTION

The general and well found perception of the Royal Australian Air Force is that of a modern, capable, professional and well respected smaller tactical force that provides first class air power to the government of Australia. This perception is bolstered by the fact that since its inception the Air Force has displayed, within the limits imposed by its small size, tactical flexibility, operational excellence and the willingness to embrace innovative and leading edge technology and thinking to achieve its ends. As Australia's security circumstances, and our government's response to them have evolved in the past century, so too has Air Force's need to flexibly adapt its posture so as to remain relevant and capable of satisfying evolving national security needs and expectations. Changes in the security environment, however, are not always smooth transitions from one dominant paradigm to another; major shifts have often been seismic with sudden and explosive changes along deep societal, religious and political fault lines. However, other changes although perhaps less obvious, may be just as consequential. The willingness of successive Australian governments to employ the ADF in a broad range of operational contexts in recent years, for example, may herald just such quiet but consequential change.

While the broader contours of the international security landscape have remained largely unchanged, since the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games the Australian Government has displayed a greater propensity to employ the ADF in more expansive and flexible fashion than in times past. Indeed, since the release of the 1997 DFAT White Paper, *In The National Interest*, in which a whole of government approach to national security in the pursuit of national interests was first enunciated, not only has the government progressively expanded the role of the ADF in national security, but it has amended Australian law to formalise this greater role. The realisation of this national effects based whole of government approach to security, has been made manifest through the government's demonstrated preference to actively use the military as an element of national power across a broadening spectrum of operations. This is a significant break with more recent historic practice and holds great consequence for the ADF, and as this paper argues, for the future shape of Air Force.

Our changed circumstances and the need for change

These recent developments, and other long term global structural changes such as the multifarious manifestations of globalisation, have altered the security environment in which the Air Force finds itself today. Current government and Defence policy reflects these changes and significantly expands the context, and potentially reshapes the security paradigm, in which the RAAF operates. The implications of this are not trivial. Air Force today is faced with an opportunity. It is an opportunity that arises from a choice of distinct but equally viable means of satisfying the demands imposed by these changing circumstances. The significance of this opportunity and choice is thrown further into sharp relief by several interrelated factors including:

- government strategic policy regarding Australia's national interests and the role of Defence in pursuing those interests,
- the ADF's participation in the global war against terrorism,
- Air Force workforce numbers in the wake of the DER-driven downsizing, and
- organisational stresses upon Air Force in the face of significant impending capability transitions in the next decade.

The choices that confront Air Force at this juncture concern how it will position and organise itself to meet the challenges of future years – whether it will remain largely as it is, an excellent tactical air force, or if it will choose to transform itself into a strategic force capable not only of tactical effect but of shaping its environment and setting its future course in a positive and self determined fashion. Both choices are valid for a range of reasons, both have associated risks and costs, and both will broadly achieve and satisfy government policy. The distinction between the two, however, concerns the means in which they will meet these objectives, the capacity of the force to realise the options, and the degree of discretion each will provide the Air Force in meeting its goals. There is an argument that suggests that as good as the Air Force currently is there are limits to its ability to achieve the strategic objectives identified in extant government and Defence policy. These limits exist not in Air Force's ability or willingness to deliver excellent tactical forces in flexible and innovative fashion; but in its capacity to act strategically to lead in shaping the security environment to its preferences, and to set and pursue a future of its own determination rather than follow the decisions and trends of others. This argument insists that as it currently stands, it is debatable whether Air Force has the wherewithal or the culture necessary to consistently and deliberately achieve the kind of strategic effect proposed in government policy. The reasons for this situation are complicated, but are in part are a product of the RAAF's history, its success as a tactical force, and its understanding of itself and its role in Australian security. This paper explores these choices. In particular, it examines the argument that in order to continue to successfully provide air power to meet Australia's evolving security demands, the Air Force must transform itself into an organisation capable of shaping its strategic environment –to become the type of force it decides to be, and to define what a strategic air force would be to its preference.

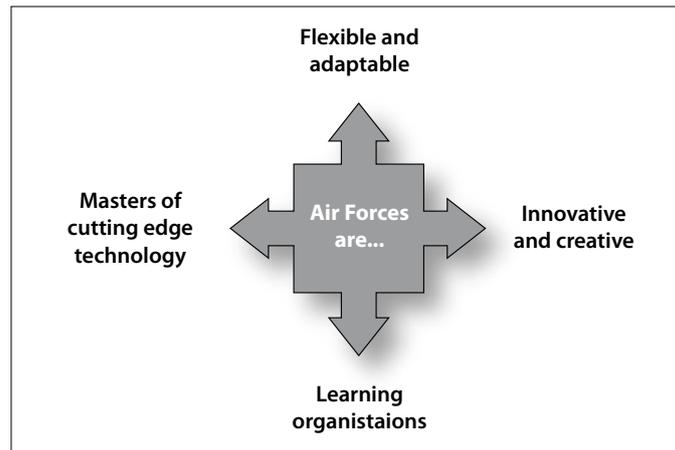
A strategic Air Force of influence

The concept of a strategic air force developed within this discussion is perhaps a new one to many. Put simply it is a metaphor for an organisation that can not only operate and produce effects within a technical and tactical domain (the technical mastery of air power); but that can operate with mastery in a strategic context as well, shaping their external environment consistent with its longer term strategic intent (moving to a fulsome professional mastery of air power in strategic contexts).

...THE TACTICAL SUBSTRATE IS ABOUT DOING THINGS RIGHT, AND THE
STRATEGIC PART IS ABOUT DOING THE RIGHT THING.

Conceptually, strategic organisations are analogous to a bottle of full cream milk. In this analogy the bottle is ninety percent full of milk with a thin ten percent layer of cream at the surface. The milk represents the vast majority of what the organisation is capable and accustomed to doing. This is the technical and tactical domain,

it is what, in the Air Force's case, it does the great majority of the time and which takes ninety percent of its effort to achieve. It also perhaps represents what a majority of organisations can achieve. The 10 per cent represents the extra dimension strategically focussed organisations can achieve. Attaining this level of capability is usual only in a very small percentage of organisations and is possible only when founded upon the mastery and maintenance of the 90 per cent tactical substrate. The strategic dimension may only comprise around 10 per cent of the capability of the force but it disproportionately represents the most influential and powerful part of the organisation. To paraphrase; the tactical substrate is about doing things right, and the strategic part is about doing the right thing. Further, the strategic dimension concerns doing the right thing by design, with that concern imbued and valued in organisational culture.



