

12TH ICCRTS
“Adapting C2 to the 21st Century”

Title: “Metacapability: how to think about and beyond defence force capabilities”

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Abstract

Capability development (including C3 systems) is a central activity of many modern national defence forces, including the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The focus has been on producing an “optimal” force, ideally maximising the effectiveness of the force while minimising the cost to government. Capability-Based Planning is the current paradigm used by the ADF for force development. It attempts to avoid simplistic platform replacement and premature specification of solutions by crafting the “answer” in terms of operational or effects-based outcomes. However, this is still usually done within defined boundaries, such as a threat of known composition or a predefined set of possible futures.

The question of the beneficial attributes of the force or its subsystems has generally been secondary to this process of optimisation but the dual challenges of rapid technological change and broader, more complex operational requirements are putting pressure on traditional force development paradigms. A different approach, hinted at within the domains of complexity science and network-centric warfare, more closely examines these attributes, such as agility and adaptability. These are not capabilities but ‘the ability to change capability’, or so-called ‘metacapabilities’. In a companion paper, the paired concepts of capability and metacapability are discussed. In this paper, the concept of metacapability is introduced with specific emphasis on its implications for the C3 system.