

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS - PROPOSED SEMINAR OUTLINE FOR 2023-2025

For Presentation at the Annual General Meeting

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Strategic Outlook Sub Committee

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Preamble

The SRWF board accepted a proposal on 7 May 2019 for the strategic direction of future seminar topics over a two-year period, building on the existing theme of fifth generation warfare. The board agreed to a program of 2 major seminars a year with a disciplined approach to relate six lunches per annum around the seminar themes. This intent has been followed in 2021 and 2022. Note the concluding seminar in this series occurred in September 2022 titled 'Towards a Lethal, Survivable and Affordable Force.

The plan for 2023 and beyond, is to further develop the theme of next generation capabilities with seminars looking 'beyond 5th Generation warfare', and a 'future perspective on Australian sovereign guided weapon capability'. Importantly, the committee feels the scope (and success) of our seminars can be broadened to include a wider range of views that will influence future development.

Future Directions

In air power terms, the ADF force structure is substantially 'locked in' for the near to medium term.

Looking to the future, there is a need to prepare for the next generation of technology; however, new thinking is required to ensure the ADF is able to fight tonight as well as being prepared for the future. Air power history suggests there will be a highly innovative phase (Gen 5.5) before we get to the next transformative change. But where will that innovation come from? And can we afford to wait for the next generation to arrive?

Emerging geo-strategic, economic, and demographic trends continue to impact the environment in which Australian air power must raise, train, sustain and operate, demanding an increasingly sophisticated and balanced approach to the development of technology, workforce, policy, and process. As covered in previous seminars, this will involve the increased influence of space and cyberspace.

While technology will continue to drive the development of air and space power, a focus on technology alone is not enough to win in strategic competitions. It will require an approach which is able to make best use of Australia's geography, a relatively small but highly skilled population, existing and new partnerships, and creative thinking to provide credible options and choices at the lowest possible level of political risk.

The mid to long term future will be shaped by a new government, the Strategic Review, new Service Chiefs and will be heavily influenced by the AUKUS agreement.

Future Scope of Seminars

The next series of seminars will therefore seek to explore the following themes:

- shaping the force for high end deterrence and action;
- articulating the case for modern asymmetric force;
- survivability (people, basing, platforms, comms and networks);
- novel technology 'pathways' to fielded capability (from requirements, through acquisition to operations); and
- affordability in the post-covid world.

These themes will necessarily drive the exploration of future technologies at various maturity levels, including quantum and nano technologies; laser and other-directed energy technologies; propulsion systems; and AI.

But it will also be necessary to identify national vulnerabilities, including the need to understand the environment (physical and virtual); how to generate scale and mass; the dependency on space (particularly for PNT); logistics writ large (fuel, basing, supply chains, planning etc); workforce trends and data dependency and interdependencies.

The outcome will likely identify new challenges and gaps such as: deterrence and first strike capability options; countering first strike capability; distributed / decentralised ops; cognitive sensors / EW; command and decision-making amid ambiguity.

To set the scene, the themes in 2023 will concentrate on deterrence; the proposed outlines are detailed below. As ever, the seminar themes will be reviewed closer to the time to ensure the content remains relevant to contemporary thought.

Seminar Themes for 2023

Seminar 1 – April 2023. Sharpening the Edge of Australia’s National Deterrence Capability

This seminar will explore what deterrence means to Australia in the context of being a globally respected and responsible, non-nuclear weapon capable middle power. It will consider all national means that contribute to deterrence – diplomatic, economic and military and discuss the limits to deterrence as a national strategy. It will ask: what is the balance between a defensive posture but with an ability to strike into the broader region and what does a characteristically Australian deterrence look like.

Speakers will be drawn from strategic thinkers and practitioners in academia, government and industry.

Seminar 2 – September 2023. Exploring the Future Requirements of a National Deterrence Capability

Building on the foundations set in the first seminar, the second will seek to clarify the future direction and challenges for government and industry in setting the national deterrence capability. It will be informed by the outcomes of the Defence Strategic View, the report from the Nuclear-Powered Submarine Task Force and the contemporary status of the AUKUS agreement.

The seminar will explore a number of themes:

What does a national deterrence capability mean for industry? Is it as an essential element of national power rather than just a ‘fundamental input to capability’?

How do you configure the current force to provide a meaningful deterrence and prepare for it to ‘fight tonight’? Is there an increased focus on readiness rather than just sustainment to meet the required national preparedness outcomes?

Speakers will be drawn from strategic thinkers and practitioners in academia, government and industry.