



## Rethinking Preparedness

Samantha Gilks, Catherine Beadle, Alexandria Clarke, Jade Evans, Robert Miles

Published 01 November 2021

It's the first day of the exercise. You've organised your work life balance to run like a well-oiled machine whilst you are away fighting the "war." You hit the ground running; "fights on!" You receive intelligence snap-ins that scope the current situation, the operating environment and the adversaries' capabilities. You are briefed on missions that will be executed by 'Gucci' Army, Air Force and Navy platforms and teams. You work extra-long shifts to ensure robust handovers and it doesn't bother you because you know there is an end in sight. ENDEX is called and everyone returns back to the day-to-day grind with the parting message that "no lives or assets were harmed in the making of this exercise." But what happens when they are? What happens when the high-end war fighting scenario becomes a reality and our campaign planning is put to the test?

The idea of rethinking preparedness looks at the fight in terms of campaign sustainability and not just the short term fight—usually manifested by way of high-end war fighting scenarios—that we train for. It is a multifaceted beast that I believe has two key elements: people and capability.

### People

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) exercises Phase 1 to 4 of ADF Operations (shape, deter, seize initiative, dominate), but in order to test the sustainability of the campaign there is a

need to exercise Phases 5 and 6 (stabilise, enable civil authority). Unlike in exercises; however, the reality is that war lasts longer than anyone ever intends and after the initial conflict engagement, it is resiliency, redundancy and recovery that keeps us alive and able to contribute to the fight.

A recent example of this is the ADF response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the ADF were quick to respond, we were not prepared for it to last as long as it has. While workplace practices evolved, we tested and adjusted to working from home, and our systems/training/meetings/forums moved online, the ADF scrambled to stand up a Joint Task Force. Throughout the pandemic, people have been and continue to be deployed without bias from all services, professions and ranks. However, as the COVID-19 situation has developed it seems like workplaces returned to OPS normal by bringing the workforce back into the office, offering personnel deployment on Operation COVID-19 Assist and continuing normal operations and exercises. We acknowledge that this is the nature of the beast that is the ADF, but have we burnt out our workforce for sake of the short term fight?

Understandably, COVID-19 is an evolving situation that has no foreseeable end, but this is where I draw the similarity—neither does war. More than ever there is a need to include resiliency, redundancy and recovery plans into campaigns not only for deployed roles, but also the workforce holding down the home front. Some ideas include: make work from home the norm, not the exception; provide five paid mental health days a year with no questions asked; include a yearly mental health check-up as part of Individual Readiness requirements; and have each ADF unit create a redundancy and recovery plan that details an organisational chart and assignment of secondary duties that will stand up to support Whole of Government efforts in an event that requires it. Each of these ideas seeks to enable the ADF to prepare its people to not only withstand the initial engagement of war, but sustain it for the length of the campaign.

## **Capability**

Have you ever been part of an exercise where we lose almost all of our biggest, baddest assets in the first couple of days? No? Me either. So what do we do when the above hypothetical becomes a reality? We may find that the most efficient and successful capabilities the ADF employs will be the first to be targeted in an initial engagement with an

adversary that understands and exploits all domains of war. This would change not only the way we fight but what we fight with.

The capabilities facet of rethinking preparedness is about better aligning battlespace and capability management, coordination and integration. We need to ensure that each service takes integration and interoperability with the other services into consideration before procuring a capability. A Joint Capabilities Centre with representatives from each service would ensure that capabilities procured could enable communications and cuing across all domains and services, be more cost effective, and be able to take the brunt of attrition whilst also sustaining offensive and defensive posturing for the entirety of a campaign.

These capabilities would not be a like for like replacement of current capabilities. As the focus shifts to multi-domain fighting and 'grey zone' warfare the need for smarter, faster and cheaper platforms arises. This does not mean that expensive combat platforms fall by the way side, it simply means rethinking how and when we use them. For example, the idea of drones is not a new one, they are cost effective and fast. They could be used in the first instances of Phase 1 and 2 to help shape the operating environment and deter the adversary whilst the more expensive capabilities like JSF's and nuclear subs enact Phase 3 and 4—seizing the initiative and dominating. All the while ISR, electronic warfare, cyber and space assets play in the 'grey zone' of modern warfare and enable all phases of ADF operations. Procuring assets quickly is another moving piece at play here; there is little to no benefit waiting years on end to procure a platform that may be attrited in the initial engagement with no back up. Perhaps sending cheaper, faster platforms to take the brunt of attrition is the smarter move.

Each of these capabilities need to be procured quickly and smartly, and employed for the right job at the right time. A Joint Capabilities Centre would be pivotal in understanding these needs and ensuring its proper execution.

### **The Payoff**

The integration and expansion of these ideas within campaigns seeks to safeguard the ADF from not only the perils of attrition during war, but also the haemorrhaging and deterioration of people and capability throughout the years to come. Included resiliency,

redundancy and recovery plans for people and capabilities built into campaigns is a must if we want to sustain our lines of effort in the current and future global climate.

Recommended APA7 Citation - Beadle, C., Clarke, A., Evans, J., Gilks, S., Miles, R. (2021). Rethinking Preparedness [Blog]. Retrieved DD Month YY, from <https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/blog/rethinking-preparedness>