Australian Maritime Strategic Thought 2013–2023

Edited by Justin Jones
Sea Power Centre – Australia

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Our mission is to:

- promote understanding of sea power and its application to the security of Australia's national interests
- contribute to regional engagement and the development of maritime strategic concepts
- facilitate informed discussion on matters of maritime security and strategic affairs.

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Cover image: POIS Yuri Ramsey, *HMAS Hobart Departs Sydney Harbour to Begin Her Mariner Skills Evaluation Period*.

Australian Maritime Strategic Thought 2013–2023

Foreword

Our minds are our sharpest weapons. Reading and critical thinking provides ammunition for our minds. Thus, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this volume on Australian maritime strategic thought covering the last decade. Ten years ago, a series of seminars around Australia provided the basis for a book titled *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives*. This collection of papers did indeed become a 'rich vein on which to draw our collective understanding of maritime strategic thought from a whole-of-nation perspective', as the editor had hoped. This book commemorates the tenth anniversary of that publication, and several of the original authors have contributed reflections on their thoughts.

Readers will notice themes of both change and continuity: the more things change, the more they stay the same. Our backyard, the Indo-Pacific, highlights this. The strategic environment has changed, but our commitment to a rules-based order and to our partners and allies, and our geography, has not. As Peter Jones reminds us, Australia is a maritime nation; we are the fifth largest user of shipping services in the world, with maritime trade accounting for over 99 per cent of our imports and exports by volume. Under the sea are the seabed cables that enable our communications, financial transactions and access to trading markets. Our economic wellbeing and our national power is derived from the sea. Thus, national power is synonymous with sea power.

I am pleased that a set of fresh perspectives is included in this volume. The essay topics are diverse and include: critical seabed infrastructure, nuclear stewardship for nuclear submarines, and Australia's southern flank: Antarctica. All of these topics are compelling for maritime strategists and readers as we look toward our future.

I would like to thank Rear Admiral Justin Jones RAN for his original initiative in leading the Maritime School of Strategic Thought project in 2013 while director of the Sea Power Centre – Australia, and for conceiving of and again editing this tenth anniversary follow-up. I also thank all the contributing authors to this volume. It is another diverse set of perspectives from which we can follow the development of Australia's maritime strategic thought.

Vice Admiral Mark Hammond AO RAN
Chief of Navy

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Acknowledgements

The idea to bring together another collection of papers to commemorate the tenth anniversary of *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives* came quite late in the year and with a shortened time frame for prospective authors to contribute. I am appreciative of all the authors for their quick and, without exception, enthusiastic response to the invitation to submit.

I'm grateful to Ray Griggs, Michael Evans, Geoffrey Till, Peter Layton, Chris Rahman, Alexey Muraviev, Peter Dean, Ian Langford and David Letts for taking the time to reflect on their original essays. Peter Dean was a member of the 2022–2023 Defence Strategic Review team, and his paper reflects his insight from that study.

I am thankful for permission from the Australian Naval Institute to publish an edited version of Professor Michael Wesley's 2012 Vernon Parker Oration. In 2013, I quoted from Michael's speech in the introduction, and it seemed apt to include the substantive speech in setting the scene for this edition. Looking back, Michael made some prescient observations that are well worth the re-read. In granting permission, the President of the Australian Naval Institute, Vice Admiral Peter Jones AO DSC RAN (Retd), offered to provide an overview of the evolution of Australian maritime strategic thought since Federation – an offer I accepted gratefully.

I thought it useful to marry the series of reflections from 2013 with a range of fresh perspectives on issues of maritime strategic relevance to Australia in 2023. The 2013 book contained papers from across maritime 'industry', covering tourism, transportation, fuel security and hydrography. In this edition, the maritime industry's view is covered by Angela Gillham, and I therefore decided to situate her paper amongst fresh perspectives. Thanks also to David Brewster and Sam Bashfield, Euan Graham, Liz Buchanan, Maria Rost Rublee and Bec Strating for offering to submit papers on their topics.

Whether one of the originals, or new, each of the contributors to this book dedicated valuable time in their busy lives to make a thoughtful contribution. The product is all the better for their diverse array of expertise and perspectives. Alas, with such a considerable pool of talent contributing to the book, any errors or omissions must be mine.

Thanks must go to Captain Alastair Cooper RAN, Director, and the staff of the Sea Power Centre – Australia for their part in the broader production of the book. In particular, my thanks to Dr Liz Buchanan, Head of Navy Research, without whom this book would not have been possible, given competing priorities.

Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Terrie, for her love and support over the course of a career that has necessitated long absences. Juggling the editing of a book alongside my current three roles must have seemed quite absurd.

