Executive Summary

The United Kingdom and Australia have conducted several policy development processes since 1998 and several lessons can be learned from their experience. In so doing, this report focuses on three areas: a) public involvement, b) policy coherence, and c) political support.

Both countries maintain the standard practice of publishing separate foreign and defence White Papers and both have conducted reviews which have involved the public to an extensive and intensive degree. Going far beyond mere online exercises, Australia in particular encourage the participation of a wide cross-section of society, including state governments and serving military members. However, this public participation has not been well received in all quarters, as it has been associated with a politicisation of foreign and defence policy, rather than with a genuine desire to gain insight or information from sources outside government.

In each country, the departments of foreign affairs and defence have established a modicum of policy coherence, demonstrated by often sharing a common point of departure in the assessments of their country’s position within the international security environment. More could be done on this front, though, as illustrated by British and Australian progress in achieving coherence in domestic security; at the domestic level policy integration in both countries is enviable.

In terms of political support, both countries have been criticised for having too much ‘spin’ in the policy development process, especially when the reviews were conducted around the time of elections. While scepticism prevails, there is much to be said for political ‘championing’ of international policy: it can improve the chances of the policies receiving budgetary support, for example.
Discussion Paper

BACKGROUND

1. The policy development process is usually sketched out quite simply: with or without some kind of political direction or vision, policy staffs assess current strengths and weaknesses, seek out threats and opportunities, and produce documents meant to inform and guide the wide array of interested parties, from across government and the public. This process, so it seems, is done in relative isolation: separate from the remainder of whichever department is undergoing the process; separate from other departments; and separate from the public. Out of this sequestered ‘policy black box’ (using in the form of a specially established task force or working group) eventually comes a white paper, to be massaged and approved by the political chain of command, presented to parliament, and published, again with or without fanfare.

2. Whether or not this portrait is entirely accurate is beside the point: its component elements have been valid enough over time to be considered a reasonable approximation of the policy process as it now stands. However, perhaps against such a stylised backdrop, a new ideal has developed, comprised of two hallmarks. First, all policy should involve the public. Their opinions should be sought and their reactions gauged. The policy development process should be a consultative one. Second, national administrations should speak with one voice. The artificiality of departmental divisions should fade away and the ideal of ‘joined-up’ government should be realised. After this fashion, policy should be coherent. Indeed within the fields of foreign and defence policy, the calls for some kind of consistency are not new at all.

3. This shift in preference is not merely an academic one: many countries have developed policy in this way. Most recently, Canada has conducted Foreign and Defence policy consultations and it appears as if this trend will continue. Two countries which have made their mark in this regard have been the United Kingdom and Australia; their experience is of particular interest in the Canadian case for several reasons. First, they were extremely vocal in the championing of both consultation and coherence, especially in the British Strategic Defence Review of 1998 and the Australian Defence White Paper of 2003. Second, Canada shares a large part of its legislative and bureaucratic architecture with these ‘Westminster’ parliaments. Third, Britain and Australia have conducted several policy development-to-publication cycles in defence and foreign policy since 1998 and can, therefore, provide many lessons to be learned.

APPROACH

4. The aim of this paper is to highlight the lessons that can be learned from the recent defence and foreign policy white paper processes that have occurred in Britain and Australia.

5. In doing so, observations have been drawn from three sets of data:
   b. Interviews and correspondence with participants and observers of the processes surrounding the production of these documents; and
   c. Critical professional and academic literature from British and Australian journals and think-tank reports.
6. The resulting analysis will revolve around three issue areas:
   a. Public involvement in policy development;
   b. Coherence between defence and foreign policy; and
   c. Political support and involvement in the policy process.

UNITED KINGDOM

Public Involvement

7. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review perhaps set the standard in contemporary consultative policy development. An extensive and intensive 12 week consultation process was initiated. Several discussion papers were developed and input was sought from a number of segments of the British public: academics, parliamentarians, special interest groups (e.g. defence lobbies, veterans groups, think-tanks) and individual members of the public. Input was solicited in writing and workshops (usually involving small groups of experts) were convened. Since the SDR was styled as a baseline review, everything was on the table for discussion (with the notable exception of the strategic nuclear deterrent in the shape of the Trident missile program) and the submissions were wide ranging, dealing with all manner of issues related to the strategic environment to ‘quality of life’ issues.

8. Such a defence review had been promised by the Labour government in their election manifesto. As such their was a great deal of publicity surrounding the process. Many observers were expecting the Labour government to usher in severe reductions in defence. Much of the publicity focussed on the role that the public was playing in helping to determine the direction of British defence policy into the 21st Century.

9. In 2002, following the terror attacks of September 11th, 2001, the SDR was reviewed and ‘A New Chapter’ was produced. While not a comprehensive review, it was an examination of the assumptions and policies in light of the altered strategic environment. At the time it was viewed as a prudent measure, striking the correct balance between healthy reappraisal and timely action based on current capabilities. Given its shorter time frame (and less comprehensive scope) the New Chapter did not incorporate a lengthy consultation period. However, provisions were made for public input: a discussion paper with eleven key questions was produced and written submissions were accepted. Private consultations with experts did occur, but this was reduced from the level of the 1998 SDR.

