

# SPECIAL REPORT

## Projecting national power

Reconceiving Australian air power strategy  
for an age of high contest



Peter Hunter

August 2019

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AUSTRALIAN  
STRATEGIC  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faced by an Indo-Pacific region fraught with challenge, but also rich with opportunity, air power strategy needs to be reframed to provide Australian governments with flexible options for wielding national influence. In the light of major changes affecting regional security, it will be increasingly important for air power, within a joint force construct, to contribute to holistic, whole-of-government approaches to deploying the elements of national power.

If, at the simplest level, Australia's regional goals are concerned with advancing our national security and prosperity, then the application of those elements of power will need to be in service of the kinds of effects that deliver those goals. Such strategic effects may range from deterrence and denial, to influence and counter-influence, to counter-coercion and cost imposition. Along with other elements of national power, including diplomatic, informational and economic elements, the ADF, and specifically its air power components, can play an instrumental role in helping to deliver these kinds of outcomes to better position Australia for an era of *high contest*.

This paper proposes a recalibrated Australian air power strategy to bring about such an effects-oriented approach. While the RAAF may once have focused on delivering air fighting capabilities, the coercive 'winning without fighting' methods being applied through political warfare campaigns against Australia have overtaken such thinking. Any response based on 'more of the same' models risks exposing Australia to greater strategic risk.

Of course, there will always be an irreducible requirement to maintain military forces capable of repelling and defeating any attempt at military intervention by an outside power. And unless Australia wishes to be a truly mendicant security state, we must have a core capacity for national defence based on sovereign, self-reliant frameworks. But if our sophisticated military capabilities are having little effect in countering the coercive diplomacy and political warfare methods being practised by regional powers such as the Chinese state, then it's timely to ask tough-minded questions about how the military dimension of national power is to be made relevant to those challenges.

The inescapable conclusion is that, if we're to succeed in a high-contest environment, we need to recalibrate our thinking about the applicability of military forces to winning-without-fighting scenarios. With its large-scale force modernisation well advanced, the RAAF is well placed to look for ways to ensure that its war-fighting tool-chest is applicable not just to high-intensity near-peer conflict scenarios, but also to the more likely, more prevalent, grey-zone scenarios that it will consistently encounter in the Indo Pacific.

But this will require disruptive thinking about how air power assets may be used in unconventional ways. Such disruption isn't merely a function of technological innovation: it can happen only if we reconceive of our military tools for uses other than those imagined during their design or acquisition. There's rich potential for the Air Force's new platforms—from F-35 to P8 to Growler—to help deliver what might be called 'influence operations' through the joint force.

This paper contends that an influence operations model will enable the Air Force to focus on how to give priority to the strategic effects that it can deliver for government and to creatively reframe its thinking about how best to use the tools available for those effects.

On the one hand, this will involve exposing coercive diplomacy and grey-zone strategies whenever they're applied against us. One of the reasons those methods succeed is that they stay below the threshold of our responses. By shining a light on them, air power can help erase the ambiguity and uncertainty on which they depend.

But such exposure alone won't always be enough. That's where a more forward-leaning mindset will be needed to create cost-imposing strategies. Those strategies will necessarily be geared to ensuring that any party that wishes to coercively interfere in Australia's interests desists from actions that hurt us. It will be vital that we signal that we have the resolve, the intent and above all the capability to robustly protect and advance our national interests.

For air power purposes, it will be helpful to identify mission types that align with the strategic goal of influence. In this regard, there's a spectrum of activities that exist on a sliding scale from the seemingly benign, such as public affairs and international engagement, through more assertive approaches, such as information and deception operations, and up to and including the selective application of force.

This notion of a sliding scale is key, both because it reflects the nonlinear, yet scalable, approach being taken by revisionist powers such as the Chinese state, but also, perhaps more importantly, because it allows for flexibility in our own methods. Such a sliding-scale approach to influence operations is posited here to represent a viable air power contribution to a joint force strategy for high contest.

## Recommendations

1. Reconsideration of air power's role within an overarching defence strategy is essential for responding to the high-contest environment Australia now faces in the Indo-Pacific. Such a strategy should focus on effects, including deterrence, denial, influence, counter-influence, counter-coercion and cost imposition.
2. In the light of the comprehensive coercion models being applied by regional powers such as China, our air power strategy will need to deliver effects through the joint force and as part of a holistic, whole-of-government approach to wielding the elements of national power.
3. The obsolescence of platform-centric approaches in achieving strategic effects has been revealed by the Chinese state's approach to political warfare and its use of grey-zone strategies. A reframing of air power strategy is needed to ensure that our newly acquired, sophisticated platforms have relevance in those grey-zone scenarios.
4. An influence operations model will help to deliver such disruptive options. This may mean applying air power tools for purposes other than those for which they were at first designed. A sliding-scale approach to activities, ranging from public affairs and international engagement, through information and deception operations, and up to and including the selective application of force, will provide Australian governments with flexible options for wielding national influence.

# INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the RAAF has embarked on a program to become a '5th-generation' air force. Sparked in the first instance by the acquisition of state-of-the-art aircraft such as the F-35, the Air Force has come to realise that there are far-reaching implications for its air combat capabilities resident in those sophisticated, technologically enabled platforms.

Through initiatives such as Plan Jericho,<sup>1</sup> the Air Force has invested significant intellectual capital in fathoming those implications and in adapting its thinking to the new opportunities. And while both the F-35 and the notion of 5th generation are still relatively new to Australia, it's nevertheless fair to say that laudable progress has been made in seizing on these themes, and that, in certain senses, the RAAF is ahead of regional peers in its modernisation program.

This paper seeks to explore how Australia might capitalise on this modernisation by transforming an Australian conception of air power for the modern era. The point here isn't to replicate the significant body of work already done to explore the technical dimensions of modern 5th-generation air forces, but rather to consider the place of an air power strategy in modern geostrategic circumstances. To avert the need for an overly detailed focus on what 5th generation might mean, a working definition for this paper can be taken as:

a whole of force approach to airpower application where the capabilities of individual platforms are enhanced by networking across the joint force. This will produce sophisticated cooperative engagement effects by linking distributed sensors and effectors through sharing mission critical data and situational awareness.<sup>2</sup>

The introduction into service of an almost entirely new fleet of aircraft, from Joint Strike Fighters, to Growler electronic attackers, to Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, to C-17 and C-27 transports and on to E-7A airborne surveillance aircraft, along with unmanned systems, requires that the RAAF adopt new ways of working to ensure that it delivers against the promise of those systems. While there's rich potential in this highly networked force, there are many challenges in bringing it to fruition, not least in generating all the essential enablers. Since the Air Force already has all this as impetus for change, it makes sense to capitalise on it to ensure that its efforts are in the service of a robust air power strategy that serves Australia's national interests.

But, even more importantly, Australia is now confronted with a markedly different Indo-Pacific strategic environment. Although we've for many years been an ardent supporter of the 'rules-based global order', that wished-for *status quo* has been overtaken by events and replaced with what's been described variously as an age of comprehensive coercion, or high contest.<sup>3</sup>

The more competitive aspects of geopolitical statecraft are becoming a new regional norm, particularly through the coercive grey-zone methods being applied by revisionist powers such as China, which have no interest in sustaining the rules-based order that Australia still champions. The tougher, more competitive dimensions of Indo-Pacific security are, by and large, now being recognised in strategic policy circles, including among Australia's closest friends and allies, from the UK to the US to Japan<sup>4</sup>. In his now-famous speech in October 2018, US Vice President Pence noted that:



Beijing is employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests.<sup>5</sup>

These geostrategic issues raise serious questions about the place of air power in Australia's response to the regional environment. For it to remain a valued dimension of national power, a recalibrated conception of air power strategy that accounts for these geopolitical changes is needed, in addition to ensuring the delivery of an exceptional air combat force.