The future of the RAAF is not in danger in any existential sense. The adoption of either course of action outlined above will allow the Air Force to continue, as it has since 1921, to deliver first class air power for Australia's security. Remaining as it is, an excellent tactical air force, will ensure this capability survives well into the future and is consistent with Air Force capacity and resources. The argument for change however, insists that in order to meet the challenges of national security in a sustainable, purposeful fashion that not only reacts to Australia's security environment but which can positively and proactively shape that environment consistent with Australia's national interests, Air Force will need to chose to deliberately transform itself into a more capable and strategic force. Such a force would not abdicate any of its current capability nor compromise its technical competence, but rather design itself to incorporate the additional strategic dimension. By examining the argument for change, this paper hopes to throw some light on the choices available to Air Force today, and to highlight the necessity of purposive organisational design and the vital role of leadership provided by the Air Force senior leadership team in choosing a particular style of air force.

AN AIR FORCE CAPABLE OF STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

In order to better understand this idea of strategic organisation and how this relates to the Air Force of today, it is useful to briefly survey Air Force history in the context of strategic and tactical effect and to note how the Air Force of today is a product of its particular history.¹

¹ The distinction between strategic and tactical air forces is one that is set wholly within the Australian context and refers to the difference between strategic and tactical. The distinction is one that this paper makes with regard to the RAAF alone. No claim is made that this distinction is definitive beyond the Australian context or applicable to any other force. Strategic in this usage is not to be confused with any USAF references to strategic air force which implies a nuclear capability.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historicism and the shape of our force past

The history of the RAAF illustrates a discernable lack of coherent strategic planning to guide the development of the service, its understanding of its core business and its vision for the future. At the close of World War I the future of the Australian Flying Corps AFC looked uncertain. The government of the day had decided not to retain the wartime operational capability of the corps but it had not decided to entirely dispense with it either. The need for and utility of some form of military aviation force had been well demonstrated during operations in the war and the government had indicated a willingness to continue Australian military flying through its commitment to purchase new airframes to replace its outdated machines at the end of hostilities.² With the arrival of the Imperial Gift of some 128 aircraft and ancillaries from Britain in 1921, the government's ability to establish some form of permanent military aviation was substantially bolstered although as to how that capability would be commanded and incorporated into the Australian military was far from decided. Indeed as is noted in our current history doctrinal volume, the Australian post-war government did not have a coherent plan for the incorporation of aviation into a cohesive Australian defence strategy.³ The debate that smouldered between the Army and Navy in the immediate post-war years over funding for independent air services was finally settled by the government with the establishment in 1921 of a third independent service – the Australian Air Force – which would satisfy the competing single service demands within the funding and resources the government was prepared to devote to such enterprise. The RAAF, as it became later that year, came to independence not out of a recognition of the strategic imperative of an independent force to pursue strategic air objectives, but in large part in order to expediently meet the competing demands to support Army and Navy. It may be fair to say therefore, that from inception the RAAF was conceived by government, the other services, and to a considerable degree by itself, primarily within an expedient tactical context. The fact that it gained independence was far more the result of an inability of the government to settle the dispute between Army and Navy as to who should own the air assets, as it was out of any notion of the autonomous roles of an independent force.

This early history, although not necessarily a limitation in any form on the subsequent force, is consequential for the logic that underpinned Air Force as it developed, and the subsequent trajectory that it took in meeting the needs of the government and Australian security. Following the formative 1920s and '30's, in which the Air Force was preoccupied with training and national development, the first major test of Australia's national air capabilities came with the advent of World War II, and in particular its experiences in the Pacific Theatre in which it operated as an independent air force. RAAF performance in this campaign confirmed its ability to operate very effectively in a variety of tactical contexts, but also highlighted that the force was initially under-prepared, both materially and conceptually, for the role it would play in this conflict. RAAF exposure to senior level command in the Pacific theatre during the war was meagre at best and this not only undermined the operational effectiveness of the force, but contributed, by omission, to the subsequent inadequate development within the organisation of strategic analysis, thought and planning. Any expertise that was gained by individual RAAF commanders at the strategic level in the conduct of operations did not appear to flow coherently down through the organisation or to be systematically captured as a basis for future institutional development. Rather, the Air Force at the time was content to contribute forces and capability to the allied war effort without adopting the organisational structure and intellectual foundation necessary to operate as an independent national air force.

The record of Air Force involvement in operations during the Cold War similarly reflected an inability of the force to either appreciate the necessity of strategic analysis and planning, or to devote sufficient resources to developing indigenous doctrine that embodied the Air Force's own experiences or needs. During the post World War II period up to the late 1960's, Air Force again appeared content to adopt the doctrine of other air forces

2 AAP 1000 – H, *The Australian Experience of Air Power*, Air Power Development Centre, Canberra, 2007, p 24.

3 Ibid, p 24.

and to develop operational capabilities in response to presumed likely regional threats⁴. While this regional focus may have been appropriate, the rationale that underpinned the thinking was reactive in that it sought to prepare the force to fight a war just like the last one, albeit within a regional context. What was not evident during this period was a coherent understanding or strategy that sought to positively shape and influence the security environment to Australia's desired ends or indeed a recognition that such strategic influence was either desirable or possible. The RAAF was still very much an excellent tactical force designed, equipped and prepared to meet a conventional adversary in much the same way as it had in the last war. To a degree this inability and unwillingness to plan and think strategically to this point in time, reflected Air Force's lack of a mature self-identity and an unawareness of the strategic potential of air power. Indeed the concept of 'air power' as distinct from the power of 'air forces' is one that was not well understood or valued by Air Force and acted to limit its ability to articulate a coherent vision for the future or a strategy to employ air power beyond the operational level.

With the introduction in 1976 of a new Defence White Paper that moved from a posture of forward defence to one of self-reliance, the Air Force was forced to confront the need for strategic policy and doctrine. The introduction to service of the F-111 fleet and the establishment of Learmonth as the first of its bare bases enabled the Air Force to articulate a strategy of denial as its response to the demands of the new White Paper. Within this strategy of denial, Air Force proposed to prevent any foreign hostile lodgement on Australian soil by denying access through the 'air-sea gap'. Its subsequent bare base development and capability initiatives sought, for perhaps the first time, to coherently link force structure, equipment and capability with a strategy for the employment of air power to serve national goals. This strategy subsequently took centre stage in the 1987 Defence of Australia White Paper with Air Force assuming a vital role in this policy. Today, the 1987 view of 'Defence of Australia' is a somewhat outdated strategy, although the central premise of national territorial sovereignty remains an unassailable objective. The substantial deterrent role for offensive air power that existed in Defence of Australia has been transformed into the more nuanced and subtle role of shaping and influencing the strategic security environment as reflected in current defence strategy, and this subtlety requires new interpretation and articulation of air power's ability to meet these national objectives.