Rear Admiral Justin Jones CSC RAN
Canberra, 2023

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Introduction

Justin Jones

> Australia's own connections with the world will continue to rely on our sea lines of communication.[1]

Writing the introduction to *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives* in 2013, I pondered whether 2012–2013 might come to be seen as a watershed period for maritime strategy in Australian strategic thought. The arrival of the tenth anniversary of the book seemed an appropriate moment to explore that question. This revisit did not involve a seminar series. Instead, a smaller group of the original authors was called upon to reflect on their original contributions. The authors were asked to consider what assumptions and arguments held true. Where did their assessments diverge? What are the implications of shifts in Australian thought? What are the key themes today, looking into the future? Before coming to the contributions to those answers, it is useful to recap briefly the evolution of maritime strategic thought over the ensuing period.

Over the last decade, there has been a series of high-level documents published that contribute to the evolving strategic narrative in Australia. Three years after the 2013 Defence White Paper's inaugural application of the term 'Indo Pacific', the 2016 Defence White Paper placed Indo Pacific economic transformation, the nature of the US–China relationship, and the stability of the rules-based global order at the centre of its strategic outlook. The associated Defence strategic interests were familiar: a secure, resilient Australia; a secure nearer region, encompassing maritime Sout-East Asia and the South Pacific; and a stable Indo-Pacific region and rules-based global order which supports our interests.[2] Note the emphasis on 'maritime' South–East Asia and the South Pacific, rather than a simple geographic delineation. The following year's foreign policy white paper continued the maritime theme.

In 2017, the government published a rare foreign policy white paper, describing its purpose as 'to chart a clear course for Australia at a time of rapid change'.[3] Maritime underpinnings were evident, the word itself appearing 34 times in the paper, along with a dedicated section on safeguarding maritime security, from which the opening quote is drawn. Peter Dean's contribution unpacks in more detail the maritime aspects of the foreign policy white paper. A time of rapid change was a prescient assessment, as only three years later, and four years on from the last defence white paper, the government determined the need for a defence strategic update.

The 2020 Defence Strategic Update was promulgated under the rationale of a significant deterioration in Australia's strategic environment. It noted accelerated military modernisation, expanded cyber capabilities, major power competition, decreasing confidence in the rules based global order, and expansion of grey-zone activities amongst the reasons for such a degraded environment. Its new policy framework directed that Defence be able to 'deploy military power to shape our environment, deter actions against our interests and, when required, respond with military force'.[4] Concurrently, it tightened the focus for planning onto the 'immediate region: ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific'.[5] Maritime remained an emphasis, with Defence directed to expand its regional cooperation in maritime security. Most significantly, the 2020 Defence Strategic Update terminated the long-held expectation in Australian defence planning of 10 years' strategic warning time. A change of government in 2022, with attendant electoral promises, necessitated another defence paper, this time in the form of a strategic review.

The Labor government's *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023* outlined a regional balancing strategy, retaining the focus on Australia's immediate maritime approaches, underpinned by the need to 'focus its force' and move to a strategy of denial.[6] This may prompt a reappraisal of longstanding Australian maritime doctrine, given the Navy's assessment in 2010 that:

> Because Australia is an island continent fundamentally dependent upon the sea for communications, and because it exists within a region equally dependent upon the sea, it is control rather than denial which more closely bears upon our national situation. Denial retains a place, but sea control operations ensure that Australian response options are not constrained and will be required whenever our national freedom of action is threatened.[7]

Noting Peter Dean's analysis of the *Defence Strategic Review* within, no further comment will be made here.

In terms of maritime strategy, one paper stands out. The *Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy* was published in April 2022. It is a comprehensive document, covering the 'problem set' of Australia's maritime domain, vision, interests, and strategic drivers. It defines civil maritime security as:

> advance[ing] and protect[ing] Australia's interests by actively managing non-military risk to Australia and Australia's maritime domain. Effective civil maritime security ensures Australia's ongoing ability to exercise its sovereign rights and obligations across all activities that occur within or affect our maritime domain.[8]

The strategy deliberately draws a distinction between civil and military maritime security and, by inference, strategy. This is the document's drawback. The delineation between peace, competition, crisis and conflict involves grey areas. In the Australian context in particular, Maritime Border Command is the multi-agency taskforce charged with civil maritime security, yet it is regularly involved in harder-edged national security activities, noting the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and broader Australian Defence Force's contributions to the mission. As Geoffrey Till has noted, 'these good order tasks are rising both in relative importance and in scope and difficulty'.9 With that in mind, we can turn to our examination of a maritime school of thought over the last decade.