That said, it's important to recognise that this doesn't connote a need for wholesale change. Rather, it will be important to build on the momentum already achieved and, by doing so, expand the frames of reference for air power thinking to contend with the new era. This is all eminently achievable, as it's a question of concepts, ideas and approaches, not so much of new systems or platforms, given the RAAF's extensive new high-technology force.

By adopting a strategy-led approach that on the one hand capitalises on the opportunities of modernisation but on the other is geared to contending with the new geostrategic era, a reframed air power strategy should diversify the options available to Australian governments.

Earlier this year, Heather Venable published a noteworthy piece on the *War on the Rocks* blog, arguing for a reconceptualisation of the US Air Force's approach to air power. In 'More than planes and pickle buttons: updating the Air Force's core missions for the 21st century',<sup>6</sup> she made some trenchant observations that are germane to Australia's circumstances.

First, she suggested that only a more holistic approach to air power can push the US Air Force beyond its limiting, platform-centric mentality. Second, she suggested that the focus should shift from missions and platforms to enablers and effects. But, perhaps most importantly, her piece underscored the need for tough-minded questions on how to conceive of air power in the context of changing geopolitical circumstances.

This is a helpful starting point for this paper's consideration of Australian air power strategy in an era of geostrategic change.

# WHAT ARE THE GEOSTRATEGIC CHANGES?

For a recalibrated air power strategy to have value, it must be situated in the realities of geostrategic contest. Because this paper is about air power, I'll treat these themes only briefly, but such consideration is necessary to provide the context in which air power will be applied.

To begin with, a brief survey of the wide body of literature now available concerning the Indo-Pacific security environment reveals some common themes, expressed here as a few essential premises.

First is the idea that the Indo-Pacific region has entered an age of constant contest, in which power and influence are abiding themes.<sup>7</sup>

Second, while there are some like-minded regional powers (including, for example, Australia, the US, Japan, India and Singapore) that wish to continue to build a rules-based global order in changing circumstances and all the good that accrues from that, there are also revisionist powers (particularly China and Russia) that want to rewrite those rules to their own advantage.<sup>8</sup>

Third, those revisionist powers are applying the methods of political warfare and coercive diplomacy—including in what's often described as the grey zone—to win without fighting. That is, they seek to achieve their strategic objectives below the threshold of military conflict.<sup>9</sup>

## How does this look in the real world?

While neither this paper nor any future Australian air power strategy should have China and its use of power as an exclusive focus, it's nevertheless important to understand the Chinese state's approach to power and influence in the Indo-Pacific, given the major impact that it's having. Indeed, Ross Babbage has suggested that the pace and scale of Chinese political warfare operations in the Indo-Pacific constitute a form of high-intensity warfare.<sup>10</sup> If that's correct, it would be imprudent *not* to account for this in the development of future strategy, including for air power. Of course it will also be important to cooperate with China when our interests overlap, just as we do with others in the region. The dynamics of regional power and influence won't always be zero sum, and our air power strategy needs to be valid for those cases too.

## The geostrategic model of Xi's China

To get to the root of China's approach to power and influence in the Indo-Pacific, it's important to be clear about the goals and ambitions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Across the literature on these themes, there is, broadly, a consensus that the CCP's hardline revisionism—that is, its effort to rewrite the global order in its own interests—is rooted in its Leninist ideological core and straightforward realist power politics. To that end, Beijing's essential goals are generally understood to be regime survival for the CCP; a prosperous, united populace loyal to the CCP; and building China's international power and prestige to rival and overtake the US on the regional stage.<sup>11</sup> A narrative that helps make this appealing to China's people is the strongly emotive issue of overcoming China's 'century of shame'; in the CCP narrative, China is determined to recover from the humiliation of domination by foreign powers in the 20th century by asserting its prosperity and power in the 21st century. (This notably avoids the humiliations inflicted on the Chinese people by the CCP itself, such as the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square massacre.)

The Chinese state's approach to achieving those goals is both ambitious and aggressive,<sup>12</sup> and Beijing now seeks to grow its power, influence and prosperity—particularly at the expense of US hegemony and the rules-based global order—through means designed to coerce,<sup>13</sup> corrupt, undermine, confuse, co-opt and distract its rivals and competitors in the Indo-Pacific. And it does that by pulling on all the levers of its national power, overtly and covertly, including through intrusive and subversive espionage, cyber, military and paramilitary operations.<sup>14</sup>

Collectively, these means are generally referred to as 'political warfare', or, more recently, 'comprehensive coercion'. Regardless of the label, the essence is a comprehensive, tightly coordinated approach to applying all aspects of national power to secure the Chinese state's strategic interests.

In Chinese strategic literature, both official and unofficial accounts place strong emphasis on this comprehensive, holistic approach to wielding national influence. One of the most important theoretical works in recent years, written by People's Liberation Army (PLA) colonels Liang and Xiangsui, is titled *Unrestricted warfare*. That publication espouses a persistent campaign for advantage that:

... breaks down the dividing lines between civilian and military affairs and between peace and war ... non-military tools are equally prominent and useful for the achievement of previously military objectives. Cyberattacks, financial weapons, informational attacks—all of these taken together constitute the future of warfare. In this model, the essence of unrestricted warfare is that the 'battlefield is everywhere'.<sup>15</sup>

## We need to recalibrate our peace–war dichotomy

If the political warfare models being pursued by China so deliberately blur the distinction between war and peace, then any Australian defence strategy that sustains that distinction may be unhelpfully narrow.

Certainly, the US policy community has picked up on this, as Charles Cleveland has noted:

The American definition of war is incomplete ... war as we know it is a sign of the times ... the present and prevailing western construct of war is rapidly being over-ruled by the contemporary realities of the 21st century. To attain a position of relative advantage, the US military should expand its definition of core tasks beyond conventional warfighting.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, if Australia continues with the linear logic that sustains a sharp distinction between peace and war, including a sequential planning construct, which, from Phase 0 (shaping) through to Phase III (dominate) and on to Phase V (enable civil authority), connotes a linear pathway from peace to war, then there's a real risk of misunderstanding the true nature of the threat of political warfare. That is, because political warfare (and its application in the grey zone) doesn't resemble what we think of as conflict, since there's generally no application of violence, it's easy to miss the extent to which such coercive activities nevertheless share the same goal as kinetic conflict—which is to compel the opponent to acquiescence.<sup>17</sup> As Jesse Miller helpfully suggests:

Rather than relying on notions of war and peace, [we] must learn to adapt to more modern concepts of durable disorder and constant conflict while accepting that irregular warfare is becoming a misnomer as it becomes the new normal.<sup>18</sup>

It's only once the implications of this are fully appreciated that it starts to become clear why the possession of advanced military capabilities—including air power—will be a necessary but not sufficient response.

As Antulio Echevarria has noted:

security analysts ... and scholars alike have struggled to come to terms with these ideas, and as a result, many are calling for revolutionary measures to address what they wrongly perceive to be a new form of warfare, but which is, in fact, an application of classic coercive strategies, enhanced by evolving technologies.<sup>19</sup>

Even more importantly, he argues, 'whatever these terms might convey, Russian aggression and Chinese coercion have highlighted weaknesses in [our] conceptual frameworks for planning campaigns. These weaknesses and shortcomings add up to a conceptual unpreparedness, which demands a remedy.'<sup>20</sup>

# POLITICAL WARFARE AND THE GREY ZONE

If 'political warfare' describes the way the Chinese state pursues its strategic interests, then an equally important concept is that of the 'grey zone'. While the literature on this is quite broad, for the purposes of this paper the grey zone is taken to be both the locus and the modality by which Xi Jinping's China applies its political warfare methodologies. Put simply, that 'zone' is the arena of international power and influence below outright conflict where the Chinese state wields its power.

