

Towards a general theory of geopolitics in our time:

Philip Bobbitt and the rise of the market-state

Paul Monk

Too often when we examine Australia's present strategic circumstances it is the big picture that is confusing to most of us, more than the details; or rather, the details can confuse us just to the extent that we lack a coherent big picture. I am at the beginning of a research project into the utility of the ideas of Philip Bobbitt for understanding that big picture and so I shall sketch out those ideas for you.

In April 2001 my essay in *Quadrant*, *Twelve Questions for Paul Dibb*, was a response to an essay he'd had in the July-August 2000 issue of the same magazine, which had been titled *A Trivial Strategic Age?* Dibb had opened up by remarking that we do not have an adequate label for the strategic era we are in. We find ourselves, he suggested, in 'an indecipherable world in which the previous certainties of the Cold War have been replaced by a maze of complexity and contradictions.' Dibb's most fundamental complaint at that time was 'the discipline of strategic studies has been of little use in enlightening our understanding of the current state of international affairs.' He commented that 'the body of knowledge that was built up during the Cold War is now of little use' and that the academics had become 'too preoccupied with theoretical introspection to be of much use to policy makers.'

As a consequence, he concluded, '...strategic policy is being made "on the run" without a well-grounded body of analysis to guide defence priorities.' Yet in this state of apparent confusion, Dibb helped Hugh White draft the 2000 Defence White Paper. It is high time we did, indeed, develop a well-grounded body of analysis to guide strategic policy. But neither Dibb nor White has done so while at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at ANU, in part because they lack an aptitude precisely for theoretical introspection.

Perhaps my most pointed criticism of Dibb, in April 2001, was that his impatience with 'theoretical introspection' seemed to place him 'in some danger of finding himself up the strategic studies creek without a cognitive paddle.' More than seven years later, I believe this has been demonstrated rather dramatically by much that has been occurring in the world around us. A great deal has been happening since April 2001 and new thinking is certainly required in order to grapple with it. If Dibb's remarks about the Russian intervention in Georgia are an indication of his state of mind, however, he,

at least, is not doing any new thinking even now. Instead, he seems to be urging us to get back to the future, with a few platitudes about great power politics. Robert Kagan was, perhaps, a little closer to the mark in warning of the complacency of the Western Europeans, but we need much more than simple talk about the rough balance of power.

Let's recall a few of the striking developments of the present decade:

- the irruption of global Islamist jihad;
- a rapid increase in Chinese wealth, power and assertiveness;
- the widening proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, with Pakistan, Iran and North Korea of particular concern;
- the uncertain future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and of counter-proliferation with regard to WMD in general;
- growing problems with cyber security, not least with large scale hacking operations coming out of China and apparently sponsored by the PLA;
- the peak oil problem;
- the complex challenges of climate change;
- the possibility of pandemic disease in a globalised world;
- the collapse of the Doha Round of free trade talks;
- the global economic meltdown and the fragilities and vulnerabilities it has highlighted in the international financial order;
- the widespread sense that the United States itself is in irreversible relative decline as a power and the tendency to liken it to the Roman Empire; and
- the more and more evident deficiencies of the international institutions set up at the beginning of the Cold War to serve the maintenance of world order, notably the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

So much for Francis Fukuyama and what he acclaimed in the early 1990s as *The End of History*. Yet the list of developments above is only a very preliminary one and to run through these topics in detail would be several articles in themselves. Let me; therefore, confine myself to three central observations:

- First, in order to think more or less coherently and in practical terms about this array of challenges, we do, in fact, need theoretical introspection. Indeed, we need a new kind of general theory in the geopolitical arena analogous to the ‘general theory of employment, interest and money’ developed by John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s in the midst of the Great Depression.
- Second, such a general theory has been developed over the past decade by Philip Bobbitt; most notably in his landmark 2002 book *The Shield of Achilles*, and applied to the challenge of globalised terrorism in his new book, *Terror and Consent*, which he had planned to call *The Bow of Odysseus*, only to be overruled by his publisher.
- Third, in working with this general theory, as with any theory, we will get the most return on our investment of time and effort by using a Popperian approach to the relationship between theory, reality and judgment. Those familiar with the work of the late Karl Popper, author of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *Conjectures and Refutations*, among many other works, will be aware that he rejected the concept of knowledge as apprehension of certain truth in favour of the idea that we advance our understanding of the world through making bold conjectures that are then tested against reality and revised as we discover our errors.

Why we need a new general theory of geopolitics

In decrying the academic preoccupation with theoretical introspection, in 2000, Paul Dibb lamented the loss of the ‘certainties’ on which strategic policy had been based during the Cold War. But on any serious reading, the Cold War was full of *uncertainties* and its ending was rooted precisely in those uncertainties. I remember feeling bemused, in 1989 and 1990, at the widespread incredulity that the Soviet bloc was falling apart. Those who were incredulous had been prisoners to their own certainties. I had just completed a PhD in 1988, in which I had remarked that the history of the 20th century was that of the collapse of one obstacle after another to the further expansion of the global capitalist order – and that the next in line for capitulation, as recent developments plainly demonstrated, were the command economies of the anti-capitalist states. That remark was not based on certainty or ideological faith, but on a general theory which I had developed in the 1980s.

A great deal was changing in the world before the demolition of the Berlin Wall and it is those changes which both triggered that seminal event and opened the floodgates to much that we are experiencing now. I never say, by the way, that the Berlin Wall ‘fell’, because this suggests that it did so all on its own, whereas human agency was the critical factor. There has been widespread agreement, since 1991, that we need a serious conceptual reframing of geopolitics. It is just that the various reframings on offer have not, thus far, been very convincing. There has actually been almost an avalanche of books on geopolitics over the past seventeen years. Indeed, we can feel swamped by it almost to the point

where we give up on any serious effort to master it all. But if we do that, we reduce ourselves to confusion and ineptitude. We need powerful conceptual tools. We need a new and compelling general theory.

What, then, is the *relationship between* globalisation, the global Islamist jihad, the rise of China, the dangers of cyber warfare, the challenge of WMD proliferation, the collapse of the Doha Round, the dangers of climate change, the global economic meltdown, the view of the United States as a declining empire and so on? How do we *make sense* of all these phenomena? What is it actually *intelligent* to do, if we want to respond to them all without coming to grief? It would be fatuous of me to declare that the answer is simple or that I am certain I have it. But as a student of these matters, I have found the work of Philip Bobbitt more interesting and suggestive certainly than that of, say, Paul Kennedy, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan or Thomas Friedman, to mention but a few of the better known names in the field.

To underscore the need for serious theory, let us consider, for example, the quite popular idea that the United States is in decline and can usefully be compared with the Roman Empire. This is an attempt at theory by means of historical analogy. It is a somewhat vague attempt at a more general theory or conceptual perspective. Let’s reflect on that, as a way into the broader question of why we need a general theory and what kind of things a really useful general theory would need to be. After all, even those whose knowledge of history is pretty thin have heard of the fall of the Roman Empire to the barbarians and the coming of the Dark Ages. The very idea of the Republic and the Empire, as shadowy, portentous concepts, surfaces again and again in popular culture, most famously in the *Star Wars* films. Somehow, the analogy with Rome seems to provide perspective – but it is a fatalistic and ominous perspective that does little to enhance our sense of what it might be useful to do in all the circumstances.

Niall Ferguson and Chalmers Johnson have used, instead, an analogy with the decline and retreat of the *British Empire*, but methodologically, the approach is basically the same. It is, in both cases, an attempt to understand the course of contemporary affairs and anticipate the future course of events in terms of a general, more or less cyclical, theory of states. This is an approach to geopolitics that goes back to the Greeks, if not earlier and was famously represented in the 1930s by Oswald Spengler in his dark prophecy of *The Decline of the West*.

Polybius, in his powerful account of *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, looked ahead, in the 2nd century BCE, and anticipated its eventual fall. He did not anticipate that the Empire would last another 600 years. When its fall began, with the sack of Rome by Alaric’s Goths, in 410 AD, St Augustine made an even grander attempt at a theoretical synthesis, in his remarkable book *The City of God Against the Pagans*. Empires come and go, he wrote, but the true eternal city, the City of God, will not fall and we should place our hopes in it, not in Rome. Augustine believed that the barbarian invasions were a sign that he and his contemporaries lived in the *senectus mundi* – the old age of

the world – and that the End of the World was coming, if not imminently then within that epoch. He would, doubtless, be astonished by the staggering vitality and inventiveness of the modern world. Yet here we are again, with prognostications of both the fall of the ‘Empire’ and even the End of the World, as we know it.