10. Following from Labour’s commitment (and the unofficial parliamentary tradition) to produce a new White Paper every 5 years, 2003 saw the production of another defence policy statement. However, the scope of this document was affected much more by ‘events’ than by public input: lessons learned in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly with regard to issues of interoperability with the US, formed the core of the document. No public consultation was sought and very little expert opinion was solicited. The document itself was different than other White Papers in that it was quite short and spoke mainly in generalities rather than spelling out detailed equipment, doctrinal, or force structure changes.

11. Within Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), there have been public consultations in the past (most notably the establishment of Panel 2000 to help define what Britain’s overseas image should be) but they have not been tied to specific policy documents. The first foreign policy white paper issued by the Labour government (in the form of the FCO Strategy) was
issued in late 2003. It involved no public consultation, although the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw has said he “wants the Strategy to be the beginning of a process of debate, not the end.”

12. Reactions from people from outside government involved in these processes have been mixed. Many academics involved in the 1998 SDR were sceptical of the value of their input. Some commented that since their was so much ‘squabbling’ amongst those providing input at workshops that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) officials’ reaction was one of horror and bemusement, rather than appreciation. In terms of public input for the most part the impression (note: there were no accurate statistics published as to the nature and number of submissions) is that most of the submissions were from special interest groups and contained information and perspectives that were already available to the MOD. Again, impressionistically, many feel that the more private consultations that occurred with defence analysts (from academe and think tanks) were more influential, but it is difficult to validate these claims. Finally, given that Labour had promised public input into the process and were weary of being seen as ‘soft on defence’ (by virtue of history and a perception of a ‘left of centre’ political bent), it is likely that public participation was an exercise in risk management and public relations more so than an honest ‘fact finding’ one.

Policy Coherence

13. Foreign and defence policy within the UK are not written together; that is, two separate development processes are followed and two separate white papers are produced. There are however, some signs of coherence. First, the ‘world view’ espoused by both departments is quite similar; they both see weapons of mass destruction and failed states as the most serious challenges in facing the UK. Second, and more concretely, the FCO and the MOD share several objectives, and also share targets for meeting those objectives, as spelled out in their Public Service Agreements (part of the departmental business plans). In areas such as international security, the two departments have formally established that there are interdependencies and have agreed to work together in pursuit of common goals.

14. Of interest (but outside the scope of this paper) are the efforts made across the UK government to address issues relating to terrorism. The publication of a national crisis response plan, with input and responsibilities from a number of departments, indicates a high degree of policy integration, at least at some levels, and on certain issues.

Political Support

15. As mentioned above, when the Labour party came to office in 1997, it put a great deal of stock in promoting its defence policy and ministerial and prime ministerial support was evident throughout the process. The same can be said for the promotion of the concept of ‘ethical foreign policy’, an election platform promise and one that was touted by then-secretary Robin Cook and Prime Minister Blair. The concept remained a concept as it was never formalised in a policy document and since the Kosovo campaign of 1999, the term has faded from official public discourse. The various white papers mentioned in this report were tabled by the appropriate departmental minister and not the prime minister.

AUSTRALIA

Public Involvement

16. If the British SDR experience of 1998 set the standard for public involvement, then the Australian experience of 1999 raised the bar. In preparation for the 2000 Defence White Paper, the Australian government under John Howard launched a public consultation round like no
other. Not only was public input encouraged, it was actively facilitated. Akin to a royal commission, the Defence Community Consultation Team (DCCT) was established under the leadership of Andrew Peacock, a former ambassador to Washington (and former leader of the Liberal Party). The commission met for 9 weeks, travelling the length and breadth of Australia. A discussion paper was produced and the DCCT, according to its own published statistics, met with or received submissions from a wide cross section of interested parties (See Table 1). Twenty-eight special ‘town hall’ type sessions were arranged for the general public (with over 2000 people participating), and workshops were established not only with academic analysts, but also with industry members and, interestingly, serving military members and state governments. The findings of this process were published separately from the White Paper, although it is possible to find a great deal of concordance between the documents.

Table 1: Statistics on DCCT Public Consultations

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<th>DCCT INTERFACE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Website visits</td>
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<td>Discussion Paper (downloads)</td>
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<td>5,316</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone calls</td>
<td>3,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissions</td>
<td>1,157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. The DFAT White Paper and the Defence Update of 2003 were produced with some public input, but no where near the level of the 2000 Defence White paper. Ostensibly this was due to the dramatic situation produced by the events of September 11th, 2001, October 12th, 2002 (the Bali bombing which killed nearly 200 tourists, including 7 Australians) and the US led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq; the mandate for international defence and security was at once more clear and more controversial.