Chinese strategic tradition commends indirection and the avoidance of unnecessary fights whenever possible. According to that strategic culture, the acme of wisdom is to achieve national goals through astute political manoeuvre rather than by engaging in damaging and expensive physical battles.<sup>21</sup>

But what, precisely, can this mean for Australia? The Chinese model of grey-zone campaigns is instructive in this regard, for not only is it the threat we face, but it's also the operating model we need to contemplate to rigorously understand what winning without fighting can look like.

China under Xi Jinping, like Russia under Vladimir Putin, has become adept at deploying its instruments of national power (including military, cyber, and clandestine and covert forces) in places such as the South China Sea in order to bring about desired strategic outcomes. As Tom Mahnken, Toshi Yoshihara and Ross Babbage have argued:

When viewed as a whole, the Chinese regime's diverse political warfare operations have achieved some notable successes in the last decade ... Beijing has emerged as the largest trade partner over most of the Indo-Pacific region, seized effective control over disputed parts of the South China Sea, and established a maritime presence deep into the Pacific and Indian oceans. These advances have boosted the prestige and legitimacy of the CCP, not least with the bulk of China's domestic population.<sup>22</sup>

## Winning without fighting is an important theme

The notion of winning without fighting bears closer examination, as it's of profound consequence to our strategies for air power, for the joint force and, ultimately, for national security.

So, what is it? In the view of the Chinese state, the purpose is to achieve its strategic interests below the threshold of outside intervention. Recognising the costs and risks of engaging in direct military confrontation (particularly with a major power such as the US), the idea is to impose influence and coercion on such a scale as to achieve the desired outcome while not provoking a military reaction.<sup>23</sup>

By skirting the trigger points that might provoke responses that are counter to its interests, Xi's China incrementally advances its desired changes to the *status quo* while avoiding crises or outright conflict: literally, winning without fighting.

Not only is this effective in the short term, but its corrosive effect is a major contributor to the long-term goal of irreversibly changing the *status quo*. With each transgression that goes unpunished—and even unmentioned by many leaders and states who see not ‘offending’ Beijing as a guiding principle of policy—the Chinese regime gains confidence that there’ll be no response to its next step. And, while it doesn’t hesitate to threaten the use of military force, at the same time it seeks to render our military capabilities irrelevant by achieving its goals below the threshold of war-fighting.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, it’s important not to underemphasise the importance that the CCP attaches to military capabilities as levers of power. Those capabilities are prized both as a means of deterring US and allied interference in areas of China’s ‘core interest’ (such as Taiwan), but also to add muscle to its coercive methodologies elsewhere. Under the mask of such terms as ‘China’s peaceful rise’ and ‘One Belt, One Road’, Beijing makes sure to convey to its targets that resistance to China’s will engenders a real risk of military intervention.<sup>25</sup> The lack of consequences to the Chinese state for its use of coercive power in this way also provides a strategic messaging boon to the Chinese leadership, as it’s able to show that other states acquiesce to this exercise of Chinese power but otherwise fail to respond.

And, as China’s military capabilities continue to gain in sophistication and reach, so Beijing’s confidence in wielding the threat of physical coercion grows (no doubt with some uncertainties about whether the PLA is as capable as it wishes to portray). In this, as in many other dimensions of its grey-zone political warfare, the CCP’s salami-slicing method poses a double threat. Not only does it subtly but irreversibly erode the *status quo*, but it also boosts Beijing’s confidence that it can get away with setting new precedents.

### If we’re not deterring them, why do we keep doing what we’re doing?

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of China’s success in achieving its strategic goals in grey-zone scenarios is that it’s happening despite whatever deterrent effect we might think our military forces, along with those of our allies and partners, are having.

And, given the extensive (and hard to reverse) changes being wrought through these methods, this ought to create an inflection point in our thinking about the utility of military force in these cases. That is, although we persist with ideas such as ‘overmatch’ and ‘maintaining a capability edge’, as though they’ll buy us the strategic outcomes we want, in the context of grey-zone coercive diplomacy, those ideas don’t appear to be having the desired effect.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as Trent Scott and Andrew Shearer have suggested:

an approach based on ‘more of the same’... has little prospect of shaping regional security, deterring contemporary and future threats, and responding effectively to emergent crises.<sup>27</sup>

# WHAT'S NOT WORKING? MORE OF THE SAME ISN'T THE ANSWER

If our current thinking on deterrence is having so little impact in grey-zone scenarios,<sup>28</sup> it would seem both timely and prudent to reconsider our models. To that end, it may be instructive to first consider what *isn't* working.

For some time now, there's been a running dialogue in Australia that's been questioning the notion of a so-called 'Plan-A' in our strategic thinking.<sup>29</sup> Put simply, the 'Plan-A' label is shorthand for Australia's historical propensity for putting our faith in an external guarantor of international security. For the first part of the 20th century, that meant the UK; during and since World War II, it meant the US.

As many have argued, the putative logic for our faith in external guarantors has stemmed from a base-level fear that we've lacked the wherewithal to provide for our own security, and that only a great power could protect us in the event of major conflict. Consequently, out of 'fear of abandonment',<sup>30</sup> Canberra has consistently sought to invest premiums in the 'insurance policy' that such alliances are thought to provide—an approach that has 'drawn us into wars of choice of obscure relevance, or which are morally dubious'.<sup>31</sup>

## Fatal attraction

Plan-A logic has been exacerbated by what's been called the 'fatal attraction' of air power.<sup>32</sup> The core argument, according to this school of thought, is that through the latter part of the 20th century air power (and, in similar vein, other precise and lethal force options such as special forces) have come to be regarded by Western governments as an instrument of first choice. This is also sometimes called the 'Western way of war'.<sup>33</sup>

This is because the accuracy and speed of such measures *seem* to offer very attractive options to politicians and decision-makers:

- They can be applied quickly, particularly in media-driven politics, when it's good to be seen to be doing something.
- They minimise the risk of putting our own people into harm's way. Jets and special forces teams appeal to decision-makers as speedy, small-footprint and deadly. The risk of friendly casualties *appears* much less.
- At the same time, they appear to reduce the political risk of collateral damage. That is, because they deliver violence with discretion and accuracy, the risk of associated knock-on political consequences is reduced.

So, since these options give the appearance of being low cost and low risk, they have come to be regarded not only as indispensable but as tools of first choice. And, lacking either the time or the historical knowledge to ask more demanding questions about the applicability or utility of precision lethality, still less about its track record in delivering desired political outcomes, decision-makers are apt to reach for them as attractive, readily applied 'solutions'. As Walter Haynes has suggested:

The drawback to this approach, as evidenced in Libya, is the myopic use of special operations forces as a foreign policy 'easy button'.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, if the arguments above about the winning-without-fighting ethos of revisionist powers such as China under President Xi are correct, then surely this logic about tools of first choice needs careful reconsideration. Indeed, it might be prudent to reconsider that thinking, which effectively says 'Air power is the answer. Now, what was the question?' Instead, it will be more productive to identify the right questions, and only then consider the tools for the job.

So, what's to be done? What might we do to address our 'conceptual unpreparedness'?



# NEXT STEPS

If we're in an age of constant competition in which the prevalent model involves winning without fighting, it will be increasingly important to consider how the military will best align with the other instruments of national power to counter that coercive influence. If, as Ross Babbage has argued,<sup>35</sup> there's a need for a whole-of-government approach to generating counter-strategies to deal with constant contest, that would suggest that we look at how best to coordinate the elements of national power towards that end.