Professor Michael Wesley's full Vernon Parker Oration from 2012 opens Part I: Setting the Scene in this edition. In 2012, Michael had recorded his surprise at the lack of maritime imagination in Australia and, therefore, the substantive speech—with a good number of prescient observations—is included here. Following is a paper on the evolution of Australia's maritime strategic thought since Federation by Vice Admiral Peter Jones AO DSC RAN (Retd). While this book is focused on the last ten years, it is helpful to understand the preceding history of our nation's maritime thought. Vice Admiral Ray Griggs AO CSC RAN (Retd), the instigator of the 'third way' as chief of Navy in 2012, then reflects upon his original speeches and the maritime school of thought. The final paper for Part I provides the current view from the top. Vice Admiral Mark Hammond AO RAN, Chief of Navy, outlines his direction for the Navy, framed by the Defence Strategic Review. Familiar themes emerge in 'diplomacy, deterrence and defence'—missions that have occupied navies for centuries and show no signs of fading.

In Part II: Reflections, a series of the original authors tackle the questions described above. Professor Michael Evans leads with another sophisticated appraisal of the state of maritime strategic thinking in Australia. He is 'less confident that Australia will embrace a genuine maritime strategy'. Geoffrey Till writes through the lens of 'future proofing' the RAN, noting that 'meeting the requirements of both soft and hard maritime security will remain a particular challenge for the RAN, given the sheer size and complexity of its maritime domain and the manifold threats it faces'. Dr Peter Layton examines the two strategies Australia has recently adopted, the strategy not chosen, the implications that arise from this shift in Australian strategic thought, and the two key contemporary trends that might inform a 2033 successor to this chapter. Dr Chris Rahman returns to his theme of the 'inescapable ocean', concluding that in 'designing policy and strategy for Australia's geopolitical environment, the maritime context literally is inescapable'. Dr Alexey Muraviev takes a broader approach to assessing our progress, in particular proposing a national maritime Culture strategy. Dr Peter Dean provides incisive insight into the Defence Strategic Review from the inner sanctum of the advising and writing team, highlighting that 'the security of Australia's maritime approaches is essential to its national survival, peace, and prosperity'. A view from the cockpit was unable to be replicated for this book, however Brigadier Ian Langford DSC and Bars (Retd) reviews his original perspective of land forces in a maritime strategy, concluding that our 'amphibious forces now need

further evolution; future capabilities must include an ability for other domain forces, to include the land force, to contribute beyond the amphibious system only and deeper into the DSR-inspired ADF future maritime strategy'. Professor David Letts rounds out Part II with a review of the legal standpoint, noting that, if anything, the legal dimension has become more clouded.

Part III: Fresh Perspectives incorporates a range of new authors. Some review the original book; many tackle new topics. Angela Gillham opens Part III with an industry view. She draws attention to the influence of climate change since 2013, and reinforces the importance of the role of merchant maritime industry for Australia. Dr David Brewster and Sam Bashfield explore the prominent absence from A Maritime School of Thought for Australia: Perspectives—critical seabed infrastructure. They argue that it is time for this topic to receive sustained attention. Dr Euan Graham reviews the original book papers, suggesting that Australia may not need a maritime strategy as much as a 'national maritime narrative, at the political level, that can serve to educate and persuade the Australian public of the links between national prosperity and the integrity of the international maritime system'. Dr Liz Buchanan provides another perspective missing from the 2013 book: Antarctica and our southern flank. In the wake of the AUKUS announcements and, in particular, the government's decision to acquire nuclear-propelled, but not armed, submarines, Associate Professor Maria Rost Rublee provides an important examination of nuclear stewardship. The final paper amongst our fresh perspectives is from Professor Bec Strating, who explores broader Australian maritime security strategy. In her view, explaining the importance of the maritime domain to Australia's national interests is an essential project.

Amongst the contributors to this book, views on Australia's successful adoption of a maritime school of thought range from the enthusiastic to the pessimistic. One aspect is immutable, as highlighted by Peter Jones: 'since Federation, Australia's maritime strategy has been the product of competing demands and tensions'. This remains evident today, given the aspirations of the Defence Strategic Review and the modest resources at the disposal of the Department of Defence. The one paper in Part IV: Conclusion is by Captain Alastair Cooper RAN, Director of the Sea Power Centre – Australia. He attempts to summarise the arguments contained herein. In his own words 'the most significant challenge for an Australian Maritime School of Strategic Thought will be to most closely match and represent Australian national interest'. He concludes that the Maritime School of Strategic Thought has had a good start, but will require an enduring commitment and development.

