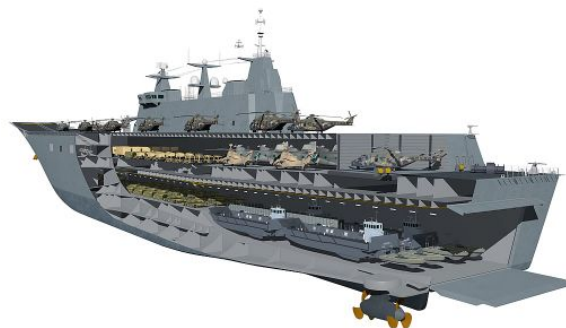


Integration or Amalgamation of Armed Services: ‘If you are given lemons, make lemonade’

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Early 2014, the first of the RAN Landing Helicopter Docks (LHDs), HMAS Canberra, is due to be commissioned, followed by HMAS Adelaide in 2015. Conceivably, these new vessels represent a steep change in Australia’s strategic outlook, away from autonomous services towards integrated, interlocking armed forces. Australia will crew these vessels with Navy, Army and Air Force personnel able to deliver any ADF combat element into theatre, even armour. These vessels represent advanced interoperability in a single integrated package. This approach may be described as “bottom up” integration, led by in-theatre necessity, and giving junior ranks and officers the opportunity to serve together without unnecessary and excessive service distinction. As a “middle power”, Australia is seeking maximum mission flexibility within fiscally constrained conditions. The Australian model will prove an important test case for policy makers, particularly amongst Europe’s projectionist powers (Great Britain, France, Italy and potentially Germany), but also for America as it seeks streamlining measures. The model will need to balance the competing drives towards specialisation and the need for multi-role

efficiency, while managing competing influences such as service competition, cost effectiveness, divergent strategic cultures and ally interoperability.



Australia’s decision to undertake intensive integration comes on the back of more than a decade of her own and allies experience in ugly little wars. From the US Marines’ and the British Army’s experience in Iraq, Australia has acquired examples of best and worst practice. Since the articulation of Charles Krulak’s Three-Block War doctrine in the late 1990s,ⁱ the US Marine Corps has been locked into a trajectory of adaptation and of ever more integration. Though bloodied in Iraq, like all units given the failure to properly resource and the poor post-conflict strategic planning by the Bush Administration, the US Marines offer a clear example of good integrated theatre practice. In stark contrast, the British Army’s failure to implement the changes needed to address the insurgency compounded the political and resourcing failures of the Blair Administration. Despite the perceived successes of Belfast (1972-98)



and Sierra Leone (2000), the British abjectly failed to adapt quickly enough to the requirements of counter insurgency. Much of their failure stemmed from believing that they would instinctually adapt. The US Marines, on the other hand, had an institutionalised capacity to adapt, a culture that responded favourably to the creative thinking and self-reliance of in-theatre commanders regardless of rank, specialisations or duties. As such, it offers an example of how the strategic culture of the fighting services can offset the lack of strategic genius (or even simple aptitude) within the political elite.



While US Marine Corps units and personnel are trained to think of themselves, first and foremost, as part of a greater “Marine” whole, British Army units each have complex and separate histories, with divergent cultures. The British model worked well when each unit had specialised functions within the empire’s many localised theatres, and when during World War 1, they were much larger multi-battalion regiments, often of brigade strength. However, in the early 21st Century, these British regiments are now single battalion

forces, merged into multi-regimental brigades with few coherent cultural constructs informing their combined action within brigades, the Army and across services. When push came to shove in the maelstrom of Iraq, Marines had an appreciation of how to work together which their British counter-parts took years to (re-)learn. Integration begins with a common culture. While the Marines have this common identity across a multi-function (Air, Sea and Land) service, the British Army was hampered by its own culture before it even began working with the Royal Navy and Air Force. A strategic culture can either be the glue that connects disparate components or the fencing that prevents integration.

To return to the Australian example, Australia’s tradition of acting as a junior partner in major conflicts (WW1, WW2, Malaya, Vietnam and now Iraq and Afghanistan) has built into its military tradition the culture of “can-do, and will adapt” in (and across) her forces. This condition of enforced interoperability is a



marked component of the Australian in-theatre military culture. On the LHDs, and

in-theatre, Canberra and Adelaide's crews are likely to produce practical dynamic solutions to their various challenges because of the recruiting culture Australia has attached to these vessels. The young men and women in these crews are likely to represent some of the most eager and resourceful of each service's officers and ranks, many with experience from Iraq, Afghanistan, and peace keeping in the Solomon Islands. While this may offer a useful seed for future integration, it is still not a formal integrated structure and runs the risk of being subject to the machination of the parochial interests of the disparate services hierarchies and bureaucracies. This ultimately is the greatest challenge posed to any other state interested in the Australian model. While integration from the "bottom up" may represent development by stealth, the advances made through it may still be vulnerable to service interests until it is firmly institutionalised.

It does offer, however, a route other than that pursued by Canada: integration by "shock", which appears to have seriously



damaged Canada's defence capacities. The Canadian model, "top down" involved creating a purple service to manage Land, Sea and Air elements. These reforms were implemented without the cultural reset needed to make the changes effective. The result of this has been the creation of an unwieldy "backroom", the demoralisation of large parts of the Canadian armed forces and an exodus of

talent to countries like Australia. "Bottom up" may have its risks, but they seem preferable to "top down".

In contrast, British interoperability has focused overwhelmingly on the "special relationship" with America, and not within its own forces. It is unique in its intensity and extent, but it is a Grand Strategy – intelligence and policy driven interoperability, between peers (albeit peers of divergent capacities), and one marked by difficulties in-theatre. As the British Armed forces are reduced through cost savings pressed on it by the Treasury through the Strategic Defence and Security Review (2010),ⁱⁱ in-theatre considerations will become more important. Consequently, the method for integration in the British case is likely to be neither "bottom up" nor "top down". The foreseeable alternative is the assimilation of less strategically important services by the most strategically important service. For Australia, where the services are relatively balanced, this makes little sense (so far), but for Great Britain the absorption of the Army and Royal Air Force by Royal Navy is conceivable, practical, but highly controversial. After a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army in particular has acquired a new kudos, a sense of purpose and a revived self-identity that will be difficult to simply subsume into the Navy character. The controversial nature of such a decision will require political capital and nerve few post-Cold War administrations have possessed. The risk for Britain is that it chooses the Canadian model, or a watered down version of the

Australian model, or worse, a stunted integration by political committee census for the benefit of press liaisons.

Treasury experts may prefer the top down model for its simplicity, and the oversight it affords them, or appreciate the minimal management required by a bottom up approach, but no form of service integration or amalgamation is likely to succeed without requisite cultural resources and evidence of strategic efficacy. As the US Marines illustrate, integration works, but how a point of interoperability is achieved is likely to determine success or failure in strategic and operational terms.

– Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International –

Images Accessed: 27/04/2013

HMAS Canberra cutaway

http://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/SHIP_LHD_Canberra_Class_Concept_Cutaway.jpg

Charles C. Krulak

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0f/Charles_C._Krulak.jpg/220px-Charles_C._Krulak.jpg

British Army in Sierra Leone

http://static1.demotix.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/aspect_large/000-7/photos/1278982085-the-british-army-in-sierra-leone_35327.jpg

Australian Army on Operation Talisman Sabre military exercise

http://www.strategypage.com/gallery/images/exercise_talisman_saber.jpg

Canadian Forces image

<http://durhamregioncareerfair.1c1.ca/images/CanadianForces.jpg>

i

http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm

ii

http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf