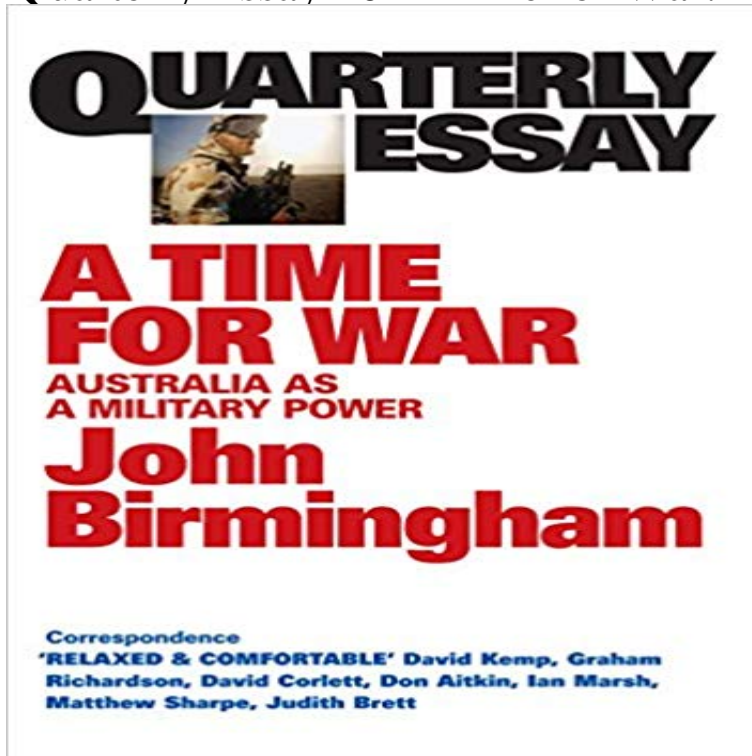


## Quarterly Essay 20 A Time for War: Australia as a Military Power



In *A Time for War: Australia as a Military Power*, John Birmingham ponders the Australian way of war. After East Timor and Bali, a combination of primal fear and primal ambition has transformed attitudes to our region, to security and to war as an instrument of politics. Australian defence policy has become more assertive and our armed forces are being radically restructured and hardened. Australia now has the capacity, and even the will, to act as a military power in its region. *A Time for War* begins with a gripping account of Operation Anaconda, the 2002 battle in Afghanistan to which Australian special forces made a crucial contribution. Birmingham also looks at our war dreaming: the sanctification of Anzac Day and the eclipse of the Vietnam Syndrome. Ranging from Sir John Monash to Peter Cosgrove, from Rudyard Kipling to *The One Day of the Year*, he finds that our armed forces can now do no wrong, and that politicians have taken note. The new militarism is not simply a response to September 11, he argues it marks a deeper shift in the culture. It being an RSL, we would stand each night at six o'clock for the prayer of remembrance. It was always a moving occasion, a strange suspended moment when the pokies and racing channel, the piped music and the drunken bullshitting all fell away. Friends from overseas who witnessed the quiet ceremony never failed to be impressed. One, a poet from Czechoslovakia, had always thought Australians to be a shallow, soulless, materialistic people, but she changed her mind after her first experience of the ode to the fallen among the half-empty schooners and chip packets. John Birmingham, *A Time for War* Like many of us, Birmingham loves our warriors, but is much less sure about our wars. Hugh White John Birmingham's books include the cult memoir *He Died with a Felafel in His Hand*, *Leviathan: The*

Unauthorised Biography of Sydney and the fiction series Weapons of Choice. He is the author of two Quarterly Essays, Appeasing Jakarta Australias Complicity in the East Timor Tragedy and A Time for War Australia as a Military Power. He is a regular contributor to the Monthly.

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