While it's generally accepted that those elements of national power comprise diplomatic, informational, military and economic dimensions (hence the acronym DIME), it's recently been suggested that this might helpfully be expanded to include the further three dimensions of scientific/technological, environmental and legal (thus DIMESEL).<sup>36</sup> This expanded conception is quite useful insofar as it more thoroughly encompasses the dimensions that we need to incorporate in the application of national power to our advantage.

That is, the DIMESEL model for encapsulating the elements of national power offers a useful lens as we think of a coordinated whole-of-government approach to formulating our strategic policy response to the era of constant competition. Barry Blechman has broadened this further:

A state has many means at its disposal to obtain objectives abroad. These may include diplomacy, alliances, trade, aid, cultural and scientific exchanges, emigration and immigration policies and other domestic policies, covert activities, and the use of the military. These instruments, together, are an orchestra, to be used in accordance with the differing requirements of individual scores.<sup>37</sup>

So, the bedrock principle that I recommended in this paper is the need for an orchestrated approach to applying the elements of our national power (including, of course, air power) under an effects-oriented strategy.

## **Towards an effects-oriented strategy**

What might such a grand strategy look like?

From a first-principles perspective, it may be helpful to start from some simple, irreducible goals of an Australian grand strategy. Absent a publicly articulated version, such goals might be said to be to protect and advance our national security and to wield influence in ways that positively affect Australia's prosperity; that is, for Australia to be safe and secure and for our economy to thrive.

If such premises can be agreed, the next consideration concerns how we go about those things: how we might use the elements of our national power, including defence. There are two broad sets of activities we might wish to do in this regard. We can either seek to enhance our national interests on the one hand, or to prevent or deter the imposition of external negative influences on the other. These admittedly broad categories are nevertheless foundational to how we might apply the elements of national power, as they imply the application of those elements of national power to generate effects.

And here it's worth emphasising that, in general, there's been a tendency to look at defence through a lens that, for the most part, has focused on the defensive side; that's to say, on the prevention of negative outcomes.

But, as valid as such thinking may be, it means that a vital aspect of the application of our national power has been largely overlooked. That is, the application of defence capabilities within a DIMESEL context for the net positive of national interest has been a category that's received only limited attention, but on which, as a regional power, Australia ought to be far more forward leaning.

This in turn leads to consideration of what an effects-oriented strategy might look like; that's to say, to give consideration to strategic-level effects such as influence and counter-influence; access and presence; and deterrence and denial. As I suggested above, in the grey-zone context, it will be important to reorient the now-obsolescent Western military model, which, through a bottom-up approach, has seen the capabilities of individual platforms effectively defining the kinds of effects they can generate.<sup>38</sup>

But grey-zone methods have revealed that model to be of questionable merit. Rather, it will be more beneficial to put effort into considered analysis of the effects that *will* work and that are realistically achievable. Only then should consideration be given to the kinds of tools (that is, platforms) and how they might be brought to bear for those effects.

Moreover, for the effects-oriented strategy that I advocate here, it will be prudent to focus on sovereign requirements—what's typically been called self-reliance—in place of the flawed Plan-A model. The capacity to rely on ourselves and not be held hostage to external support or provisions should inform all our thinking about the kinds of effects it's realistic for us to aspire to.

## Competing comprehensively: a model for holistic sovereign power

Since our authoritarian rivals are employing 'comprehensive coercion' models that incorporate economic, informational, diplomatic, military and other tools against Australia and our interests, it's difficult to see how we might be able to exercise our own national power without a similarly holistic approach. As the Chinese state's 'unrestricted warfare' model makes clear, Beijing would consider it foolhardy to undercut its own influence by insisting that its military tools be kept on the shelf only for use in the event of conflict.

Quite the contrary, China has a long history of incorporating military forces within holistic applications of diplomatic, economic and informational aspects of its national power, particularly in coercive grey-zone campaigns, and the Leninist ideology of the current rulers of China under Xi Jinping has added ideological elements to this. What sense does it make, then, for Australia to have one hand tied behind its back by insisting that our military tools be kept exclusively for their designed war-fighting purpose? As Hal Brands has argued:

What made US strategy so effective in the late Cold War was that it deployed virtually every weapon in the American arsenal: intensified military competition, economic warfare, covert action, and political and ideological measures ... Today, by contrast, the US's strategies are not nearly so complete.<sup>39</sup>

## Knowing the competition

If we're to succeed in long-term competition by imposing costs and exploiting asymmetries, then our efforts will have to be rooted in deep knowledge of our adversaries. It simply won't be possible to achieve the influence, access and denial effects we desire without a deep intelligence-based understanding of the Chinese state and military leaderships' world view, decision-making and behaviour. 'Only by grasping a rival's weaknesses and fears can they be exploited. Such understanding requires sustained intellectual and economic investment.'<sup>40</sup>

## Responding to the problem of constant contest

Thus, one of the most important things we can do to manage the threat of constant competition, and in particular the political warfare models perpetrated by Xi's China, is to fully recognise the dangers and to understand just how thoroughly the Chinese state's intentions run counter to our values and our security. For as long as those methods go unchallenged, revisionist powers such China will favour them as a means of winning without fighting, which

of course raises the question: how do we stop them from getting away with it? Any Australian efforts to counter aggressive political warfare methods will need to be multifaceted and be accompanied by the actions of our allies and other partners, who also want to ensure their own sovereignty and independent decision-making in the face of the Chinese state's interference and use of power.

One of the most immediate tasks is to expose grey-zone tactics for what they are. The reason those methods continue to succeed is that they stay below the threshold for a Western response. By shining a light on them and actively calling them out, it becomes possible to erase the ambiguity and uncertainty on which they depend.

But such exposure alone won't always be enough to counter political warfare. And that's where a more forward-leaning mindset will be needed to create cost-imposing strategies. Those strategies will necessarily be geared to ensuring that any party that wishes to coercively interfere in Australia's interests desists from actions that hurt us. Such cost-imposing approaches can be proportional or asymmetrical: in any case, air power is well suited to undertaking a broad range of non-kinetic activities that would raise the price of coercive grey-zone influence activities.<sup>41</sup>

## What we can and can't achieve

If we're to adopt an effects-oriented strategy, it will be important to take a very pragmatic approach to what's plausible for a regional power such as Australia.

First, we should be starkly realistic about what we're capable of achieving. This means acting within our means. History is replete with examples of strategic failure due to overreach, and Australia has, through our predilection for joining US-led wars of choice, been party to quite a number of interventions that, in retrospect, appear to be cases of overreach at minimum, from Vietnam to more recent wars in the Middle East.

Given Australia's national-power resources, our decision-making needs to be firmly grounded in a clear-eyed understanding of our limits. To use the Australian vernacular, you can't have champagne goals on a beer budget. We have to be careful not to aspire to things we just don't have the resources or reach to do. This refers not only to the limits of our economic power to back any given security initiative but also, more immediately, to the absolutely definitional influence of logistics and resources. But such a clear-eyed appreciation of national power would still show Australia can be—and has often been—an activist power in pursuit of its national interests.