The problem with these kinds of theories is that they are very informal and fatalistic. They do not offer very much more than suggestive parallels by way of explaining what is happening at present or may actually occur in the future; much less do they provide the conceptual tools for taking action that would alter the anticipated course of events or enable us to grapple more effectively with the challenges we face. Yet that is what we require of theory in the physical sciences, or economics. It is, surely, what we need from theory, when it comes to understanding geopolitics and the tasks of our time.

That means not simply seeing rough analogies with the past, however intriguing these may appear, but *explaining* the nature of the analogies with some rigour, identifying the *differences* between cases and, above all, *specifying* what insights and principles may be derived from all this to guide action in a non-fatalistic manner. This is what Machiavelli was attempting in his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy* and his more famous political pamphlet, *The Prince*. It is, also, to give him his due, presumably what Paul Dibb was driving at, in 2000, when he remarked that ‘academic work that really makes a mark in the wider community is that which develops principles to guide policy.’ Yet in his most recent commentaries, he describes the rise of Russia and China very much in ‘back to the future’ terms. I think we need to do better than this and I believe we can.

Philip Bobbitt’s general theory of geopolitics

When Philip Bobbitt’s *The Shield of Achilles* was published in 2002, it was acclaimed by Michael Howard, former Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford and Chair of Military and Naval History at Yale, as ‘a remarkable and perhaps a unique book’. Bobbitt advanced in this book a general theory of state formation, law and strategy. While it demands close analysis and may be problematic in a number of ways, it is the most thought-provoking attempt at a new general theory of geopolitics of which I am aware. Not only Michael Howard, but many others, including Henry Kissinger, have acknowledged it as having great significance.

Michael Howard wrote, in his foreword to *The Shield of Achilles*:

There have been many studies of the development of warfare, even more of the history of international relations, while those on international and constitutional law are literally innumerable. But I know of none that has dealt with all three of these together, analysed their interaction throughout European history, and used that analysis to describe the world in which we live and the manner in which it is likely to develop. Indeed, few people can match Philip Bobbitt’s qualifications to write it: doctorates

in both law and strategic studies, a respected record of publications in both, long experience in government and all informed by a deep understanding of history such as most professional historians would envy.

The Shield of Achilles is not a book that can be digested at one sitting or on one reading. My friend and business partner, Tim van Gelder, remarked to me some years ago, of *Making It Explicit*, a massive study of language, truth and meaning by the philosopher Robert Brandom, that it is not a book one ‘reads’, but a book one studies and slowly absorbs and one which, in the process, completely transforms one’s outlook on life. I believe much the same might be said of *The Shield of Achilles*. The problem, of course, is that, because such books are so formidable, relatively few people read them at all, much less study them and absorb their lessons. As far as I can gather, not very much more has been absorbed into the general understanding of decision makers from Bobbitt’s work than the term ‘The Long War’; but even it has been misapplied, being used to describe the struggle against globalised terrorism, whereas Bobbitt used it to describe the series of conflicts from 1914 to 1990 that constituted much of the history of the 20th century.

The general theory that Bobbitt advances is that the state has its genesis not in law or in war, but in the symbiotic relationship between law and war. This symbiosis has resulted in an evolution of state forms since the fifteenth century. While there may be some generic phenomenon called ‘the state’, Bobbitt argues, its specific characteristics change from century to century, driven by the imperatives of adapting both law and strategy to one another. The state as we became accustomed to it in the 20th century was not *the* state, but the *nation-state*. And the unending process of evolution is driving a mutation of the nation-state into a new state form that Bobbitt calls the *market-state*. His theory is detailed, powerful and has many implications for the guidance of strategy, and law, both domestic and international. It also has profound implications for force structure, including the concept of defence reserves, and seems to explain many of the *ad hoc* changes we have been seeing over the past decade or more.

The key to Bobbitt’s worldview is his observation that war is not an aberrant form of human behaviour that can be prevented once and for all by recourse to international law. He argues that the very nature of the state has been determined by the changing demands of war, with new legal frameworks for both states and the relations between states emerging in the cauldron of epochal wars. Crucially, what triggers epochal wars is that a process of evolution has left behind the laws and stabilities that obtained between states following an earlier settlement, and has created fundamental uncertainties about order and the use of power. This has occurred again and again and is occurring again right now – with grave implications.

It is well enough known that artillery and the printing press brought an end to the feudal order; the telegraph and railways to the dynastic order. What Bobbitt argues is that these were not merely historical episodes of a curious nature, but are clues to how history actually works. We are in the

midst of another such epochal shift, he argues, and we need to think hard and act adroitly, if we are to avoid another cycle of wars. He opens the Prologue to *The Shield of Achilles* with the words:

We are at a moment in world affairs when the essential ideas that govern statecraft must change. For five centuries it has taken the resources of a state to destroy another state; only states could muster the huge revenues, conscript the vast armies, and equip the divisions to threaten the survival of other states. Indeed, posing such threats, and meeting them, created the modern state. In such a world, every state knew that its enemy would be drawn from a small class of potential adversaries. This is no longer true, owing to advances in international telecommunications, rapid computation and weapons of mass destruction. The change in statecraft that will accompany these developments will be as profound as any that the State has thus far undergone.

Notice the key technological developments by 2000 that Bobbitt mentions, as the counterparts of the mobile artillery and printing press of 1500 or the railways and telegraph of 1900. But he enlarges on the implications, bringing law and strategy together. As a consequence of these developments, he argues, all due to the competition between different kinds of nation-state during the Long War, 'the constitutional order of the nation-state is now everywhere under siege.' A new kind of state form is necessitated by these same developments and, therefore, we are seeing and will see a transformation of the fundamental *raison d'être* of the state, the legitimating purpose of the state and the logic of its strategic endeavours – with implications for domestic constitutional law, international law, intelligence collection and analysis, force structure and military strategy.

In language which invites reflection on the discussion of interests versus geography in the informal strategic policy debate we have been having in this country over much of the past decade, Bobbitt wrote, in 2002:

The nation-state's model of statecraft links the sovereignty of a state to its territorial borders. Within these borders, a state is supreme with respect to its law, and beyond its borders a state earns the right of recognition and intercourse to the extent that it can defend its borders. Today this model confronts several deep challenges. Because the international order of nation-states is constructed on the foundation of this model of state sovereignty, developments that cast doubt on that sovereignty call the entire system into question.

Five such developments do so: (1) the recognition of human rights as norms that require adherence within all states, regardless of their internal laws; (2) the widespread deployment of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction that render the defence of state borders ineffectual for the protection of the society within; (3) the proliferation of global and transnational threats that transcend state borders, such as those that damage the environment, or threaten states through migration, population, disease or famine; (4) the growth of a world economic regime that ignores borders in the movement

of capital investment to a degree that effectively curtails states in the management of their economic affairs; and (5) the creation of a global communications network that penetrates borders electronically and threatens national languages, customs and cultures. As a consequence, a constitutional order will arise that reflects these five developments and, indeed, exalts them as requirements that only this new order can meet. The emergence of a new basis for the state will also change the constitutional assumptions of the international society of states, for that framework, too, derives from the domestic constitutional rationale of its constituent members.

Bobbitt anticipated that one alarming symptom of this state of affairs would be global terrorism able to cause unprecedented damage to metropolitan states. But the larger significance of his general theory has been somewhat lost in the preoccupation with terrorism worldwide since 2001. It is that larger significance, however, to which I would like to draw your attention.

While he is thought to have argued that the epochal war of our time will be or is already a war against terrorism, Bobbitt actually argued, both in *The Shield of Achilles* and in *Terror and Consent*, that terrorism was only a premonitory symptom of the changes that are occurring in the international system – like Caribbean piracy in the seventeenth century. If we address those symptoms intelligently, he suggested, we might avoid descent into a cataclysmic epochal war between great powers vying for primacy in the constitutional order of

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market-states. This emphasis is somewhat obscured by his concentration on the symptomatic problem in *Terror and Consent* and his urgent insistence in that book that ‘almost every widely held idea we currently entertain about twenty first century terrorism and its relationship to the Wars against Terror is wrong and must be thoroughly rethought.’

