



Mark Latham's hatred of military police

The publication of *The Latham Diaries* revealed (p.393) that Mark Latham claims to 'detest war and the meatheads who volunteer to kill other human beings'. Just why Mr Latham should so hate military police is not explained. Perhaps he is just as blissfully unaware of the specificity of the term 'meatheads' in the common, as well as the military, vernacular as he apparently is on so many other defence and foreign policy matters.

On the other hand, perhaps Mark Latham was misapplying the collective sobriquet 'meatheads' to mean most or all members of the defence force? If so, his use of the term in such an intellectually facile and morally bankrupt fashion simply reinforces what many commentators have claimed was the gut commonsense of the Australian people in rejecting him as a potential national leader.

The same commentators have often suggested that the moment when general public confidence in Mr Latham began to falter was on 23 March 2004 – when he made his arbitrary promise, on the renowned intellectual forum that is Sydney talkback radio, to withdraw all Australian troops from Iraq by Christmas if elected Prime Minister. The decline in public confidence was, however, more subtle. He might today be Prime Minister if he had subsequently qualified his remark, rather than stubbornly defending it when confronted with the obvious moral, logical and practical inconsistencies of the position.

Mr Latham would not or could not explain his policy in terms that resonated with most Australians, especially among those with no strong opinion either way about Australia's participation in Iraq but who were uneasy about his proposed simple solution to a complex dilemma. This was a telling moment nationally and for Mark Latham individually. The Australian people may not be sophisticated in their day-to-day knowledge of strategic policy, but they can recognise when a potential national leader is not up to the task of meeting the first responsibility of government – to defend the country and its people. The wider issues involved and possible solutions are explored at length in the Spring 2005 issue of *Defender*. ●

Civil liberties jeremiahs need to think before scaremongering

Is Australia under attack from Islamist terrorism or not? If the answer to this question is yes, as most Australians appear to recognise, then much more restraint is needed in Australian public debate. In particular, there needs to be a steep decline in the amount of uninformed, subjective and unbalanced public commentary claiming that our civil liberties in general are seriously threatened by what are, in reality, quite narrowly targeted and temporary counter-terrorism measures.

Highlights:

- Latham's professed hatred of defence force personnel
- Making Islamist extremists an endangered species
- Filling gaps in the ADF by recruiting Pacific Islanders
- Why not gap-fill by national service instead?
- Latest report on DIO scandal still fails to fix the problem
- ADI wins a victory for commonsense
- Irony Corner: Red Teaming, ASPI and DIO

While some of the new counter-terrorism measures are undoubtedly tough by normal peacetime standards (which no longer apply) they are not unprecedented during time of conflict. More importantly, these measures are specifically targeted only at terrorists and their sympathisers. By definition this is a very small and distinct segment of the Australian population.

The vast majority of Australians support such counter-terrorist measures because they clearly realise this fact. The reason the Islamist extremists targeted by the measures (and some of their apologists) claim otherwise is because they realise it too.

Why civil liberties jeremiahs do not understand this situation is more complex. Much of it has to do with deeply held opinions and suspicions concerning the current government among many media commentators and other public debate gatekeepers. No amount of reassurance or fact appears to sway them. This can be seen by the way many ignore or downplay the recent unanimous decisions in these matters by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments of quite disparate political views – including those who declared considerable scepticism beforehand.

Continuing wild allegations that the counter-terrorist measures are unjustified, or that they somehow 'discriminate against Muslims', are needlessly generating or fuelling mistaken concerns among Australia's broader Muslim community. This is particularly so among first-generation immigrants from countries where the security forces are not subject to the rule of law, or among those who may not yet have an adequate understanding of the relevant aspects of Australian history and civic structures.

The extremists, of course, are no doubt thankful for any assistance, however unintentional, that assists their attempts to wrongly portray the measures as 'targeted against Islam'. These spurious claims are essential to their goals of concealing themselves among a wider group and broadening the appeal of the extremist variations of Islam they espouse.

What is urgently needed is more balanced coverage of our counter-terrorist efforts. Mainstream, moderate Muslims who may be confused need to be reassured that only Islamist extremism, particularly its violent manifestation, is being targeted. Normal, law-abiding Australian Muslims have no more to fear than any other normal, law-abiding Australian. ●

Blackbirding 21st Century style

Recent speculation about the option of recruiting 'Pacific Islanders' to serve in the ADF is a good example of a brainstorming bullet point seeing the light of day before the rest of the brain, including the conscience, became engaged. The quality of subsequent public discussion on the proposal has been greatly circumscribed by divergent views on what exactly is being suggested, particularly whether such islanders would be standard immigrants or some form of 'guest worker' serving in a quasi-Foreign Legion or Brigade of Gurkhas-equivalent. Much of the debate also ignores that the ADF already recruits widely overseas among experienced and qualified military personnel who satisfy standard specialist skills shortage criteria for immigration – including in New Zealand and other Pacific Islands.

If we assume, however, that Pacific Islanders might be recruited to the ADF under some form of relaxed immigration standards – or as temporary entrant workers – a range of moral, economic, political and practical challenges arise.