Above, I raised questions about the applicability of Australia's Plan-A thinking to the emergent challenge of grey-zone operations. This isn't just a problem at the level of our strategic thinking but also has direct, practical implications for the availability of our forces. To date, we've tended to rely on the US not just as an insurance policy but also as the source for all our military provisions in the event of coalition operations. This has included fuel, armaments and, indeed, most other logistics. And in the rare cases where we've embarked on unilateral action, our inability to provide for ourselves has been quickly and harshly revealed. Craig Stockings recently presented a compelling narrative to demonstrate just how much of a near-run thing Australia's intervention in East Timor was, because of our inability to meet the logistical requirements of the mission.<sup>42</sup>

Those issues aside, another lens that merits careful application is a rigorous analysis of how states such as China or, for that matter, states with which we share more strategic interests and with which we might wish to work closely on security, will respond to our efforts. Realism is the key: it will be essential to be informed by rigorous intelligence analyses from the Australian intelligence agencies and others about how potential adversaries might respond to any given initiative or action. To what extent might any influence or counter-influence activity achieve its intended purpose, and with what unintended consequences that may need to be understood and managed?

Those kinds of analyses will be essential if we're to refine our thinking on these effects into the kinds of actions or outputs that we can ask our military forces to deliver. That is, while it makes sense to focus on the high-order goals of, say, deterrence, denial or counter-influence, those categories are probably still too broad to be actionable by military planners. The lenses that I've suggested are geared to helping refine those categories. Such analyses will help provide much-needed context and consequence. Ultimately, they should help to generate 'strategy to mission' pipelines.

# WHAT EFFECTS, EXACTLY?

In the light of my arguments for applying realist filters to the goals we aspire to, it's well to have a clear-eyed, pragmatic sense of the effects we might wish to achieve. I offer some initial suggestions here on three broad categories of effects to prompt further consideration.

## Category 1: Deterrence and denial

Only recently have the themes of deterrence and denial begun to make a return to academic and policy discussions in Australia. And it's in this context that the traditional conception of the value proposition of military power—the orchestrated application of violence on behalf of the state—is best situated. In a realist conception of regional power, there'll always be an irreducible requirement to maintain military forces capable of repelling and defeating any attempt at military intervention by an outside power. Unless Australia wishes to be a truly mendicant security state, we must have this core capacity for self-defence.

But beyond that, as I discussed above while considering coercive diplomacy and grey-zone methods, it seems that a more nuanced understanding of the extent to which military forces can achieve deterrence is required. The Chinese state's application of political warfare methods has revealed the inefficacy of such linear logic in many cases.

To be sure, Xi's China, like other authoritarian revisionist states, actively uses its military forces to apply pressure and to achieve coercion, but within more comprehensive approaches to wielding national power. And, as noted above, China's been remarkably successful in securing its strategic goals below the threshold for Western intervention. This raises tough questions about how our own forces might be used to deter its political warfare methods.

For the purposes of sovereign (self-reliant) deterrence, it will be helpful to reframe our thinking on the place of state-orchestrated violence. Recognising the changed geopolitical realities of constant competition, the capacity to 'fight tonight', while remaining essential, will need to be situated within a scale or spectrum of actions.

James Meernik drew out the issues this way:

A critical distinction between political uses of military force and wars involves the notion of influence. Like all nations, the US has employed its sea, air and land forces in situations short of war, not so much to impose its will on others, but rather to influence the behaviour of foreign actors. Wars, on the other hand, involve violence designed to impose one's will upon the enemy so that he has no choice but to do what he is told. In war one seeks a position from which to dominate one's enemies to the point where they have no choices. When using force short of war, the objective is to change the adversary's perception, as well as the actual costs and benefits of various courses of action, so that the target selects one's preferred policy.<sup>43</sup>

This underscores an essential question for Australia about the utility of military force. Starting from the premise that 'power is the ability to effect the outcomes you want and, if necessary, to change the behaviour of others',<sup>44</sup> it's then important to understand the place of military force as an instrument of national power. And, to be clear, there's a certain nondiscretionary aspect to possessing such an instrument. While military force is by no means the

only tool for use in the exercise of national power, nor can it be guaranteed to be used successfully; there'll always be situations that 'cannot be resolved politically [or] alleviated by diplomacy or any other non-military means, or settled by some tolerable compromise'.<sup>45</sup> In such cases, it's well to be explicit about the nature and application of military force:

Fighting is the core competency of the soldier; he is a specialist in violence. While armed forces can serve many purposes, what defines them uniquely is their ability to damage things and injure or kill people as a legitimate instrument of the polity.<sup>46</sup>

It's a foundational requirement for us to have forces available that can, ultimately, apply violence to deter an outside power such as China from embarking on actions we don't want—whether that be, for example, an attempted military lodgement or the use of military force to coercively achieve another undesirable condition (such as the closure of sea lanes or the imposition of Beijing's will on a friend or partner of Australia).

The manifold applications of air power will retain utility in this regard. The core attributes typically ascribed to air power—speed, range, precision and lethality<sup>47</sup>—lend themselves naturally to this. Indeed, the possession of the best air power capabilities we can generate will remain essential to expand the choices available to our own government while also constraining the choices of any opponent. As Colin S Gray has noted, 'the fact that military force should only be used with great care and skill does not minimise its unique importance'.<sup>48</sup>

For all that, there also remains a need to recalibrate our thinking about how military tools might support or contribute to non-conflict applications of military power to deter and defeat winning-without-fighting attempts at coercion and influence. Within a DIMESEL approach, consideration needs to be given to the role of the military in deterring and countering China's applications of political warfare.

## Category 2: The influence–coercion dynamic

A straightforward conception of national influence is the application of elements of national power to get the other party to do what we want, either by encouragement and the positive enlistment of willing support or by coercing them through the threat of force by outright physical domination. For military purposes, US doctrine describes influence operations this way:

Influence operations are the coordinated, integrated, and synchronised application of national diplomatic, informational, military, economic and other capabilities in peacetime, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict to foster attitudes, behaviours, or decisions by foreign target audiences that further [our] interests and objectives.<sup>49</sup>

To that end, Antulio Echevarria identified a dynamic between these effects, in which:

[they] are the proverbial two sides of the same coin. Rather than domination through decisive action, as per the current model, an alternative paradigm would have the goal of out-positioning rival powers in economic, diplomatic, informational and military dimensions. This goal could apply to peacetime and wartime situations, as well as those in between.<sup>50</sup>

That definition goes a long way towards answering the question I've raised about having both positive and negative dimensions to influence. Not only do we need to be able to wield influence to discourage or counter negative outcomes, but we also want to more coherently apply the elements of our national power in ways that generate net positives. As a regional power, with strengths across all the elements of national power, Australia ought to be doing a better job of wielding influence in this way.<sup>51</sup>

### Category 3: Access, presence and persistence

The themes of access, presence and persistence underscore the value of reinvigorating a seemingly old-fashioned aspect of air power theory: air diplomacy. In its erstwhile conception, this idea referred broadly to the indirect benefits that came from having Air Force units participating in international engagement activities, whether that might be attending air training exercises, placing Air Force personnel in liaison positions overseas, or the like. And, to be sure, those kinds of activities tended to enhance the RAAF's standing among friends and allies.

But, for the purposes of constant competition, there needs to be a more strategically focused application of such air diplomacy, and this concerns the political effect that it should be able to generate. This notion of political effect has been defined as:

The physical actions taken by one or more components of the uniformed military services as part of a deliberate attempt by the national authorities to influence, or be prepared to influence, specific behaviour of another nation without engaging in a continuing contest of violence.<sup>52</sup>



# FROM GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY TO GROWLER DIPLOMACY

This in turn points to another out-of-fashion term—‘gunboat diplomacy’, which was defined by James Cable as:

The use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage, or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state.<sup>53</sup>

The conception here of ‘securing advantage or averting loss’ is entirely relevant to the challenge of winning without fighting in the grey zone. And, while gunboat diplomacy was originally concerned only with maritime power, that was an extension of historical models of the Royal Navy’s ability to prosecute British interests—especially in the 19th century—by deploying naval vessels to wield influence, even coercively, without necessarily going to war. So, while this continues to be true for naval power, it isn’t much of an extension to see how such a model is equally relevant for air power.

