



**GAME OF DOMINOES:  
AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY  
AND THE COLD WAR  
1947-1991**



# THE RAAF & COLD WAR

## The nuclear Option



# COLD WAR – GLOBAL

COLD WAR – More than Nation State vs Nation State vying for control of global agendas.

- Proxy Wars

- Conflict Zones

  - Nationalism & European and Japanese decolonisation

  - Nationalism through the lens of competing political ideologies

- United Nations Commitments

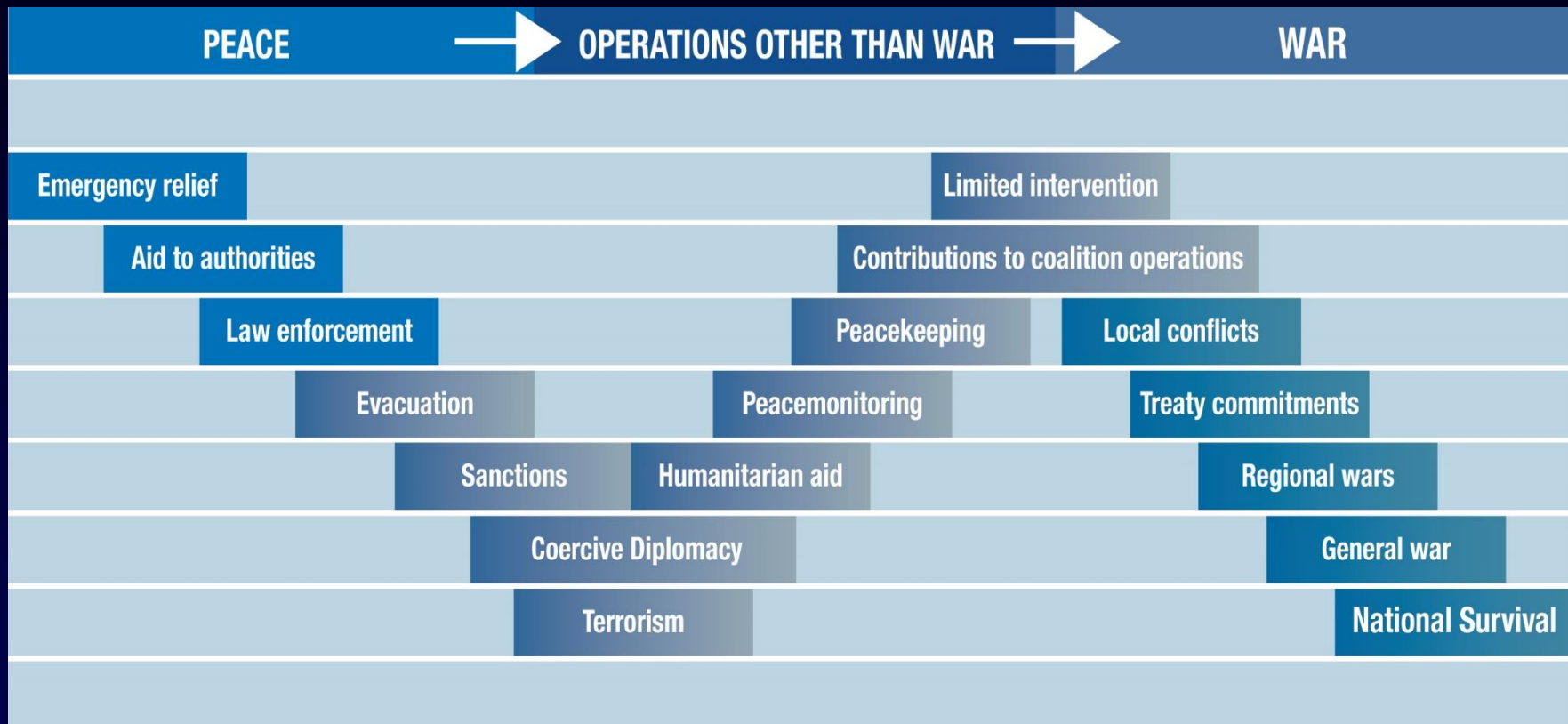
  - Peacekeeping & Peace Enforcement

  - Humanitarian & Disaster Relief

Every element of world affairs influenced, overshadowed or complicated by the Cold War protagonists.



# SPECTRUM OF CONFLICT





# RAAF SPECTRUM OF CONFLICT 1947 - 1958

- Indonesian/Dutch East Indies – 1947 UN Mission.
  - Berlin Air Lift – 1948-49
  - Korean Unification – UN mission 1949 +
  - Korean War – CAS, Interdiction, CAP, AME, Airlift
  - Malta – NATO 1952-54
  - Malayan Emergency
- All while maintaining commitments to national defence.