The RAAF's ability to conceive itself as an independent strategic force capable of influencing the strategic security environment has come only recently in its history. The implications of this history have shaped the development of the present force and inculcated a culture that conceives and constrains the Air Force as an advanced and excellent, but tactical, service. There is always a danger in retrospective reflection to judge the actions of the past in terms of the ideas of the present, and it would be fair to say that the inadequacies, as we perceive them today, of the force then, were neither so obvious or significant at the time as we may perceive now. Nonetheless, it is instructive to trace the developments of the past in order to better understand the Air Force today. That understanding must include a recognition that the force is shaped not only by the consequences of its history, but that it can be and should be deliberately shaped by design and intent for the future. Although the product of its history, Air Force is not a slave to it, neither should decisions regarding the future force be constrained by what has gone before.

CURRENT SITUATION

The shape of our force today

The Air Force today is widely regarded as a very capable, modern, technologically advanced albeit modest fighting force. Its international reputation was built upon the solid historical foundation of its experiences in combat and in peace since inception in 1921 to the present. Throughout this history the RAAF has proven to be a tactically and operationally competent force capable of operations across the spectrum of conflict. In recent years, and most particularly since Australia's intervention as lead nation of the multi-national force into East Timor, Air Force's continued high standard of performance during a period of significantly increased operational tempo, has served to confirm that it represents a credible and capable force that is highly interoperable, with

⁴ Ibid, pp 84 – 104.

the US and the UK in particular, in coalition operations. Air Force's performance in its most recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan also demonstrates the level of tactical and operational excellence the force is capable of and the highly sophisticated manner in which it is able to function as a coalition partner.

In the Middle East Area of Operations, the RAAF operates as a fully integrated partner in the much larger coalition force and provides specialist expertise in a range of war-fighting functions. Of particular note is Air Force's contribution to the air campaigning and battlespace management functions within the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) and its specialist ISR capabilities. As a small but capable force, Air Force's ability to fill very senior roles within the CAOC is a testament not only to the level of integration it has achieved with the US and UK forces, but a measure of the respect and confidence the coalition partners hold for Air Force's capability. This sort of regard comes about only through consistent performance and focussed devotion to maintaining a credible and capable force. It also reflects the historic ties and shared combat experiences between Australian, US and UK forces, and it demonstrates that the Air Force has managed to remain relevant and capable, and sufficiently in touch with its much larger and capable allies.

The Air Force today is justifiably proud of its reputation and its ability to produce first class air power to meet national objectives. The list of operations and major activities that it has conducted or been involved in since 1999 is remarkable, particularly given the concurrent nature of these activities, and the simultaneous drawdown of forces during this time. However, this capability not only continues Air Forces' tradition of delivering excellent tactical air power, but reflects a culture, structure and ethos that have developed as a consequence of its tactical focus and preoccupation with equipment and technology.

The current re-shape and re-balance activities that the Air Force is undertaking come not only out of recognition of the structural imbalances in the present force, but out of recognition that future demands can not be satisfied under the present arrangements. The shape and workforce structure of the force in 2005 was substantially a legacy of the *ad hoc* growth and development of Air Force in the previous decades. Although several major reorganisations had altered the shape of Air Force since the late 1980's, the workforce structure was largely the result of the deliberate but piecemeal acquisition of equipment and capability introduced into service since the purchase of the F-111s in the 1960's. Platforms, once at their end of life, were replaced by newer models capable of fulfilling at least the same roles and functions of their predecessor. The C130 fleet acquisitions are an example of this, as is the replacement of the Mirage with the F/A-18. In many respects the logic of such replacement planning is sound, workforce structure remains largely intact and the force retains the ability to satisfy its historic roles and functions. However, without careful and deliberate analysis of future requirements from an holistic, and strategic perspective, acquisition and consequently force structure, can become *ad hoc* and piecemeal, lacking direction and an underlying rational plan.

While the current structure of the Air Force may not be the result of deliberate strategic planning to any great extent, it is of course difficult to detract from it too stridently given the proven track record of operational success and the aforementioned reputation for tactical excellence. The Air Force today is capable of providing the government of Australia with potent air power options to meet a wide range of military objectives across the spectrum of conflict from peace operations to combat. In order to provide this capability it is structured and manned to meet the joint warfighting functions of command and control, information superiority and support, force deployment, protection, application, and generation and sustainment as directed in doctrine. In fulfilling these functions, Air Force aims to meet its obligations to provide air power as part of a seamless force within the whole of government context today, however, the argument for change insists that there are constraints on Air Force's ability to contribute to this force mix in the future strategic context as depicted in *Joint Operations for the 21st Century*.⁵ These constraints, it is argued, have serious consequences and are imposed as a result of Air Force's tactical focus and its concomitant inability to function effectively as a strategic organisation. This notion of strategic organisation and capability will be discussed in some detail.

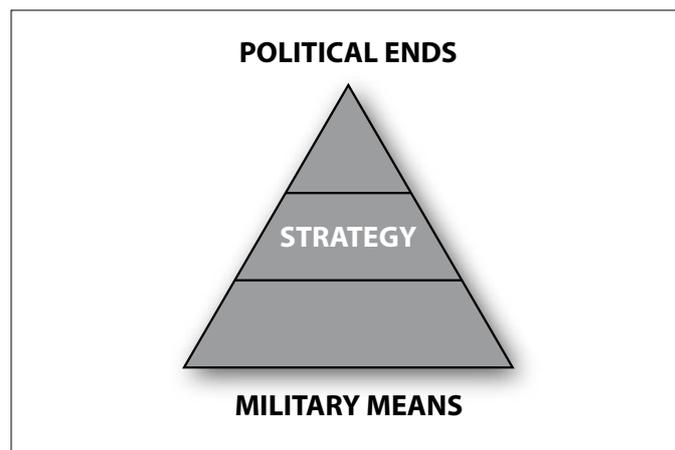
5 *Joint Operations for the 21st Century*, Canberra, 2007.

STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONS

Tactical, operational and strategic organisations

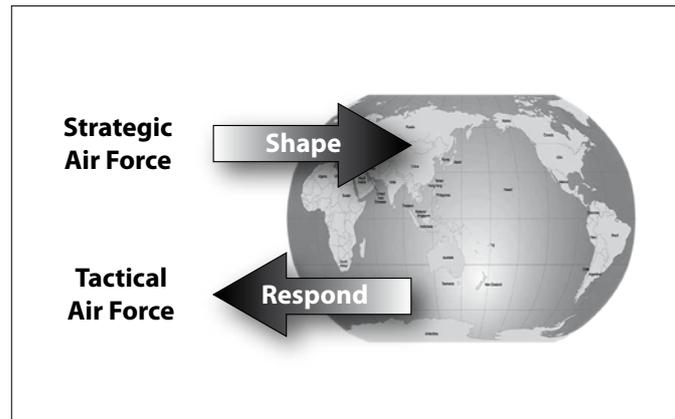
There is a quantifiable difference between organisations that are able to operate strategically and those that are able only to function at the operational or tactical levels. In this context the terms strategic, operational and tactical have a more expansive connotation than that usually ascribed to them in military parlance. Organisationally, these terms refer to the domain of influence commensurate with capability and intent, that is, how broad and to what ends are the actions directed. Strategic refers to the most far reaching and consequential decisions and plans an organisation can be concerned with. This encompasses a view to the future and a plan or strategy of how to achieve that future. Operational and tactical refer to more focussed, immediate and less consequential activities and plans. Tactical implies externally or self imposed constraints on timeliness and action, and suggests a domain of competence quantifiably distinct in nature and extent from strategic activity.

Strategic organisations, businesses, institutions or forces, have the capacity, organisational structure, culture, intent and desire to be able to shape and influence the environment in which they operate. This can be a regional security environment, an international business environment, inter-departmental government environment, or any other context. They proactively fashion the type of circumstance appropriate to their context, their capabilities and their interests at a pace and in the direction they choose, and in so doing exhibit influence that far outweighs their size. Strategic organisations lead and set their agenda, and do not merely react to, and be determined by, agendas set by others. They achieve this by applying professional mastery to synthesise the human and technological dimensions of their organisation to achieve strategic effect.



Tactical organisations conversely are reactive. They respond to the circumstances and the environment they find themselves in. They receive direction and purpose from others and are shaped by, and fashioned to meet, the needs and proclivities of others. Tactical organisations although technically proficient, perhaps even masterful, do not determine their own trajectory, they do not decisively shape their environment, and they do not lead in their field.

While tactical and strategic organisations may appear to be quantitatively identical, strategic organisations are discernable by the fact that they are able to shape and influence their environment consistent with their strategic intent. The hallmark of strategic organisations is the value they place in education. They understand the necessity to train for certainty and to educate for uncertainty and they are comfortable operating in uncertain and ambiguous environments. The superiority that strategic organisations are able to demonstrate is created by their capacity for complex decision-making to fashion their future. Within this understanding of strategic and tactical organisations, it is germane to note that the distinction between them is not based solely upon capability. There is a conceptual content to this distinction as well. Strategic organisations are so by design and intent. In order to become a strategic entity an organisation must first desire to be one, then implement structures, strategies and a culture to achieve this end.



Tactical organisations conversely, may be so by design or lack of it. They may have chosen to operate at this level of functionality, or they may be forced to do so by either failing to design and implement the necessary preconditions to becoming strategic, or simply not have the wherewithal to operate at that level. In either event, although there are clearly advantages for an organisation to be able to operate strategically this does not necessarily infer a value judgement. Some organisations for a variety of reasons may prefer, and be most effective, functioning at the tactical level only. They may have neither the need, nor desire to embrace a strategic dimension. Typically this might be the case where some other organisation or market force assumes the role of setting the strategic agenda such that the tactical organisation simply reacts to that agenda either happily or otherwise. For small organisations, with a limited and prescribed mandate, this may be an effective and rational course of action as they are incapable of acting strategically; ie. shaping their longer term future to their ends.

A STRATEGIC AIR FORCE

The parallels for military forces are obvious. As organisations, they are human enterprises, they embody an organisational structure - either by design or default - they are sustained by people, possess a culture, exist to serve a purpose, and function along prescribed lines. Consequently, as organisations they may be characterised as either strategic or tactical - the distinction of operational organisations, although valid is less commonly used and although it may be relevant to the RAAF it is not pursued here as the salient distinction pertains to strategic capacity and what this infers. The implications of being either a strategic or tactical organisation/force are heavily dependent upon the context in which the force exists and the purposes for which it functions.

For the RAAF there is now a degree of clarity to the purpose and context that will influence the design of the force. That clarity has not existed to the same extent at any time in its past. Some of that clarity and certainty is a product of the strategic guidance now provided, to Defence in general and to Air Force in particular, by government. By acting strategically to articulate a vision for the future in *Future Air and Space Operating Concept*,⁶ Air Force has deliberately influenced and shaped that guidance by example. Professional mastery of air power, including a sound understanding of how Air Force's air power is applied in the political and security environment, has positioned Air Force to exercise choice in its future.

Professional mastery

No force can function at any level without the essential foundation of technical mastery. Technical mastery ensures that a force can carry out the functions that are assigned to it and maintain a level of capability largely determined by others. For the Air Force, technical mastery provides the force the ability to operate the capabilities it possesses - it is the basis upon which the force's tactical excellence is established. Technical mastery is the necessary precondition of effective tactical forces and is an essential foundation of professional

⁶ Royal Australian Air Force AAP 1000-F—*The Future Air and Space Operating Concept*, Air Power Development Centre, Canberra, 2007.

mastery. Although technical mastery may exist in the absence of professional mastery, the converse is not true. Strategic air forces set themselves apart by developing and applying professional mastery to their business.

Professional mastery is a superior and more expansive capability that develops from a foundation of the highest standards of technical mastery. The salient distinction between technical and professional mastery is not in the level of competence exhibited. Both denote expert and authoritative skill. Professional mastery adds the strategic dimension to the competence of the force, and has a far greater scope and purview. Air Force's professional mastery is the sum of the organisational and individual technical mastery within the force plus the experience, knowledge, understanding and confidence of the strategic leaders of the force. This encompasses the ability to shape the future of the force, and the ability to conduct operations to the highest levels of proficiency whenever the force is called upon.

Professional mastery also includes the skills to develop and apply the force's technical mastery and to shape joint operations to ensure the most effective use of the force's capabilities. An organisation that possesses professional mastery can apply its technical mastery in ways that are synchronised with the actions of a range of partners, military and non-military, to create strategic effects. This professional mastery, in conjunction with decision superiority, forms the essential foundation of a strategic air force.

