

Strategy

Society as a Fundamental Input to Defence Capability

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Keywords: Fundamental Inputs to Capability, Society, Defence capability

<https://doi.org/10.58930/bp38755363>

Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2024

This paper argues that the list of Fundamental Inputs to Capability (FIC) of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is currently incomplete, being too inwardly focussed on what the organisation can exert direct control over. While the ADF widened its perspective somewhat to include industry as a FIC, both history and the current strategic climate dictate the need to expand the conceptual aperture further and identify society as a FIC beyond what industry can offer. This paper examines three reasons for identifying society as a FIC: (1) the character of contemporary strategic competition provides unprecedented opportunities for society to mobilise in support of military capability; (2) society is the ADF's sole supplier of critical resources in a highly competitive market; and (3) the nature of competition itself as a social activity means society must grant the ADF a social license to operate. Identifying society as a FIC ensures the widest range of inputs to capability are leveraged to deliver the most effective ADF capability.

1. Introduction

The *Defence Capability Manual* of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is part of a set of policy documents that provide guidance on managing defence capability (Department of Defence, 2023, p. 1). The Manual defines 'Capability' as 'the power to achieve a desired operational effect in a nominated environment within a specified time, and to sustain that effect for a designated period' (Department of Defence, 2023, p. 3). The Manual asserts that capability is generated through combining inputs known as Fundamental Inputs to Capability (FIC), which are 'capability elements or inputs, which in combination, form the basis of capability'. Importantly, capability is claimed to be generated only through 'integrating, coordinating and managing the various FIC, which need to be delivered in the [right] quantities, characteristics and timescales' (Department of Defence, 2023, p. 12). It follows that if the ADF has not defined FIC fully and correctly, it will be difficult or impossible to achieve optimal capability outcomes.

In the context of this paper, society means 'a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Since their inception, the ADF's FIC have remained improperly biased towards only those inputs that the ADF directly controls. [Table 1](#) (left column) lists the original nine FIC (Department of Defence, 2002, pp. 1–1, 1–2). All are inputs that are entirely within the ADF's control. Over 20 years later, the ADF's FIC remain almost identical ([Table 1](#), right column), with the exception of 'Industry' which is the first and only input residing beyond the ADF's remit (Department of Defence, 2023, pp. 13–14).

The addition of 'industry' was a late change, and one not instigated by the ADF. It was directed by the Australian

Government through the 2016 Defence White Paper following a recommendation by the independent First Principles Review (Department of Defence, 2016, p. 109; Peever, 2015, p. 37). While it now seems self-evident that industry is a critical enabler of capability, the ADF still has work to do to fully capitalise on everything industry has to offer (Houston & Smith, 2023, p. 92; Noetic Group, 2019; Peever, 2015, pp. 14, 34, 36). The static nature of FIC across more than 20 years, and the slow engagement of industry as a FIC, suggests the ADF is hesitant to explore FIC outside its direct control. It also provides an indication that there could be more FIC *out there*.

The current FIC list is incomplete and society can potentially be a fundamental input to the ADF's capability. At a superficial level, the ability for the ADF to directly control a FIC appears elegant and important. If the ADF can control all inputs to capability, it is empowered to manage capability outcomes without the need to interact with, or rely on, the external world. The problem is that this is simply not true. The ADF does not have the means to operate autonomously and deliver optimised capability. It cannot partition itself from the broader environment and expect to deliver capability effectively. The inclusion of industry as a FIC proves that inputs to defence capability reside outside the ADF's control. The problem for the next FIC could simply be that it is hidden in plain sight. Society is a quiet achiever that enables almost everything military organisations do, but it remains unrecognised because civil-military relations (often misunderstood to mean government-military relations) is historically understudied in the Australian context, including by military professionals (Carter, 2019; Funnell, 1980; Moore & Brick, 2022; Ryan et al., 2021). Part of the problem could also be that the ADF finds it difficult to understand and engage with a society that it is not representative of demographically.

Table 1. Original and contemporary FIC list

Original FIC list	Contemporary FIC list
Organisation	Organisation
Command and Management	Command and Management
[ADF] People	[ADF] Personnel
Collective Training	Collective Training
Capability Systems	Major Systems
Facilities	Facilities and Training Areas
Through Life Support	Support
Materiel	Supplies
Doctrine ^a	-
-	Industry

^a A detailed examination of why 'Doctrine' was removed as a FIC is beyond the scope of this paper. One comparison suggests 'Doctrine' is analogous to 'Command and Management' (Dortmans et al., 2019) and on this basis, it is possible to conclude that the former was subsumed by the latter in the contemporary FIC list. It would seem obvious that 'Doctrine' was not replaced by 'Industry', given these inputs are fundamentally different. (Dortmans et al., 2019)