Indeed, not only can the definition above easily be transposed to air power, but it can helpfully encompass the idea that air power might be used across a spectrum of diplomatic effects, from cooperation to coercion.<sup>54</sup> There are any number of examples in which the flexibility, reach, range and precision of air power tools have been brought to bear in such circumstances.

Some historical instances demonstrate how air power has been used for diplomatic effect. The Berlin Airlift (which involved a significant Australian component) was clearly a non-combat intervention that successfully bolstered the West German regime in the face of intense Soviet coercion. Another example was Australia’s immediate response to Japan’s tsunami crisis in 2011. By deploying C-17 airlifters and sorely needed supplies and assistance, we gave unmistakable (and gratefully acknowledged) proof of the strength of the bilateral relationship—and of our reach.

However, in response to increasing competition in the Indo-Pacific, a more penetrating conception of air diplomacy will be needed if it’s to generate *political* effects. So the suggestion that gunboat diplomacy be reconceived as ‘Growler diplomacy’ may indeed have merit.

## Creative thinking about effects

If Australia is to more fully develop options and modalities for achieving the kinds of political effects set out above, then it will be important to reframe traditional thinking about the use of platforms—and people—to achieve those effects.

Traditionally, the logic has simply been to apply the tools to the job for which they’ve been designed (‘breaking stuff and killing people’<sup>55</sup>). But, as winning without fighting has shown, that kind of logic has become the necessary but not sufficient condition for the era of constant competition.

To truly add value in a whole-of-government DIMESEL approach to applying the elements of national power, it will be essential that disruptive proposals and concepts be generated for non-traditional applications of those tools.

Take, for example, one of the Air Force's most recent acquisitions: the EA-18G Growler. On face value, this is already a potentially game-changing capability, even in its direct war-fighting roles of electronic warfare (EW) and the suppression of enemy air defences. Australia has never had this capability before. It provides entirely new opportunities for force projection and force protection. That alone will have a major impact on conventional deterrence. By signalling our capability to generate significant EW effects, this can serve to deter any threatening force that might think it has power-projection options to hurt Australia. Capabilities like the Growler can be used to signal such deterrent effects, but that shouldn't be the only way we think about it.

By virtue of being a new war-fighting domain for the RAAF, electronic attack is an opportunity to engage in even bolder thinking as to how such capabilities might be used in non-combat, grey-zone scenarios. As a sophisticated platform expressly designed for the collection and exploitation of information and data in the electronic domain, it could be used as an advanced intelligence-collection platform, especially if partnered with other assets and, indeed, in coalition-style operations with other operators in the region—in the first instance the US but possibly also Japan.

However, all this is still an extension of the linear logic of the Growler's designed-for role and isn't particularly disruptive. Disruption happens only if we reconceive the platform for use in roles that weren't imagined in its design or acquisition. This comes back to my advocacy for an effects-oriented approach. How might a sophisticated EW platform find use in grey-zone scenarios, short of outright conflict, but in which Australia nevertheless wishes to create effects that result in influence or counter-influence? This is when such exploratory thinking can generate exciting, groundbreaking outcomes.

This is particularly so if creative thinking is applied to the challenges in cyber operations and threats. The literature is now replete with warnings about the threats posed by the Chinese state's offensive cyber operations, including in political and economic coercion and interference.<sup>56</sup> So would it not stand to reason that a military system such as Growler, which by virtue of its sophisticated EW suite can, through cyber-EW convergence, become a tool of cyber operations—including to generate influence and counter-coercion effects—be considered an effects-generator at the whole-of-government level? Put another way, it seems almost wilfully self-limiting to continue to think of the suite of advanced systems Australia has bought as being applicable only to their designed-for war-fighting role.

There's rich potential to reframe thinking on all our new platforms, from F-35 to P8 to Growler, for such applications. The Growler example is merely intended to point to the general via the specific. Such potential becomes even richer if applied in a joint force construct. What if counter-influence effects were conceived of as a joint force activity involving, say, unmanned aerial systems, Growlers, special forces teams and submarines? And what if we broadened it further to include whole-of-government modalities within Australia, and indeed partner operations with like-minded military and government agencies from, say, Japan and Singapore?

Again, recalling my advocacy for exposure and cost-imposing operations, that potential becomes very rich indeed if we think of multiagency, multinational operations that, in the first instance, could collect and share information to produce joined-up narratives to expose Chinese grey-zone operations that are undercutting others' sovereignty and creating the conditions for further Chinese military expansion, as we have seen in the South China Sea, for example, and, equally, whether the next step into cost-imposing operations is also required.

All of which can be done across a spectrum of options. We may wish to make such operations public, or they may need to be done in ways that are covert or even deniable. The sophisticated military systems we have at our disposal lend themselves naturally to this spectrum of options.

The essential argument here's the need for us to look for ways to ensure that our war-fighting tool-chest is applicable not just to high-intensity, near-peer conflict scenarios, but also to the more likely, more prevalent winning-without-fighting grey-zone scenarios we'll consistently see in the Indo-Pacific.

## Some of the things we might do to give substance to our strategies

To give substance to these suggestions about an effects-oriented strategy, it will be fundamentally important for strategic policymakers and government leaders to engage in close dialogue with practitioners. It will do no good to set unachievable targets. Rather, constant, close interaction between strategists and operators will be key to establishing a symbiotic relationship between ends, ways and means.

Similarly, it will be essential to engage in detailed, frank dialogue at the multiagency level. Only then can we rigorously understand how military capabilities might generate new and innovative options.

How we go about this is an open question. There are many modalities that can offer value, whether they be war-gaming; modelling and simulation; workshops; or commercial models such as design thinking. The goal should be not to just reframe strategic thinking to become service-agnostic, but to extend it to other branches of government. The mechanism is less important than achieving the benefits that will come from innovative ideation.

## Limitations, difficulties and an eroding advantage

None of this will be easy: there'll be many challenges, including from the transient advantage of technology, from the difficulty of finding and keeping the right people, and on to difficulties with institutional inertia and with logistics and enablers. Public awareness of grey-zone activities by other states, notably China, and of the consequences for Australian interests and values is a necessary element in creating the environment for policymaking and implementation.

The speed and scale of technology proliferation, and especially China's progress in appropriating advanced Western technologies (and creating its own), will result in a much more challenging threat environment for air power.

Unlike operations in the Middle East in recent decades, in which peer-level capability has generally been absent, in the Indo-Pacific, air power's ability to conduct force projection will face increasing threats and will be contingent on supporting technologies, including signature management<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, amid competing demands on US alliances and resources, it will be prudent to place increasing weight on Australian self-sufficiency. This will have implications for sovereign capabilities in R&D, industry and logistics. And, as I've argued, those considerations will place real limits on the sorts of options Australia can pursue in a self-reliant construct.

Where once it was possible for the ADF and Australia's allies and partners to achieve enduring capability overmatch, that's no longer the case. The phenomenon of 'transient advantage' means competitors can so quickly acquire and adopt peer-level systems that any advantage we might gain will be only temporary at best. With open global markets, including in the technology sector, those technologies will be 'user-agnostic'. Moreover, weaknesses in intellectual property law and other protections mean that our ability to keep technological superiority for ourselves is declining. We'll have to work in operating environments in which it's increasingly likely that threat systems are on par with, if not in some cases superior to, our own.

This could include such challenges as hypersonic weapons, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and directed-energy weapons, to name a few. As this phenomenon grows, we'll need to work hard to achieve technological superiority that lasts merely as long as the mission. This is particularly true in the cyber and space environments, where the speed of technological advance could easily see us behind, not ahead, of our competitors.