FUTURE FORCE

In 2007 Air Force launched its latest version of air power doctrine. It did so with a vision and purpose not before enunciated. The new doctrine set included, by design, historical, contemporary and future components articulating the RAAF's history, its current practice and its preferred aim point for the future. Of these, the future vision embodied in FASOC has been particularly influential for higher Defence strategic policy development. By design FASOC became the exemplar of future operating concepts and was adopted, discretely, as the model for the joint statement of future intent in CDF's *Joint Operations for the 21st Century*. It has become almost cliché now that the international security environment has become more complex, uncertain and dangerous. Certainly since the events of September 2001, international attention has been unceasingly drawn to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the spread of trans-national terrorism and the ramifications of such threats to global and regional security. ADF strategic policy reflects these concerns and acknowledges that this uncertainty requires Defence to constantly challenge its orthodoxy and to think and act strategically – that is, with a clear eye on the broad strategic security environment and the type of future Australia envisages for itself. This strategic outlook, while not entirely new for Defence, articulates a role for Defence, within a whole of government approach to security, that is subtly different to previous policy and which has particular implications for Air Force.

The most significant change to Defence strategic policy in recent years is the emphasis toward 'understanding and shaping' the strategic security environment within the context of a whole of government approach to security.⁷ This emphasis on 'shaping' in particular, infers a substantial role for the services in projecting influence beyond Australian territorial shores to potentially, the full extent of Australian interests abroad. While the more traditional roles of 'detering, defeating, denying and assisting' articulated in *Joint Operations for the 21st Century* fit comfortably into the capabilities and rationales of the services – and have been the cornerstone of Air Force doctrine and strategy for many years – the less tangible notion of 'shaping' is at once a more challenging and subtle role. Shaping, too, has been a key element of Air Force doctrine and strategy for some time, however, the shaping that the current security circumstances demand is a more nuanced and subtle approach than that traditionally employed. Of course, military forces have always shaped their environments, either by design or simply by virtue of their presence. The RAAF shaped political conditions in South-East Asia during the 'Konfrontasi' conflict, again during the Vietnam War and certainly shaped the circumstances surrounding events in East Timor in 1999 – 2000, by its presence and its actions. But this shaping is a discernibly different effect to that described in current Defence policy. Although the outcome may be the same – that of conditioning the actions of an adversary or potential adversary – what is proposed in *Joint Operations for the 21st Century* and

⁷ *Joint Operations for the 21st Century*, Canberra, 2007. p 12.

other classified statements is a proactive forward leaning posture that can project influence without necessarily physically positioning forces forward. The difference is a cognitive one.

The threat of force has always been a potent influence and means of shaping the actions of an adversary short of violence. The proactive shaping that Defence now proposes, however, is a more long term and nuanced approach that does not rely solely on the threat or implied threat of violence, but which positively conditions the security environment through a variety of subtle, perhaps subconscious means. The ability to responsively and quickly provide humanitarian relief through agile airlift throughout Australia's immediate region and beyond is a persistent, subtle and powerful shaping force. The capacity to deploy a squadron of advanced fighter aircraft across the globe with indigenous AAR and logistics support is also a powerful non-violent shaping force. Similarly; commanding an agile, networked and capable air force is also a potent influence on Australia's regional security environment. These are examples of how Air Force can and must shape and influence its security environment consistent with government policy – what follows from this requirement is the perhaps less well understood need for Air Force to become a particular type of force to perform this role effectively for the long term.



In order to effectively and intentionally shape its security environment, in a fashion consistent with government policy and Australia's articulated national interests, Air Force must exhibit the characteristics of a strategic organisation – that is, it must become a strategic air force. While there is little doubt that even a sound tactical air force can and will shape its immediate environment, it will do so in a fashion and to ends that it may not control. Again, this is the conceptual dimension of strategic organisations – they determine how, when, what and why they shape their environment by design and through deliberate intent. Unwittingly perhaps, Defence through its enunciation of the need and desire to shape and influence Australia's security environment, has articulated a fundamental requirement of Air Force and the other services.

FORCE OPTIONS

Within the broad alternatives of strategic or tactical organisation as presented thus far, there are a number of force options open to Air Force in positioning itself to meet CDF's intent and government direction. In essence, these range from the force maintaining its current capabilities, through to adopting a fundamentally different philosophy for force development.

The status quo

The first and perhaps most obvious course of action is to simply deny that current policy implies a need for fundamental changes to the Air Force. This line of reasoning might suggest that for over 80 years Air Force has been meeting the needs of government and Australian national security by providing modern, capable and effective air power consistent with its charter and capability. By this logic, Air Force has, and continues, to shape

its environment through the provision of tactically excellent operational capability and needs no conceptual or structural change to continue to meet government policy or intent. This *status quo* argument will naturally be the most superficially appealing and achievable option, at least in part because it admits no systemic shortcomings past or present. As noted earlier, Air Force justifiably holds a very favourable domestic and international reputation. A 'do nothing' option would see Air Force maintain its tactical excellence and operational focus, and continue to develop capabilities and workforce structures in the fashion it always has. This position would argue that being a tactically proficient air force is not only a valid and sustainable proposition, but given its limited resources, and in particular the constraints on its personnel numbers, is the only viable option for a force of its constrained size.

The implications of maintaining a status quo approach may be controversial. Proponents of the status quo philosophy would argue that the system is not substantially deficient and needs no major adjustments. The force clearly delivers superior (if limited) air power, meets government direction and is on parity with the other services. The contra argument would propose that while the Air Force does indeed deliver excellent tactical forces and capabilities able to meet broad government direction, it is unnecessarily self-constrained in its ability to shape its own ends and influence its environment. Thus Air Force is unable to fully meet the implicit requirements of strategic policy. The crux of the matter therefore would appear to be two fold. First, that Air Force currently is constrained in its ability to act strategically, and secondly, that extant strategic policy explicitly requires it to be able to act strategically.

The consequences of an organisation's inability to act strategically may be dire or negligible depending on what it hopes to achieve and what it is required to achieve. For Air Force, the consequences of not shaping its environment or directing its own future, while potentially not evident in the short term, would prove dire in the long run. History and commonsense would suggest that there will always be a multitude of actors willing to provide Air Force with guidance, to prescribe its future course, or to suggest activities and outcomes it should pursue. Lack of direction, typically, is not a quality government agencies lack. However, the issue for Air Force, is who sets those parameters and to what extent would Air Force set its own vision, and pursue the courses of action it best believes fulfils its obligations. If, Air Force believes, it is required to shape its own future and to positively and deliberately influence the security environment it inhabits, then it should also acknowledge that it needs the wherewithal to do so.

Similarly, the consequences of not fulfilling its obligations to contribute to shaping the environment as directed in strategic policy, would eventually prove catastrophic for Air Force. Defence strategy as described *inter alia* in *Joint Operations for the 21st Century* is predicated on the government of Australia, through coordinated inter-agency effort, understanding and shaping its regional and potentially global strategic security environment. The extent to which any single agency or government actor fails to effectively contribute to that whole of government effort fundamentally weakens Australia's capacity to pursue its interests. Should Air Force fail to contribute effectively to shaping and understanding the security environment then it would not only lose the opportunity to positively influence its future but it would eventually lose the confidence of the government, the respect of the other services and possibly the trust of the Australian public. This would amount to strategic failure of the organisation.