# RAAF of the 1950s

- World War II legacy platforms & weapon systems
- First generation jet fighters
- Second generation jet fighters & bombers
- Emerging capabilities such as ASW & Airlift typified by the Neptune & Hercules aircraft.
- Support to British nuclear testing.
- Diversifying workforce – diversifying thinking.
- RAAF College educating officers attuned to 'next gen' opportunities.



# RAAF Strike Capability

- Avro Lincoln
- EE Canberra
- WWII technology bombs & bombsights





# RAAF of the 1950s

## The nuclear option

The challenge for the RAAF – how does it sustain an affordable strike capability suitable for employment across the spectrum of conflict?





# The Problem

## The Australian built Canberra Bomber

- RAAF's sole modern bomber & primary strike platform
- Max bombload 3600kg to 4500kg pending configuration.
- Only 48 available for operations.
- Mean bomb error of 250 metres from 13 000 metres alt./50 metres from 900m alt.
- No meaningful strategic weight & limited tactical effect.





# The Problem

## Strike Operations Across the Spectrum of Conflict

- Experience of RAAF Lincoln operations in Malaya Emergency demonstrated the difficulties in the employment of strike aircraft in counterinsurgency conflicts
- In high end war, the RAAF's 48 Canberra with extant weapon systems would only be effective as part of a larger UK or US force.

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# The Solution

- Re arm with atomic bombs suitable for tactical and strategic deployment.
- Minimal yield & capable of carriage by Canberra bombers.
- If a suitable weapon could be identified, RAAF CAC Sabre acft could also be adapted for employment on or near the immediate battlespace.
- Such weapons could be used under extant SEATO concepts of operations.



MK 7 Thor (USAF) or 1,650 lb. H.E. M.C. in RAF service

Variable yield: 8 – 61 kt.



# The Influencers.

Professor Earnest Titterton, the Foundation  
Chair of Nuclear Physics ANU

- 1953 brief to Gov't on the employment of tactical nuclear weapons
- Brief indicated that targets are enemy beach-heads, fleet concentrations and rear area bases.
- 12 weapons would be sufficient for national defence.





# The Influencers.

Bernard Brodie - Lead author and editor of *The Absolute Weapon*, the 1946 analysis of the threat and impact of atomic weapons on US national defence and strategic policy.

*The Absolute Weapon* was provided to Sheddon et al with Titterton's brief in 1953.

*"the retention of traditional armed forces as a means of positioning the atomic armed forces to best advantage while simultaneously imposing limitations on adversary targeting options and weapon delivery systems"*





# The Influencers.

Air Marshal Sir Donald Hardman (RAF) – RAAF CAS 1952-54. Reorganised the RAAF into functional commands and institutionalised RAF air power doctrine in the RAAF thinking. In March 1957 the RAF Manual AP 1300 *Operations* was adopted as the RAAF's air power doctrine.

*"the basic weapon of the Air Force is the bomber, and the basic strategy of Air Power must be offensive"*

RAF Manual AP1300  
Operations 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Edition 1950



*"attacks by a long-range nuclear bomber force could be so devastating...a country could not long survive..."*

RAF Manual AP1300  
Operations 4<sup>th</sup>  
Edition 1957



# The Results – Option is on the table

- 1956 the Minister for Air, Athol Townley initiates nuclear weapon discussions (Scherger, DEFMIN McBride & Defence Committee)
- 1956 US policy announcement - willing to supply allies with nuclear-capable systems but would retain control of weapons.
- March 1957 – RAAF adopts RAF air power doctrine which includes nuclear strike.
- September 1957 Scherger seeks weapon options from UK RAF CAS.
- September 1957 Menzies announces that Australia would not become nuclear armed in the short term.
- September 1958 – Scherger in UK, reviews UK nuclear weapon capability. No suitable/affordable weapons identified.
- 1958 – Scherger discusses options with CoS USAF. Suitable weapons were identified in broad terms but US policy was still an issue.



# The Denourment

- 1959-1961 – The perceived need for nuclear weapons recedes due to community attitudes & maturation of ANZUS.
- June 1961 Australia's Chiefs of Staff Committee formally agreed that there was no immediate need for an independent nuclear capability.
- 1963-68 RAAF F-111C acquisition program does not pursue nuclear capability.
- 1966-1971 RAAF No 2 SQN demonstrates ability for low level precision strike during Vietnam War.







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