2. The historical record – is there a case to answer?

Australian military history has repeatedly demonstrated the consequences of failing to identify society as a FIC. While the concept of FIC is a modern construct, the importance of identifying and managing inputs to military capability is as timeless as it is fundamental, as many historical examples show. During World War I, private and merchant vessels requisitioned as troop and supply transports by the Australian Government were acquired so late that, by November 1915 (15 months after declaration of war), the shortage of ships had become 'acute' (Scott, 1941, p. 608). Many of the ships requisitioned were also 'rotten-bottomed old things', barely fit for purpose, but purchased at up to six times their original cost (Scott, 1941, pp. 617–618). The situation could have been mitigated had the ADF acted with less passivity by identifying preferred vessels, shepherding the Australian Government towards preferred vessel owners, and providing both with specialist advice on military requirements. The ADF's lack of foresight cost it dearly. Exorbitant funds were spent on ships that could otherwise have been spent on military capability.

At the outbreak of World War II, the Australian railway system – critical for the movement of troops and materiel – was not suited to the task. States in Australia used different track gauges, there were few border crossings, and civilian railway operators were scarce (Butlin, 1977, pp. 249–254). Notwithstanding, the ADF made few attempts to raise awareness of these problems prior to the onset of war. The persistent nature of Australia's societal–military divide remains evident decades after the divisive Vietnam War (Yule, 2020). And most recently, Australia's objectives in Afghanistan suffered due to a lack of coordination between aid projects delivered by the ADF and other agencies. The fragmented application of projects at times resulted in poor community consultation, compromised the long-term viability of infrastructure, and may even have facilitated local government corruption (Australian Civil-Military Centre, 2016, pp. 35–38, 42, 47). In each example above, the

ADF could have recognised and managed problems earlier had it identified and engaged with society as a FIC. Failing to identify society as a FIC inhibited the ADF from taking the necessary actions to optimise its military capabilities.

3. Fundamental reasons for identifying society as a FIC

3.1. The character of contemporary competition

While Australia has not encountered an existential threat for over 75 years, climate change and great power competition loom large, and both already create powerful challenges for Australia's security and prosperity. The more significant and proximate a threat is, the more its shadow is felt by society, and the more motivated members of that society will be to illuminate the dark. The current strategic environment provides the ADF with a new, albeit solemn, opportunity to energise society as an input to capability. And because current defence capabilities are modest, the current strategic threats also make engaging with society essential. The ADF must do more to raise the strategic consciousness of society, alert it to the seriousness and proximity of current strategic threats, and identify how individuals can assist the ADF in combating these threats. Identifying society as a FIC provides the mechanism through which this can occur.

The character of contemporary strategic competition provides opportunities for society to provide inputs to capability at unprecedented levels. This includes contributions in times of relatively low-level competition as a deterrent and as a means to prepare for an escalating competition. Members of society can now meaningfully contribute via a diverse range of activities such as: converting civilian equipment for military use (Correspondent, 2023a); supplying military equipment (Shapiro et al., 2023; Tokariuk, 2022); returning to service and maintaining weapon systems (Greene, 2024); conducting reconnaissance missions with remotely-operated vehicles (Droning Company, 2023); disrupting infrastructure and services

through cyber-attacks (Yuchong & Qinghui, 2021); coordinating logistics needs (Beaumont, 2022); gathering intelligence using open-source data (Lendon, 2023); prosecuting lawfare (Mosquera & Bachmann, 2016); and influencing public opinion through online information or disinformation campaigns (Svetoka, 2016). Arguably, the unprecedented span and diversity through which society can contribute to defence capability is the result of modern technologies, which allow individuals access to the data and resources they need to provide meaningful contributions. For example, a significant opportunity exists in relation to the emergence of distributed, additive manufacturing build farms across Australia (Loy & Novak, 2021), which could be leveraged to engage members of the public to rapidly manufacture military equipment at or near the point of use, reducing the military logistics footprint.