This in turn will drive the imperative to adopt a well-integrated 'small, smart, many' approach to technology acquisition and deployment, compared to our current 'few, expensive, exquisite' approach.<sup>58</sup> To complement transient technology acquisitions, there'll also need to be a focus on the agile integration of systems and capabilities. Effective integration coupled with enhanced training and doctrine will allow users to leverage the full potential of individual technologies and systems.

All of this can increase the significance of air power's value proposition to government. By offering agile and unconventional solutions to the issues of access, persistence, presence and lethality, air power can help deliver Australian strategic goals through a flexible spectrum of high-impact approaches.

### **Alliances: as important as ever, but in different ways**

The Chinese state is working assiduously to erode US power and influence in our region. And, at the same time, US domestic political trends suggest that Washington will become far more discerning in the security challenges it chooses to 'own'. Washington has made clear its expectation that regional partners, including Australia and Japan, will shoulder more responsibility and effort in responding to regional security issues.

While Australia will undoubtedly continue to emphasise the fundamental importance of our alliance with the US, and the advantages it brings to Australian power, the complexities of the emerging environment will require more nuanced approaches to operating in partnerships, not only with the US and other regional allies, but also when acting independently to advance our sovereign interests. While this may mean working with a reduced degree of assurance, the need for greater independence of action plays to the strengths of air power's value proposition. In an era of increasing concern about the assertive nature of the Chinese state and, in particular, its use of power, the flexible deterrence options that air power can offer will be of increasing value to government.

All of which underscores the pivotal importance of air power's role in building a persistent presence in the region. Indeed, at the geostrategic level, it's in Australia's interest to be far more deeply engaged and present in the Indo-Pacific. If national security and prosperity are the most elemental aspects of our strategic interest, and given that robust strategies for enhancing our ability to influence and to deter are foundational to achieving this, then the ADF, on behalf of Australia, should pursue mechanisms that enable greater influence and deterrent effects in our region.

The essential conclusion is that, if we're to succeed in an environment of constant competition, first and foremost we need to recalibrate our thinking about the applicability of military forces to winning-without-fighting scenarios. As I've mentioned above, the intellectual pivot here's to recognise that military preparedness will be a necessary but not sufficient condition for meeting our goals. And so, where traditionally we may have focused on force projection as a core military mission, the real opportunity is to reframe this to incorporate military dimensions within national power projection.

### **Employing air power for strategic challenges: putting meat on the bones**

It's important to emphasise that this paper is intended only as a prompt for further consideration. Nevertheless, enhancing our regional influence and bolstering our ability to resist the unwanted influence of others will require the development of innovative missions and capabilities that deliver effects in ways that account for the competition's approach to winning without fighting.

# CONCLUSIONS

To make progress with such a holistic strategy, it will be important to have both the will and the policy settings to create air power effects for deterrence and influence. There are historical precedents in which Australia has indeed taken hard-edged approaches to national security. In the current environment, it may prove challenging to secure broad support for the idea that air power should be used in these ways, although, as in other nations, growing public understanding of how the Chinese state is using its power, including its military and cyber power, in ways that are against Australian interests is creating an environment in which policy change will be understood. Given the comprehensive competition we face, an approach based on 'more of the same', whereby alliance and the possession of a technologically advanced military force are seen as the guarantors of deterrence, simply won't suffice.

More creative, independent approaches will be essential if we're to avoid the fate Michael Shoebridge recently highlighted here at ASPI: that we don't want the cost of our security and prosperity to be acquiescence to the CCP's will.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, to that end there's a powerful element of strategic messaging here. It's vital that we signal to the Chinese leadership that we have the resolve, the intent and above all the capability to robustly protect and advance our national interests.

This will mean growing comfortable with Australian responses, which might not always be pretty, to clandestine, coercive and corrupting Chinese policies. While I'm not arguing here for Australia to descend to that level, we nevertheless need to overcome our squeamishness concerning ideas such as coercion and counter-influence if we're to avoid unhelpfully self-limiting frames of reference.

That squeamishness is, after all, only a relatively modern impediment. Throughout the Cold War, and certainly during World War II, Australia and our allies were actively, unsentimentally engaged in political warfare and counter-influence activities of our own. From the Political Warfare Executive of World War II<sup>60</sup> to our engagement in clandestine counter-communist operations in such Cold War conflicts as the Malayan Emergency and *Konfrontasi*,<sup>61</sup> we once took a far clearer, tougher approach to these things. That ought to give pause for thought about the validity and permanence of our current reticence. To be sure, there are complexities involved, not least balancing the economic dimensions, but that shouldn't see us pulling on the handbrake if doing so is counter to our own interests.

To give full consideration to all these themes, I recommend that the RAAF engage widely to give substance to an effects-oriented strategy for air power. To properly understand how air power might contribute to a whole-of-government approach, Air Force strategists will need to engage not only with their own operational community but also across the other services, out into other government agencies and industry, and, where appropriate, with key international partners. The goal would be to come up with concrete proposals that can be incorporated into Air Force strategic planning guidance.

Australia has a strong economy, robust political institutions, diplomatic acumen, tough, accomplished military forces, and capable allies and partners. Those add up to compelling elements of national power. As long as we do a better job of conceiving a holistic approach to their application, including by establishing far-reaching geostrategic narratives of our own, there's every reason why Australia ought to be able to take a far stronger role in leading on regional security. And isn't that what a strategy is for?

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- 20 Echevarria, *Operating in the grey zone*, 4.
- 21 Mazarr, *Mastering the grey zone*, 34.
- 22 Mahnken et al., *Countering comprehensive coercion*, 40. They go on to argue that 'Beijing has made significant geostrategic progress, most notably in relations with Russia and in parts of broader Southeast Asia, in Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa. Reinforcing these successes has been the Belt and Road Initiative, bringing substantial Chinese investments in transport and communications infrastructure to locations as diverse as the Panama Canal, northern Australia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.'
- 23 Mazarr, *Mastering the grey zone*, 35.
- 24 Valery Gerasimov, 'The value of science is in the foresight: new challenges demand rethinking the forms and methods of carrying out combat operations', *The Military Review*, January–February 2016. Gerasimov is the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. He argues for applications of military power to render the West's military superiority irrelevant: 'The very "rules of war" have changed. The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and in many cases, they have exceeded the power of forces of weapons in their effectiveness ... The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures—applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population ... Asymmetrical actions have come into widespread use, enabling the nullification of an enemy's



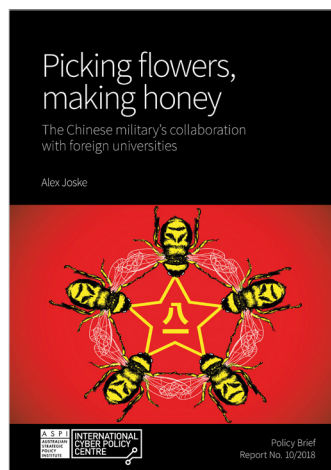
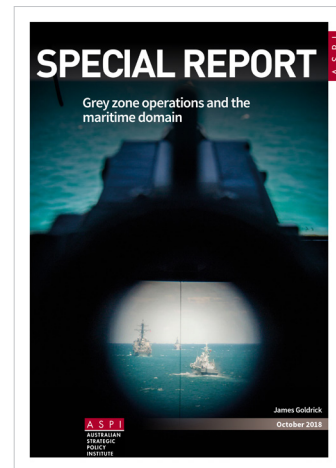
advantages in armed conflict. Among such actions are the use of special operations forces and internal opposition to create a permanently operating front throughout the entire territory of the enemy state, as well as informational actions, devices and means that are constantly being perfected.'