Writing in 2000, before *The Shield of Achilles* went to press and months before 11 September 2001, Bobbitt commented:

When the best commentators look at the future, they seem to divide between two expectations: some, like John Keegan, expect that states will master the arts of peace and that war will wither away; others, like Martin van Creveld, believe that war will degenerate into civil chaos, fought by stateless gangs. One might say that the former see a future of law without war, and the latter a future of wars without law. My own view, of course, is that law and wars will persist because they are mutually supportive. And this is not the worst dynamic equilibrium: a state without strategy for war would be unable to maintain its domestic legitimacy and thus could not even guarantee its citizens civil rights and liberties; a lawless state at war could never make peace and thus would be trapped in the cycle of violence and revenge.

The parliamentary nation-state has emerged from the Long War as triumphant. Nevertheless, we should not expect that either this form of the constitutional order or the Peace that recorded its ascendancy will be eternal. Mindful of the past, we can expect a new epochal war in

which a new form of the state – the market-state – asserts its primacy as the most effective constitutional means to deal with the consequences of the strategic innovations that won the Long War. To shape, if not permanently forestall this war to come, the society of states must organize in ways that enable it to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to treat expeditionary interventions as opportunities for consensus-creating coalitions and to share information as a means of defence against disguised attacks. By these means, the next epochal war can be converted into a series of interventions and crises, instead of a world-shattering cataclysm or a stultifying and repressive world order.

When, just before his book was due to go into print, the attacks of 11 September 2001 occurred, he wrote a post-script. He described what had just happened as ‘an historic opportunity’ to take stock and come to terms with the dangers of the new era. He called this decade an Indian Summer, remarking that the term:

...usually evokes a pleasant sensation of warm autumn weather that gives us a second chance to do what winter will make impossible. The origin of this phrase, however, is more menacing. The early American settlers were often forced to take shelter in stockades to protect themselves from attacks by tribes of Native Americans. These tribes went into winter quarters once autumn came, allowing

the settlers to return to their farms. If there was a break in the approaching winter – a few days or weeks of warm, summery climate – then the tribal attacks would be resumed, and the defenceless settlers became their prey. Once again, the settlers were forced to band together or to become victims, attacked one by one.

In the comfort of his library, in Austin, Texas, in 2006, Bobbitt told me how his ancestor, Edward Bobbitt, had been caught in the open by raiding Native American tribesmen in Massachusetts, murdered and mutilated, in the Indian summer of 1643. That brought home vividly what he meant by the expression having more sinister connotations.

He argued that, in the Indian Summer of our current prosperity and strength, we should seek to overhaul the constitutional order of the nation-state and its assumptions about international security, especially collective security, developing new legal and strategic frameworks for self-defence against terrorism – such as shared intelligence, shared surveillance information, new technologies for security such as nanosensors, cyber defences and missile defences, revised approaches to critical infrastructure security and civil defence emergency procedures in the event of cyber attacks or biological warfare attacks, new international

covenants regarding extradition, pre-emption and non-proliferation – so that nation-states in the process of losing their grip and mutating into market-states might not only defeat international terrorism, but avoid the kind of peer competition that could plunge mutating states into cataclysmic great power conflict of novel and terrifying kinds.

Al Qa’eda, he believes, is only the first of a species of market-state terrorism. The United States is not so much a declining empire as a liberal democratic nation-state mutating into an entrepreneurial market-state. China is a communist nation-state mutating into an authoritarian mercantile market-state. The A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network is the harbinger of deadly market schemes to come, in the world created by WMD, rapid computation and global capital markets. Climate change and the dangers of pandemic diseases, electronic globalisation of culture and identity politics are challenges of the new epoch which will require revisions to strategy and law, because they pose transnational dangers. The collapse of the Doha Round; the impotence of the United Nations, the increasing irrelevance of the World Bank and, not least, the great derivatives debacle, which has triggered the current global financial crisis, are all symptoms of the shift in world affairs that is ushering in the new order or disorder of market-states – though, of course, they could portend regression and confusion.