Further, since current competition is not always characterised by clear distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, it provides permissive conditions through which inputs from society can occur. The conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated many of the societal contributions listed above, including small business owners in Uzhhorod manufacturing anti-tank obstacles instead of garden sculptures; citizen volunteers in Odesa building beach barricades; churchgoers in Ivano-Frankivsk gathering on Sundays to craft camouflage nets (Schulze, 2022); and charity organisations across the country undertaking creative fundraising campaigns for a wide range of military equipment (Shulzhenko, 2023). Society can contribute to military capabilities across the entire competition continuum, from Humanitarian and Disaster Relief operations (Canyon, 2017) to high end conflict (Correspondent, 2023b; Hughson, 2018).¹

3.2. Society is a sole supplier

Society is the ADF's sole supplier of critical resources in a highly competitive market. The Australian society provides 100 per cent of the ADF's most basic resources: funding and people. This makes society a FIC in its own right by the ADF's own definition (refer to the introduction). However, characterising society as a FIC is also crucial because it acts as an input to an existing FIC ('Personnel') which can only operate through the recruitment of public citizens who are subsequently trained and given appropriate military experience. Expanding this logic further, society arguably becomes the sole and most fundamental FIC that enables many, if not all, other FIC currently identified.

Recognising society as a FIC is particularly important in the current climate, because the adequate supply of funding and human resources to the ADF is far from guaranteed. While defence funding and resourcing needs are intended to grow significantly (Blenkin, 2023; Morrison, 2022), Australia's economic circumstances mean funding is tight, and is forecast to become tighter, with budget deficits forecast

every year until 2063 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, pp. xii–xiii; Reserve Bank of Australia, 2023; Rynne & Malakellis, 2023). Furthermore, competition among employers for human talent is tough, with the ADF's conditions of employment not always positioning it as an employer of choice (Greene, 2022; Thomas & Bell, 2007; Tillett, 2022). Companies that compete with the ADF for human resources would never tolerate an equivalent to the divide that currently isolates the ADF from its sole-source supplier of basic needs, especially where those needs are growing in new, specialist areas such as nuclear-powered submarines, missile defence, space and cyber. While the ADF has commenced a number of initiatives to bolster recruiting and retention (Greene, 2022; Marles, 2023), identifying society as a FIC would enable a more holistic approach, including an examination of the causes of the current divide. According to some analysts, these causes include society's misperception of the military as a band of bush-bred larrikin soldiers; a decreasing pool of citizens eligible for service; changing societal values which steer individuals away from military service; and the sheer number of attractive, alternative employment opportunities (Moore & Brick, 2022; Thomas & Bell, 2007; Thomson, 2004, Chapter 4).

Identifying society as a FIC closes the divide between the ADF and its sole supplier, making it easier for the ADF to prioritise and sustainably resource a wide range of initiatives, which enable capability. More ADF members should be granted the authority, and empowered, to engage with society in more diverse ways such as: significantly expanding existing arrangements like providing greater encouragement to (and recognition for) ADF staff who publish papers or speak in the public domain; enhancing promotion and marketing campaigns through a variety of media and community events; expanding opportunities to display defence capabilities to the public; enlarging the number of ADF members assigned as patrons to community groups of all kinds; and reinvigorating the ADF gap year program.

ADF members could also engage society in new ways. Debates between members of the military and society concerning topical military issues could be televised and promulgated through social media. Public competitions could be held to seek innovative solutions to ADF problems such as 3D manufacturing of components for military equipment or decoys (Hood, 2023). ADF staff could work remotely from offices established in Australian schools, technical and further education institutes, universities, think tanks of all kinds, volunteer organisations and other public groups to facilitate direct engagement on military issues. The ADF could enrol sporting teams into existing public sporting competitions to build relationships and rapport. Finally, the resources of ADF media agencies could be rerolled to lead and coordinate these initiatives, in particular to engage the civilian media profession to unite the military with

¹ Citations listed previously in this section provide examples of other societal contributions made across the competition continuum, and illustrate their effect at the tactical, operational and strategic levels.

society. Over time, a greater focus on closing the divide with the ADF's sole supplier of resources will assist society to better understand the purpose and importance of the ADF, and the importance of the inputs that society can provide. With society defined as a FIC, its inputs can be managed in accordance with the *Defence Capability Manual* to ensure they are prioritised, resourced and managed effectively to deliver capability.

The significant skills, expertise, capacity and interest resident in society can be harnessed as inputs to support greater military capability. Even if a fraction of the total Australian workforce contributed only a small fraction of their time, significant inputs to capability could result. Society's input through the diverse range of activities listed in the previous section would either bolster existing but fragile military capabilities, or allow the ADF to focus on other capabilities in recognition that the expertise, innovation and capacity resident in society is greater than that able to be practicably generated within the ADF itself. This is not a theoretical argument. While historically, military innovations supported advancements in the civil domain, the opposite is now increasingly true: 'backyard' technological innovations developed by citizens are increasingly being adopted by the military (Cronin, 2020; Reuven, 2023). Society could generate inputs to capability at no cost to the ADF where individuals with the interest and initiative volunteered their time and procured any necessary resources through crowdfunding. Inputs provided by members of society would harness stereotypical Australian ingenuity and diversity of thought that has historically provided inputs to capability (Cole-Adams & Gauld, 2016, pp. 42–49). The result is greater speed to capability for the ADF and a greater military capability overall.