- 25 R Babbage *Comprehensive Coercion: China's 'political warfare' against Australia*. ASPI, Canberra, 2018.
- 26 Mazarr argues (p. 72) that 'a number of aspects of US strategic culture make it temperamentally unsuited to fighting grey zone conflicts. America is organisationally and psychologically unprepared for unrestricted warfare ... Washington's instinct is to compartmentalise the elements of [national] power and apply them in sequence, first trying diplomacy and phone calls, treating crises as if they are simply a big misunderstanding ... The US often appears frustrated with grey zone strategies, as if they are violating norms of international conduct ... Grey zone aggressors are seeking to reshape international norms and meddle with the rules-based order in ways that the US will find both threatening and underhanded.'
- 27 T Scott, A Shearer, *Building allied interoperability in the Indo Pacific region*, CSIS, Washington DC, 2017.
- 28 See, for example, Cleveland et al., *Military strategy in the 21st century*, 103: 'While conventional military power appears to be generating diminishing returns, there seems to be a new premium on influence.'
- 29 See, for example, M Hellyer (ed.), *Agenda for change 2019: strategic choices for the next government*, ASPI, Canberra, 2019, [online](#).
- 30 See, for example, A Gyngell, *Fear of abandonment: Australia in the world since 1942*, Latrobe University Press, Carlton, 2017.
- 31 A Stephens, 'Defence reliance and Plan-B', speech to Williams Foundation Seminar: High Intensity Operations and Sustaining Self Reliance, 11 April 2019.
- 32 C McInnes, 'Fatal attraction? Air power and the West', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2001, 2–3, 28–51.
- 33 Echevarria, *Operating in the grey zone*, 2: 'By the late 1990s, the combination of air power and special forces was said to mark a new American way of war.'
- 34 W Haynes, 'The hidden costs of strategy by special operations', *War on the Rocks*, April 2019, [online](#).
- 35 See, for example, Babbage, *The strategic face of conflict in the 21st century*.
- 36 K Khomko, 'A nation needs more than a DIME', *The Central Blue*, Williams Foundation, March 2019, [online](#).
- 37 B Blechman, S Kaplan, *Force without war: US Armed Forces as a political instrument*, Brookings Institute, Washington DC, 1978.
- 38 See McInnes, *Fatal attraction*.
- 39 H Brands, 'The lost art of long-term competition', *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2019, 42.
- 40 Brands, 'The lost art of long-term competition', 42.
- 41 See K Ekman, 'Applying cost imposing strategies against China', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2015.
- 42 C Stockings, 'East Timor—was it rapid enough?', presentation to Australian Army seminar: Rapid Force Projection—Defining the Opportunities, Canberra, April 2018.
- 43 JD Meernik, *The political use of force in US foreign policy*, Ashgate Publishers, Aldershot, 2004, 4.
- 44 Joseph S Nye, quoted in Colin S Gray, *Hard power and soft power: the utility of military force as an instrument of national power in the 21st century*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2011.
- 45 Gray, *Hard power and soft power*, 47.
- 46 Gray, *Hard power and soft power*, 1.
- 47 J Poss, *Air power: the new gunboat diplomacy?*, Naval War College, Rhode Island, 1994.
- 48 Gray, *Hard power and soft power*, 48.
- 49 E Larson, R Darilek, D Gibran, B Nichiporuk, A Richardson, L Schwartz, C Thurston, *Foundations of effective influence operations: a framework for enhancing army capabilities*, RAND Aroyo Center, Santa Monica, 2009, xii.
- 50 Echevarria, *Operating in the grey zone*, xiii.
- 51 Gyngell, *Fear of abandonment*, 360. Gyngell quotes former Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Secretary Peter Varghese as saying 'Australia has shied away from the exercise of power ... We have tended to see power as belonging to others. And when we have engaged with the projection of power, we have traditionally been more comfortable in the slipstream than in the lead' (p. 360).
- 52 J Lepinois, 'What is air diplomacy', *ASPJ Africa et Francophonie*, 4th quarter, 2012.
- 53 J Cable, *Gunboat diplomacy 1919–1979: political applications of limited naval force*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1981.
- 54 Poss, *Air power: the new gunboat diplomacy?*
- 55 See earlier definition from Colin S Gray.
- 56 See, for example, K Manstead, *The public square in the digital age: protecting Australia's democracy from cyber-enabled foreign interference*, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Centre, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2018.
- 57 Signatures, as referred to here, are the various energy signals any given platform or system may emit. So a radar signature is the electromagnetic energy that may be detected from a given radar. This notion extends to any other energy that may be detected from a platform. For example, acoustic, thermal, and magnetic. Therefore, signatures management refers to efforts to mask or limit these emissions, to reduce the prospects of an opponent detecting them. Stealth is a form of signatures management which seeks to reduce the radar signature of a military platform.
- 58 See TX Hammes, 'The future of warfare: small, many, smart vs few and exquisite', *War on the Rocks*, 16 July 2014, [online](#).
- 59 M Shoebridge, 'The US strategic shift: big news for Australia but are we prepared?', *The Strategist*, 17 October 2018, [online](#). Shoebridge says 'I don't want to live in a world where the price of prosperity is agreeing with the CCP.'
- 60 See S Delmer, *Black boomerang*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1962; E Howe, *The black game: British subversive operations against the Germans during the Second World War*, Michael Joseph, London, 1982. Both extensively detail Allied engagement in covert and clandestine methods for achieving political influence in Germany in World War II.
- 61 See D Lowe, *Menzies and the great world struggle: Australia's Cold War 1948–1954*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1999. Lowe discusses Menzies' work with External Affairs officials to authorise influence operations in Southeast Asia associated with *Konfrontasi*.

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DIME	diplomatic, informational, military and economic
DIMESEL	diplomatic, informational, military, economic, scientific/technological, environmental and legal
EW	electronic warfare
PLA	People's Liberation Army
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
R&D	research and development
UK	United Kingdom

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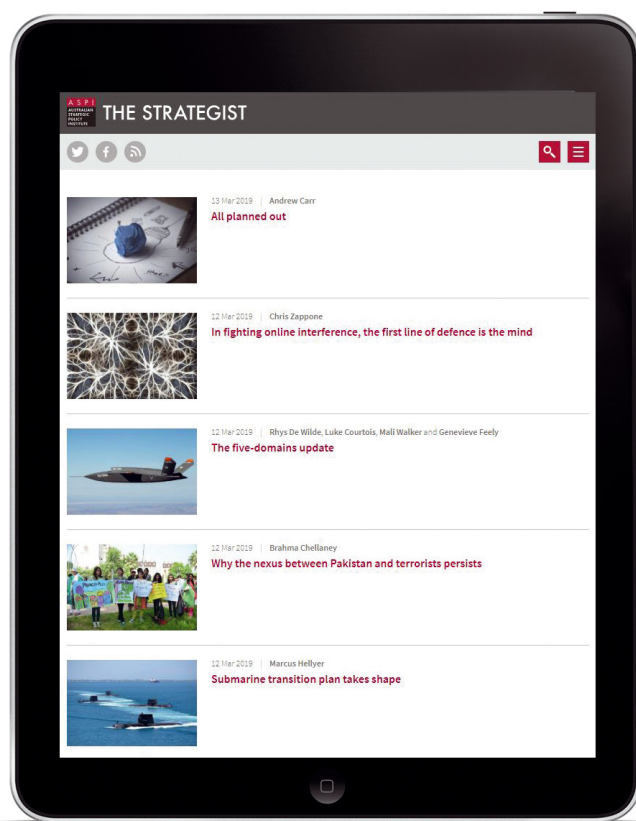


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