18. Again, reactions to the political consultation effort are mixed. While it is acknowledged by most that the process scored high on the ‘democratic participation’ scale, the jury is split over the question of the degree to which this input actually mattered. Sceptics believe that the process was an attempt to ‘politicise’ the matter of foreign affairs, and in so doing, reinforce the ‘tougher’ stance advocated by the Howard government and the (conservative) Liberal/National party coalition. As one academic observer noted, “Australia’s international relations always influence Australian domestic politics… As the general public’s awareness about global threats returns, foreign policy is the centre of attention. Australia’s domestic politics now increasingly influence Australian international relations.” Another was even more vociferous in his analysis, “John Howard wanted a khaki election…The Howard government, caring little for foreign policy, has made little effort to understand it, viewing it primarily through a domestic political lens.” Others had already picked up on this ‘new logic of foreign policy, more strongly determined by domestic politics and a vision of Australian values than anything that has come before.” Similar to the British case, and despite the assertion by the CCTS that 80% of their submissions came from ‘ordinary Australians’, many observers remarked that much of the discussion was from the ‘usual suspects’ (the ‘same old ratbags’, to cite one colourful remark), each supporting their own pet cause or issue area.

**Policy Coherence**

19. Australia publishes separate white papers for defence and foreign affairs; there is no overarching ‘national’ strategic policy for the country. In this regard, foreign policy is seen to be the ‘master’ policy, setting the context within which defence policy is to be devised. In the latest policy round, the DFAT white paper was published in January 2003 and the Defence Update
appeared after a long delay, long enough to prompt the defence department to downplay its significance in a ‘frequently asked questions’ section of their website. However, whatever the significance of the dealing, there are apparent signs of coherence. In terms of security policy, for instance, DFAT and Defence both share the same estimate of the main challenges to Australia: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, and global terrorism. This simple coherence/repetition of priorities signals that both departments are working from a shared starting point. Australia made a point of stressing that the 2000 defence white paper was developed and approved by the National Security Cabinet Committee (which is comprised of the Prime Minister (chair), the Deputy Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Defence, and the Attorney-General).

20. In the area of counter-terrorism, Australia demonstrates even more coherence than the United Kingdom. The publication in 2003 of a national counter-terrorism plan with roles for federal and state authorities, including coordination across several departments, demonstrates the degree to which this issue is interpreted as a ‘whole of government’ problem.

**Political Support**

21. If the scepticism noted in paragraph 18 is valid, then it is no surprise that the defence white paper, while signed by the defence minister, was presented to parliament by the Prime Minister. In his accompanying statement, Howard underlines that fact that the published defence policy is meant to be viewed alongside other policy (foreign, economic, and social) as an indication of Australia’s development as a country, at home and abroad. Not only did the prime minister support the defence policy but the leader of the opposition’s comments were included in the online version of the defence update, reinforcing the notion of ‘cross-party’ support for Australian security issues post-September 11th, 2001 and October 12th, 2002.

**CONCLUSIONS and ISSUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- **Public participation is not a ‘good’ in itself; quality of information counts.** It is not clear what value public participation generates. Some observers see the involvement of the public, with the concomitant fanfare, as a means of politicising the issues. Consultation with experts, on the other hand, has been seen by some to be more meaningful. However, if the public is not engaged, the negative political perception—that the policy development process is a closed shop—is equally unhelpful. In many cases, the viewpoints of academic analysts and think tanks is made publicly through conferences and reports; facilitating this process on an ongoing basis may help balance the pratfalls presented by the extreme positions outlined. It is interesting to note that in both countries the first policy reviews following elections involved the public, while subsequent reviews were less publicised and the role of those outside government was significantly reduced.

- **Policy coherence is not often explicit.** In the two countries considered here (and with the addition of Canada) there is no overarching ‘international policy’ articulated at the national government level. Separate White Papers for defence and foreign affair are the norm. While this practice certainly allows governments to focus on providing the necessary level of detail to departments, some kind of national strategy, including a vision of how diplomacy, trade, development, defence, immigration, intelligence, and national security (perhaps along the lines of the Global Affairs committee portfolio) work together would be useful. If this ‘keystone’ document set the agenda and context for the subsidiary department strategies, unnecessary overlap and conflict could be avoided. The current claims to a ‘Three D’ (diplomacy, development, and defence) policy lack the coherence that a unified national policy statement would bring.
• **Political involvement in policy is generally seen in a negative light.** Cries of ‘spin’ and ‘electioneering’ abound when politicians become involved in the policy process. However, without political support, policies are more easily ‘orphaned’. If a national vision were developed politically, departmental consideration might be most productively focussed on creating enabling strategies that contribute to the realisation of that integrated agenda.

• **National security and international security cannot be separated.** In both the United Kingdom and Australia, matters of national security are not divorced from international security. Strong roles exist for the departments of foreign affairs and defence in both these countries for the development and execution of policy meant to secure and protect national citizens and interests. While domestic departments are given the lead in this area, the international agencies are not relegated to ‘service provision’ tasks.

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**Notes:**