A Popperian approach to the general theory

The application and testing of Bobbitt’s general theory require detailed work and analysis. In undertaking such analysis, there are conceptual traps for the unwary. A.N.

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Whitehead, Bertrand Russell's collaborator in writing the *Principia Mathematica*, long ago pointed out that we confound our thinking again and again by committing what he called 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness'. He meant that we invent labels for things as a means for classifying them and making sense of them, but then mistake the label for the thing itself. This is an error of which we need to be wary in using so powerfully structured a general theory as Philip Bobbitt's. At every step, we need to check whether there are such things as 'nation-states' and 'market-states', for instance; or whether these are simply convenient labels we may use to give some semblance of order to our thinking about extremely complex realities boiling and crawling with contradictions, anomalies and anachronisms.

In his last book, *The World of Parmenides*, Karl Popper inquired into how the conceptual breakthroughs in scientific cosmology and critical rationalism by the pre-Socratics, 2500 years ago, laid the foundations of modern philosophy and science. He centred the book on Parmenides, because Parmenides, who discovered that the moon is a sphere and that it does not have its own light but reflects that of the Sun, was prompted by these startling realisations to postulate a general theory of perception and reality. That conjecture by Parmenides was so powerful, but so paradoxical that it impelled later philosophers, especially Leucippus and Democritus, to refute it and, in doing so, to develop the theory of atoms and the void upon which modern science

would later be based. Popper's interest here is in the origins of our intellectual disciplines and methods for *theorising* and, crucially, for critically revising our theories and beliefs.

In that Popperian spirit, we should not so much *believe* Bobbitt's general theory, as to use it to stimulate really serious and systematic thinking about our strategic circumstances. John Maynard Keynes remarked that practical statesmen who expressed scorn for abstract theory were invariably slaves to the ideas of some defunct economist. Likewise, those who profess impatience with detailed conceptual analysis of the kind Bobbitt offers, are very likely to be the slaves of preconceptions which they fondly imagine to be simply the 'realities' of the world. In *Terror and Consent*, Bobbitt makes numerous suggestions for the reform of intelligence, strategy, law and force structure; but he remarked to me before the book had come out, 'The one thing we most need to do is to *think*.' His general theory is a wonderful stimulus to the kind of thinking we urgently need to do.

Some force structure implications

What, then, might be some of the implications of Bobbitt's general theory for Australian national security? I found myself thinking of this, for instance, when reading Ross Babbage's claim, earlier this year, that Australia faces the rise of Asian powers on such a scale that we would need to contemplate a



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massive increase in defence expenditure and the acquisition of 400 combat aircraft or 30 conventional submarines, in order to be able to 'rip the arm off' an aggressor in a future war. I had similar thoughts when reading Major General Jim Molan's fascinating memoir of his work in Iraq for Ricardo Sanchez and George Casey in 2004-05. Neither Ross nor Jim offered a conceptually or theoretically elaborate assessment of the challenges we face, only an account of Ross's fears about Asian great powers and Jim's concerns arising out of his remarkable experience in Iraq. To *think through* our national security and the force structure requirements of the new epoch, we must dig much deeper.

If Bobbitt's general theory is any guide, we are in a world in which the nature of the dangers we face will require a capacity for securing various kinds of critical domestic infrastructure against disabling attack from sources that we will often not be able to identify in advance and possibly not even after the event. It will require more emphasis on pre-emption than on deterrence and more capacity for resilience than for retaliation. Such resilience will require a wide variety of skilled civil defence and defence force reserve capabilities to handle emergencies and the consequences of mass casualty or system disabling attacks by hostile forces; or to resuscitate systems of public order, governance and basic services in the aftermath of an intervention, whether on the scale of Iraq or that of the Solomons.