Structure around the US alliance

Another option available to the Air Force, and one that might appeal to certain sectors of the government and Defence, is to develop the force so as to provide niche capabilities to our major coalition partners, in particular the US. The logic behind this approach is centred on the reasonable belief that Australia's involvement in any major confrontation would be as part of a larger coalition effort. Thus, its force should be tailored to smoothly integrate into a larger coalition force, fulfilling vital niche capabilities – commensurate with its size – for the overall effort. The nature and particular significance of the Australia-US alliance is of course the backdrop to the line of argument, and provides the underlying rationale of Australia's special relationship with the US and the implications of this relationship for Defence. Quite reasonably the previous and current governments have consistently advocated a close defence relationship between Australia and the US. The closeness of this relationship allows the ADF to enjoy certain privileges with regards to US technology, intelligence sharing and capability development. It also has tended to shape the nature and direction of ADF force structure

and capability development, even to the extent that ADF doctrine acknowledges the probability of coalition operations and the need for Australian forces to be able to integrate seamlessly with the Americans. The pursuit therefore, of ADF capabilities, structure and strategy that fit this coalition model would appear a reasonable and sound proposition that would be consistent with government policy and ultimately advantageous to the ADF and Australian interests.

The special Australian-US relationship is of course, a very valuable one but it would be naive to believe that it does not come at some cost. That cost, from the Air Force perspective, concerns the degree of autonomy that Air Force would have to surrender over the determination of its future. A future that prescribes a close and integrated relationship with the US incurs opportunity costs and potential obligations. None of this is meant to suggest these obligations are inconsistent with Australian national interests or contrary to a direction the Air Force is happy to pursue at present, but in choosing to tie itself to US development plans the Air Force must be mindful of what freedoms it surrenders for tomorrow. As Lord Palmerston famously once opined, 'Britain does not have permanent friends only permanent interests', and in similar fashion the Air Force as an organisation must at all costs ensure it retains the ability to shape itself to assessed need, unfettered by obligations other than Australian interests.⁸ A strategic air force would ensure it retains the ability to fashion its future in a direction and form it determines consistent with national policy, and would also be able to influence national policy from within its own professional responsibilities.

The implications of Air Force choosing to adopt an approach that valued its ability to provide niche capabilities to coalition operations would be significant on several fronts. Air Force would continue to produce excellent tactical capability and would continue to be held in high regard as a credible force. In many regards its force development decisions would be simplified, as the primary objective would be to remain interoperable with the US. Its force structure also would follow the functions it chose to fulfil as a niche contributor. This structure, however, may not be ideally suited to Australia's long term interests as they evolve in the future. Possibly, so long as the relationship with the US remained of paramount importance then it would prove useful, if restrictive. To a large degree this model would resemble that adopted in the Pacific theatre during World War II. Australian forces were credible, capable and well-led at the operational level by Australian commanders, but the strategic direction and highest command resided in the hands of Australia's allies. Today, such a course of action may still be a sound and rational decision, so long as the consequences of surrendering the organisation's ability to function as a strategic force are recognised and the possibly dire consequences accepted.

A strategic Air Force

The third option available to the Air Force would be to decide to become a strategic air force. By choosing this option, the Air Force would be deciding to develop the wherewithal to not only shape its own future by design, but to shape the external security environment in which it operates in concert with others. As a strategic air force, the RAAF would undertake a range of necessary changes to its culture, its focus and its force structure, in order to achieve the ability to transcend the constraints of the tactical domain and shape its own ends through strategic design. The characteristics of strategic organisations have already been rehearsed, but the implications for the RAAF bear further elaboration. As a strategic air force the RAAF would retain all of its current tactical excellence, experience and reputation. No strategic force can exist without the firm foundation of tactical excellence. Consequently, nothing that the Air Force currently undertakes to achieve this would be diminished or halted. What would change, however, is the culture that sustains the force, the organisational structure that implements its ability to generate and sustain air power, and the strategic intent that guides the force to the envisioned future. These changes would see the Air Force transform from a force that exhibits technical mastery to one that possesses true professional mastery of air power. As a force that embodies professional mastery, the Air Force would be capable and expert at operating simultaneously at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. It would do so to achieve synergy of effect through the coordinated and aligned effort at all levels of activity within an organisation framework that is designed to optimise decision making and structured to connect strategic intent to tactical effect.

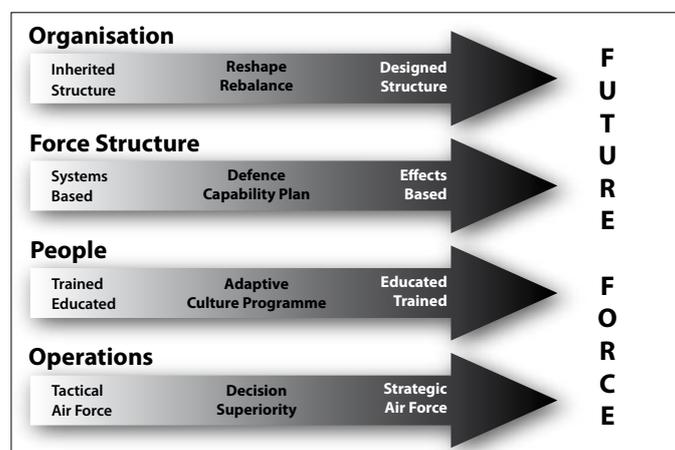
⁸ Quote attributed to Lord Palmerston, Prime Minister of England, London, 1848.

From an external vantage point, the Air Force as a strategic organisation would not appear very different to that which exists today. Internally however, the force would function and think significantly differently. As a strategic force, the Air Force would be guided by an enduring and systematic strategy that linked government intent to militarily achievable objectives, within a national effects based approach, through the coordinated and sustained application of air power effects, be they first, second or third order effects. The Air Force vision, and the strategy to achieve that vision would not only be articulated throughout the force, but would be explicitly connected to every activity performed within the organisation such that at every level, every activity, mission and task was logically linked from intent to effect, from top to bottom, tactical to strategic, vertically and horizontally. This transparent connectivity would not only provide reason and justification throughout the organisation but it would enable and facilitate decision superiority as an organisational attribute.