The first and most important objection to such a scheme is that the ADF's recruiting shortfalls and retention problems are nowhere near serious enough for such a step to be seriously entertained. If they are so serious, a range of options should probably be considered first – not least on moral grounds. One obvious but fiscally painful alternative would be to increase defence force pay and conditions of service so that they can compete more effectively with community norms. Another alternative would be some form of compulsory national service scheme among our own citizens – as was done in similar demographic, labour market and fluid strategic circumstances in the early 1960s. If such alternatives are not considered first, the whole proposal would simply smack of a notion being pursued solely because it appeared cheap – on both economic and moral effort grounds.

A second category of objections revolve around the obvious legal, moral and operational difficulties posed by the guest worker option, not least the difficulty of expecting or motivating someone to fight for your country if they are not your citizens. Not to mention potential questions of international law, such as Australia's adversaries classing such combatants as mercenaries. All these difficulties would be exacerbated if the Islanders were to be paid at lower salary rates than the rest of the ADF, were concentrated in separate units, were largely employed in lower ranks or less technical positions, or had limitations placed on their potential for promotion (most of which apply in the French Foreign Legion and the British Brigade of Gurkhas). These latter aspects would probably apply as the more qualified or experienced applicants from the Pacific Islands would generally qualify for entry as standard immigrants separate to the scheme. There is also the problem that personnel serving under such conditions would be largely led at all levels by Australian personnel, which would smack of the old 'they make good troops with white officers' colonial jibe.

Finally, and not insignificantly, both sides of politics (including the ACTU) are currently opposed on a range of grounds to the use of guest workers from the Pacific in the general economy. It is therefore difficult to see how an exception could easily be made for the defence force.

So why not national service instead?

If guest workers from the Pacific Islands are not a viable option then, what about reintroducing national service? After all, this is what Australia did in the early 1960s when the economy was booming, the labour market was tight, we needed a bigger ADF to sustain the higher operational tempo that strategic circumstances had then thrust upon us, and even higher defence force salaries would not have reversed the marked recruiting and retention shortfalls (mainly because of near full employment at that time).

Again a dose of reality intrudes by considering a few basic facts. Reintroducing national service would clearly face considerable economic, demographic, gender-equity and political difficulties. Some statistical examples will suffice. For equity reasons (including subsequent human rights legislation) a modern national service scheme would probably have to be universal, rather than selective (1 in 40) as it was in the 1960s, and include all males *and* females of a certain age cohort. Because of modern OH&S legislation and theory the period of service would need to be long enough to adequately prepare conscripts for battle and then long enough to gain useful service from them, probably 18 months to two years. On a numerical basis alone such a universal scheme (80 out of 80) would severely distort the economy and provide far more personnel than the ADF, especially the Navy and the Air Force, could conceivably need. It would also, as occurred with the 1950s universal scheme (for 18-year old males),

divert far too much of the defence force into the training of short-term conscripts, rather than meeting the needs of ongoing operations and training for war by the defence force as a whole.

Instead of guest workers or national service for Australian citizens, the Government should tackle ADF recruiting and retention problems by raising defence force salaries and conditions so they are competitive with community norms.●

Intelligence scandal still mostly uncovered

Some further details have oozed out in the saga of why an important intelligence link between DIO and the deployed ADF headquarters in East Timor was arbitrarily cut in 1999. The material provided still fails to answer many matters of considerable public interest importance.

The 13 questions on the matter posed in the January 2005 *Defence Brief* remain unanswered. The bureaucratic arrogance, indifference and incompetence revealed thus far involve fundamental constitutional, procedural and moral issues to do with the effective command and control of the defence force on operations overseas. This is not an arcane issue of only party-political or professional interest. The Government must address this issue and it must do so swiftly and comprehensively.●

ADI 'exemption' a win for commonsense

In another example of time-tested and well-accepted national security practices being endangered, however unintentionally, Australian Defence Industries (ADI) has had to apply for exemption from equal opportunity laws in Western Australia in order to comply with the Commonwealth's strict requirements for access by its employees to classified information from Australian or allied sources.

In an example of outright idiocy, ADI was cited for discrimination on supposedly 'racial' grounds because it excluded access to classified information by those employees and subcontractors who are not Australian citizens, or citizens of our principal allies with whom we exchange classified information under longstanding bilateral and multilateral security agreements.

It could well be argued that this matter is constitutionally exempt from the application of State law anyway. It involves a fundamental use of the Commonwealth's defence power and the supposed peripheral jurisdiction of State law is invalid. ADI's 'exemption' from the supposed jurisdiction of the WA Discrimination Act is for five years only. This time should be taken to pass appropriate Commonwealth legislation clarifying absolutely that such State legislation should not be misused to undermine the integrity of the defence of Australia as a whole.●

Irony corner

Recent ASPI report called for 'red teaming' as a method by which our intelligence and security agencies could attempt to simulate the intentions and replicate the plans of Islamist terrorist groups. Such methods are, of course, integral to the Intelligence Estimate process – a well-proven intellectual methodology used by intelligence professionals across the western world. A pity then, that the most recent update of the DIO Charter still failed to acknowledge the Intelligence Estimate process as a vital professional tool at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.●

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