It will require that we have the capability to contribute meaningfully and not always just symbolically to coalition operations, in efforts to check the depredations of globalised criminal or terrorist forces; to defend the human rights of those exposed to genocide or gross abuse by their own regimes; and to head off the various dangers posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; to bring relief in the event of massive natural disasters and to respond swiftly and effectively to the possible outbreak of pandemic disease. It will entail an enhanced capacity to work within a changing international order of things and not rest on long established assumptions about where our interests lie or what the threats are to our well being and sovereignty. At the most fundamental level, it will require that we look at national security as something far more elaborate and sophisticated than simply the defence in the last resort of our borders or the much vaunted 'sea-air' gap to our north.

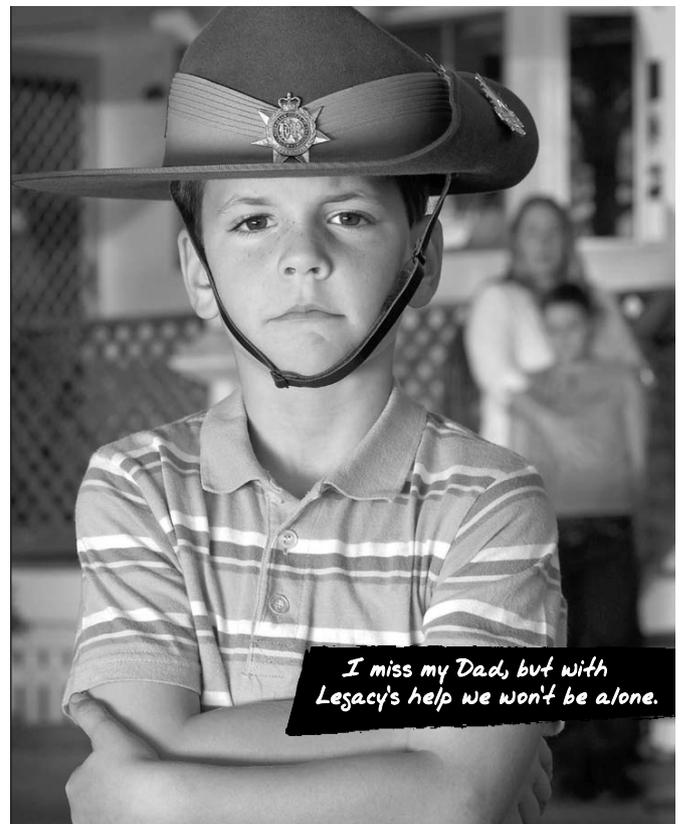
Even a cursory acquaintance with what has been happening over the past decade indicates that many of these things have started to be looked to or at least talked about, in an *ad hoc* manner. They have, however, occasioned much confusion and I am not aware of any theoretically informed and systematic assessment of Australia's security challenges that brings all this together in coherent form. The implication from Bobbitt's general theory that seems to me to have the most direct relevance to the ADF's reservist elements, for example, is that they need to be seen and developed increasingly not as a half trained cadre of foot soldiers for a main force war, but as a highly skilled range of specialists who can be called upon in case of a domestic or international emergency to buttress the core force in being.

This will include doctors, dentists, scientific specialists, computer specialists, intelligence analysts, police forces, linguists, engineers and logisticians, to name a few; specialists whom it is extremely expensive for the armed

forces to keep on the pay roll, but who are indispensable in any one of a spectrum of scenarios that may confront the armed forces and the state as a whole in the years ahead. We have spent a decade developing the concept and to some extent the reality of a hardened and networked army and a joint force. We would do well, now, to develop a concept of defence force reserve elements as a vital, extended and resilient component of the national security system in the emergent age of the market-state. And if we are to do that, we will need a radically new approach to and attitude towards the funding and development of such reservists compared with any that we have previously known.

The 2008 Defence White Paper is currently gestating. White Papers have a history of being quickly overtaken by events. I hope that this one will not be. If it is not to be, however, it should be informed by profound theoretical introspection and a reconfiguring of how we understand national and international security. I am not sanguine about the chances of it being grounded in any very searching re-examination of the traditional postulates of Australian strategic policy. This is, perhaps, an unfair as well as a bold conjecture; and I shall be delighted if it is refuted in the months ahead. We shall see what we shall see. ♦

Dr Paul Monk is a founding director of Austthink (www.austthink.com) in Melbourne. His most recent article in Defender was 'Fallujah: Close combat in complex terrain' in the Summer 2007 issue.



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