3.3. Competition as a social activity and the ADF's license to operate

By its very nature, competition is a social activity and hence is undertaken by societies. The arguments presented to this point are underpinned by a far more fundamental reality: competition is a social affair, enabled by society. The uncomfortable truth is that militaries do not fight wars: nations do. War 'is not a military activity conducted by soldiers, but a social activity that involves the entire nation' (Singh, 2011). The very existence of a military arm of Government is a demonstration that, both morally and philosophically, society supports the use of force to achieve national objectives. Society's enabling of the military is further demonstrated by the concept of a 'social contract' which requires individuals to surrender some of their natural freedoms in exchange for an authority's protection of their remaining rights (Gough, 1978). Such protection includes, arguably above all else, that against supra-societal aggressors (i.e., other nation states), which is the express domain of the military. A useful reframing of the social contract in the context of this paper is that members of society *have an obligation to enable military capability* for the purposes of their own protection. In other words, society has the right to a military, but it also holds a responsibility for its effectiveness. Not only should the ADF identify so-

ciety as a FIC to best draw on society as an input, *members of society are obliged by the social contract to act as a fundamental input to military capability*.

For any given circumstance, military operations are only possible when society provides a social license for the ADF to operate. Military effectiveness is underpinned by a society's culture and social structure, both of which shape how a society views its military (Brooks, 2007). The history of societies in both peace and war repeatedly illustrates military capability is weakened when society's support for its use declines (Larson, 1996). This demonstrates the fundamental nature of society's input to military capability in moral and philosophical terms: where a social license is not given, a military cannot operate effectively, if at all. The social license provided by society is maintained through trust, and trust is impossible without familiarity. Identifying society as a FIC will build greater and more durable levels of familiarity and trust, and hence strengthen society's social license, by enabling the ADF to engage more often and in better ways to draw out societal inputs, and also by allowing society to engage with the ADF more frequently through delivery of those inputs.

4. Perceived risks

Identifying society as a FIC is not an attempt to militarise the nation. Some commentators have claimed evidence of a long history of Australian militarism (Cheeseman & Kettle, 1990; Lake & Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2018; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2021). However, asking society to provide greater inputs into defence capabilities, even in peacetime, is not a step towards militarising the state. The ADF is already heavily engaging with society through industry as a FIC. Thousands of contractors play important roles in the design, development, test, maintenance, engineering and operation of the vast majority of defence capabilities, and there is little credible evidence that an Australian military-industrial complex has emerged. Engaging society to provide greater input to capability through a new range of activities would not therefore resemble any form of militarisation.

This paper espouses opportunities that are deliberately non-militaristic and far less fundamental in nature to the existing inputs already provided by society: funding, human resources and a social license to operate. If a 'military-societal complex' does not already exist, it is unlikely to emerge on the basis that society is identified as a FIC. Further, because engaging society as a FIC contributes to defence capability, it should be viewed not as a means of mobilising for war but as a mechanism through which an increased deterrence posture can be demonstrated, thereby reducing the chance of conflict occurring. Significantly, the ADF's engagement of society as a FIC also does nothing to alter the Ministerial and Executive control of the military, enshrined in the Australian Constitution (Constitution Education Fund, 2016; Stephen, 1983). Identifying society as a FIC will further militarise the military, not militarise the state.

5. Conclusion: the next FIC is out there

An alternative perspective to the argument presented in this paper is that military organisations are a FIC for society, insofar as the military is drawn from society to protect it, as society sees fit. While this conventional argument has merit, it is in truth only half the story. The ADF's current list of FIC is incomplete, being too inwardly focussed on what the ADF can exert direct control over. The ADF widened its perspective somewhat with the inclusion of industry as a FIC, however the aperture should be expanded further to include Australian society. Doing so will not credibly risk militarising society itself. It reaffirms the societal obligation implicit in the Australian social contract, and ensures the ADF can leverage the widest range

of inputs to deliver the best capability from what is ultimately a relatively small societal base. The current strategic environment places even more significance on the need to identify society as a FIC, to ensure capability is delivered in minimum time. General Sir John Hackett famously observed that society gets, in its armed forces, exactly what it asks for, 'no more and no less' (Hackett, 1984, p. 158). The reverse is also true: the military gets from 'its' society what it seeks. The ADF is not seeking enough. In failing to recognise society as a FIC, the ADF is not systematically engaging Australian society and the fundamental inputs that it can provide to defence capability.

Submitted: January 03, 2024 AEST, Accepted: March 18, 2024 AEST



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