BECOMING A STRATEGIC AIR FORCE

If Air Force were to choose to become a strategic organisation it would require a sustained and focussed program of change to achieve that outcome. Fundamental in this process are the cognitive changes required within the organisation both from a top down perspective and horizontally across the organisation at each level. The capacity to function strategically exists primarily within the cognitive domain of the members that comprise an organisation. Consequently, for an organisation to function effectively as a strategic force, the appropriate understanding, knowledge and intent must infuse the entire workforce population. This represents more than just the dissemination of information across the organisation. It entails a significant cultural change that must be adopted throughout the workforce so as to align thinking and behaviour within the force consistent with the new orthodoxy of strategic design. In order to coherently move toward becoming a strategic organisation, Air Force would need to inculcate a culture and ethos that valued not only the core elements of strategic intent, professional mastery, decision making and successful implementation, and decision superiority, but that valued education as an intrinsic good in itself, as well as an indispensable and worthwhile means for developing the attributes necessary within the force to achieve the abovementioned core elements.

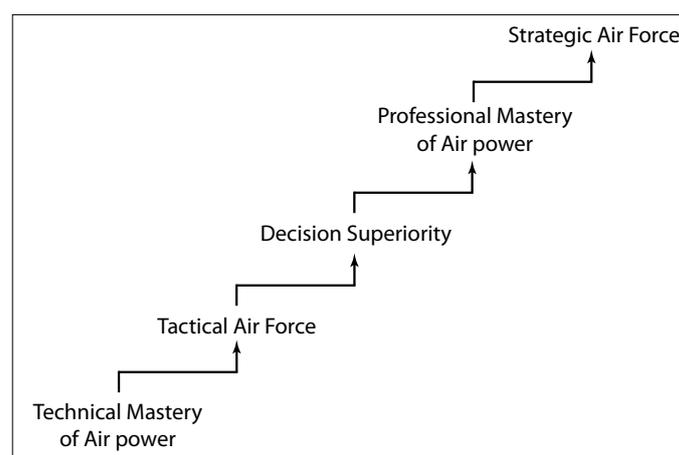
Cultural alignment is a slow and deliberate business that requires consistency, persistence, reinforcement and appropriate reward mechanism in order to effect genuine and enduring change. Producing this sort of change entails more than just formal education and training within an institutional context, it requires a whole of organisation approach in which appropriate behaviours and attitudes are valued, promoted and rewarded. The formal educational component of this approach would most appropriately be implemented through an Air Force training and education program that spanned the entirety of educational experience from initial entry training courses through to senior leadership awareness experiences. It is a well accepted maxim that one trains for certainty and educates for uncertainty, and in the complex, uncertain and ambiguous environment that Air Force faces – and will face in the future – this expression has particular relevance. Education, therefore, is a key plank in any program for developing an air force of influence.



The other less formal but essential component in the broader acculturation process is the presentation of a consistent institution wide statement of intent or vision. This pervasive message would serve not only to provide clear and unambiguous direction to the organisation, but align the disparate parts of the force to the core and essential business of the organisation. The first step in disseminating a statement of strategic intent, however, is developing the intent then committing to its achievement. In achieving this, the Air Force will have overcome its greatest hurdle in becoming a strategic air force – that of deciding and committing to becoming a strategic air force. This commitment is subsequently conveyed to the whole organisation through the articulation and pursuit of the strategic intent. This organisational approach complements the formal education and training and reinforces the cognitive changes to establish behaviour evidenced cultural modification. Upon this basis the organisation can then bring about the physical changes necessary to become a strategic force.

Although essentially the product of realignment within the cognitive domain – that is of intent – becoming a strategic force entails certain material structural and organisational changes also. These are the physical changes the organisation needs to undertake to put into effect the new culture and new way of thinking. These material changes are manifest in two primary areas, that of organisational design and force structure. As noted earlier, a key attribute of strategic forces is decision superiority; this itself is predicated on an organisational design that enables optimal decision making. This organisational design is of course different from organisation to organisation but in general terms; it embodies design that provides effective and efficient flow of information, appropriate vertical and horizontal linkages and communication paths, the delegation of appropriate authority and resources to decision-makers, and processes and procedures to report and communicate within the organisation to ensure successful implementation of decisions. Organisations designed to decide are organisations designed to function as strategic entities. This design therefore is a necessary but not sufficient characteristic of strategic air forces, coupled with the appropriate strategic intent as described above however, it forms the basis of strategic organisations.

The final component of a strategic air force is a force structure that would enable the organisation to produce strategic effects that shape its environment consistent with its intent. For Air Force, this force structure may not be too different to that which currently exists and delivers such good tactical effect. Ultimately however, as a strategic force, Air Force would need to evaluate its current force structure not only against its immediate operational requirements as directed by CDF and government, but against its longer term strategic obligations to shape the regional security environment consistent with government long-term guidance. Achieving this latter requirement may over the long term require the force structure to be reshaped or refocused.



Such change would need to be delivered through a carefully planned and directed strategic approach. The cost, in terms of budget, personnel change, training, infrastructure and time are so great that action to reshape the force for the future would need to begin long before the target date. At the same time, reshaping would need to be conducted in ways that ensured extant commitments were met. These ends could only be achieved by an organisation that understood its current and future requirements and was able to decide a strategy path to the

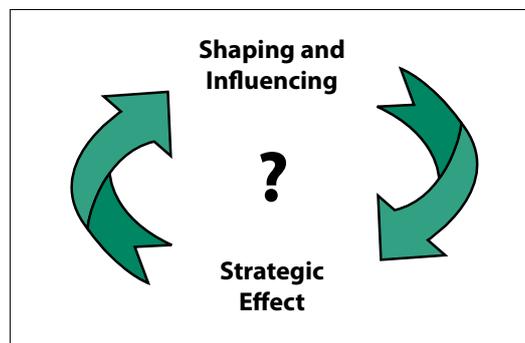
future that meets both. The historic paradigm of replacing old capabilities with newer versions of the same must be abandoned for a strategic approach.

The Air Force is already structured to create good tactical effects and is already broadly aligned with strategic intent. The implications for future capability development are clear. The future force must align with the strategic intent described in FASOC and be prepared to operate in the context of a National Effects Based Approach to Australian security. The strategic Air Force must be an influential partner in capability development that is joint, future driven and consistent with strategic intent.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

An air force structured, designed and led in a fashion consistent with that outlined above would exhibit the attributes of a strategic organisation. Making these changes however, will be complex and critical. Because these changes which are primarily cognitive will often be subtle, determining and using appropriate measures for the change and ultimately the performance and effectiveness of the strategic Air Force will be vital to establish and maintain confidence in the new organisation.

The basis for these measures is relatively simple. Strategic organisations/forces are evaluated by their ability to produce consistent and deliberate strategic effects consistent with their strategic intent. For Air Force this would mean three things. First, we must be able to influence and shape the strategic security environment (inclusive of political, policy and operational dimensions), both external to Australia and internally, as directed by government and CDF. Second, we must continue to produce the range of excellent air power effects we produce now. Third, we must demonstrate alignment with the other Services towards the creation of a seamless ADF. The framework for the third criterion will be the Joint Warfighting Functions.



While conceptually measuring this effect is relatively simple, in practice determining what strategic effect an organisation or force produces can be more subjective and problematic. The strategic objective of government policy, in understanding and shaping Australia's security environment, is that it might avoid or deter any potential conflict within the region and contribute to it remaining a stable, prosperous and peaceful one in which Australia and her neighbours could pursue their interests. In the broadest sense therefore, if Australia's security is maintained, and no significant conflicts arise in the nation's immediate area of interest that might involve Australia, then this would be a positive measure of effect. The difficulty arises of course in determining what elements of national power were responsible for such an outcome, and within a whole of government approach such determination might prove very difficult indeed. It would for example, be very difficult to precisely determine if it was military influence that had persuaded a regional state to behave in a particular manner or if it had been the cumulative effect of years of Foreign Affairs engagement with that government, or indeed the result of far more subtle influence by good-will NGOs. To try to disaggregate such complexly interrelated dynamics with any degree of certainty is probably futile and serves only to highlight that national power and influence is a complex and intricately connected web of many strands. However, developing and articulating clear, achievable and measurable strategic objectives are a first step in being able to measure performance and effect, thus a strategic air force would ensure it developed these and promoted them widely

within its organisation. The positive measure of effect for Air Force therefore, would be that at it was able to contribute to the whole of government approach to shaping the environment and that, at its level and within its sphere of influence, it had the capacity to demonstrably influence other regional air forces.

Despite the difficulty in objectively measuring the effectiveness of strategic influence there are a range of criteria that we could reasonably expect a successful strategic organisation to satisfy and these may well serve as approximate measures of effectiveness. A successful strategic air force would for example, be able to effectively, coherently and persuasively communicate its strategic intent and its plans for achieving that intent to the government, other agencies and services and the general population through a range of suitable media. In communicating this intent a strategic air force would in effect be 'telling' a convincing story of who it is, what it is, and what it is able to accomplish in the service of the national interest. An accurate, coherent and convincing story must be an elegant but simple and clear enunciation of Air Force's values, vision and mission expounded as much through actions as words, consistent across the force and persistently presented so that it was well understood, accepted and embraced by all interested parties.

There are many other criteria that a strategic air force would meet, and although not exhaustive the following are some of the more important. An air force of influence would be emulated not only by other air forces but by other services and agencies as well. The inherent value and effectiveness of such an organisation would leave others no option but to want to copy its success. Ultimately, other organisations would even defend the position of a successful strategic air force and when appropriate argue their case for them. For example, as a successful air force of influence, Air Force would find Army and Navy, more often than not, arguing their case for capital acquisitions, procurement policy and doctrine in the joint arena with the clear understanding that what was good for Air Force was good for all the services and for Australia. A strategic air force would act positively to progress and enhance the development of a seamless joint and whole of government environment. A strategic air force would not only very successfully attract and retain the services of highly competent people, but it would be able to consistently and systematically produce first class leaders, thinkers and statesmen who were highly valued and sought after by government and external industry to fulfil significant positions of influence. A successful strategic air force for example would count among the ranks of its past members, state governors, politicians, Governors General, CEOs of major industries, and all positions of upper echelon and command in Defence and government. To the extent that this is not the case now is perhaps an indication of the strategic shortcomings of the current force.

CONCLUSION

The Air Force is a dynamic organisation. It embodies an organisational structure, is sustained by people, possesses a culture, and exists to serve a purpose and function along prescribed lines. The Air Force has a future, a past and a present. Of these, its history has shaped and fashioned its present. It has set the pattern of organisational behaviour and culture that colours all that the force does today, how it perceives itself and how it is perceived by others. Unchecked, Air Force's past would determine its future also. While this may or may not be a good thing, belief in the inevitability of this future relinquishes the steering of the force to a form of passive organisational Darwinism in which an evolutionary process that favours fitness to the present, determines the future. Fortunately however, this is not the only model of future development for the Air Force. The Air Force is also a thinking and proactive collective of intelligent and motivated individuals who are capable of actively shaping their future and that of the institution in a fashion and direction they so choose.

Air Force today is faced with a choice. It is a choice between two distinct but equally viable means of meeting the demands of the present and future security environment. It is a choice between remaining a tactical force, with several force options within that structure, and becoming a strategic organisation. This paper has explored the arguments surrounding this choice and concludes that regardless of the merits of either alternative, Air Force must first choose to decide about its future. Whether Air Force chooses to continue in its historic path, constrain its influence to the tactical realm where it demonstrates such excellence, and accept the security environment presented to it, or it chooses to develop a strategic force that sets and pursues its own future, shapes and influences its environment, and achieves strategic objectives by design, is a choice that Air Force must consciously make.

As described above, either alternative presented in this paper may be a viable and reasonable option for Air Force. The arguments for each have merit. Both courses of action entail certain degrees of risk and each suggests force structures and levels of capability appropriate to their capacity and the security environment. As a tactical force Air Force could subsequently choose to structure itself primarily around the US alliance or adopt a *status quo* approach and remain largely as it is. To some, these options will appear to be the only realistic choice given Air Force's constrained personnel numbers and current resources. Air Force's proven track record further bolsters the argument for remaining a tactical force and given the already high operational tempo and the pressures upon the force as a result of the impending introduction of new capabilities, the inertia to remain unchanged is significant.

Should however, the Air Force choose to become a strategic force with the capability and capacity to shape its environment and set its own course, then it will need to implement change within three key areas: its organisational design; its force structure; and most importantly its culture through training and education. All of these changes are achievable for a force with determination, drive and vision. Air Force possesses all of these attributes and could achieve strategic status with dedicated and sustained effort probably within a decade. The changes required are not enormous and the vast majority of what the Air Force currently does would remain unchanged. What is fundamentally required is the leadership and articulated intent toward this objective that only the Air Force senior leadership team can provide.

Now, as ever, the future of the Air Force resides in the hands of those who guide its present. The challenge for Air Force leadership today therefore, is to decide about deciding. This is a challenge only Air Force leadership can face, and it is a choice that should not be deferred. Air Force has a justifiably proud history. It has clearly enunciated doctrine for the present and a well articulated vision for the future in FASOC. Realising that future through a deliberate, sustainable and designed program is a responsibility for all of Air Force.

To be a balanced expeditionary, networked Air Force capable of achieving the Government's objectives through the swift and decisive application of air and space power in joint operations or as a part of a larger coalition force