Perhaps the reader can determine whether 2012–2013 might come to be seen as a watershed period for maritime strategy in Australian strategic thought.

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[1] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, Australian Government, 2017, p 47.

[2] Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2016, pp 16-17.

[3] Foreign Policy White Paper, p 1

[4] Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, Australian Government, Canberra, p 6.

[5] 2020 Defence Strategic Update, p 6

[6] Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, pp 33-34.

[7] Royal Australian Navy, *Australian Maritime: RAN Doctrine 1*, Australian Government, 2010, p 81.

[8] Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy, Canberra, 2023, p 3.

[9] G Till, Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century, 4th ed, Routledge, p 355.

Part I: Setting the Scene

2012 Vernon Parker Oration

Michael Wesley

This paper is an edited version of the 2012 Vernon Parker Oration to the Australian Naval Institute.

Australia is an island continent washed by three of the world's largest oceans, and to its north by an extended maritime archipelago. Its non-indigenous population all arrived having crossed the seas that wash its coasts.

It depends on trade with the outside world for its prosperity – this year Australia's trade dependence, or the proportion of its GDP dependent on trade, will be a substantial 38%.

And yet Australia has no deep maritime tradition at the core of its national culture.

Our national anthem concentrates heavily on Australia's land – abounding with nature's gifts, of a beauty rich and rare, with golden soil and wealth for toil, and boundless plains to share.

The sea gets all of two mentions – our home is girt by it, and we're happy to share with those who've come across it. In popular culture, also, we think of the bush rather than the sea.

The military traditions we celebrate tend to be those of the army rather than the navy. This is odd, considering that the culture we've come from – Britain – has a rich and deep maritime tradition at its core.

For the British, the sea is central to their sense of self. Britons came to see themselves as a uniquely talented seafaring people. From the Armada to Trafalgar to the Falklands, British naval prowess was taken as a sign of a natural maritime superiority, of God's sign that the British were a people chosen to take stewardship of the oceans.

When Kipling wrote of the sea, he evoked a deep yearning of the British soul:

> Who hath desired the Sea? – the sight of salt water unbounded –
> The heave and the halt and the hurl and the crash of the comber wind-hounded?

As Britain constructed its maritime empire, it believed that this was an empire unlike any that had existed before. Whereas land-based empires are authoritarian, Britain's was maritime, free, Protestant and commercial.

Despite the fact that modern Australia was founded as an act of maritime strategy, and so much of our history has been shaped by sudden shifts in maritime power, Australia has not crafted a strong maritime culture at the core of its sense of self.

We've not produced a Joseph Conrad or a Herman Melville – an Australian writer who has told us maritime stories about ourselves as a country in a way that has shaped our sense of who we are. And I worry that without a well-developed maritime imagination, Australia will struggle to comprehend the challenges it will face in the coming decades.

Just recently, we were presented with a crystal clear vision of the future of our maritime environment when my Lowy Institute colleague Hugh White laid out this challenge in his inimitably clear and elegant prose in a new book, The China Choice.

Hugh describes the rising power of China, and the dilemma this presents to the United States and its allies in the Pacific. He argues that the growth of China's military and commercial power poses a direct challenge to the easy predominance the United States has enjoyed in Asia and the Pacific.

This is a challenge of a different order than that of the Soviet Union, which could never compete with the United States in the economic realm.

Hugh argues that the United States is therefore faced with three choices: it can choose to confront China and try to see off its challenge, it can withdraw and leave the field to Beijing, or it can negotiate a power sharing deal with China in the Pacific.

Unsurprisingly, *The China Choice* has touched off furious debate within Australia and beyond, particularly in the United States. In a manner that must have his publishers licking their lips, Hugh has managed to divide foreign policy thinkers within Australia's political parties.

Launching *The China Choice* at the Lowy Institute last week, former prime minister Paul Keating said, 'For my own part, I have long held the view that the future of Asian stability cannot be cast by a non-Asian power – especially by the application of US military force'.

Just three days later, from the same lectern, Defence Minister Stephen Smith disagreed with his old boss, saying 'In Australia's view, the United States has underwritten stability in the Asia-Pacific for

more than the past half century and will continue to be the single most important strategic actor in our region for the foreseeable future, both in its own right and through its network of Alliances and security relationships, including with Australia'.

Here is a dilemma that goes to the very heart of Australia's strategic and foreign policy. It is a divide that is deep and passionate.

On the one side are those who argue that the answer to the challenge of a rising China is to invest in maintaining the US alliance system's predominance in Asia. Maintaining an unchallengeable position of strength will make it prohibitively costly for any rising Asian power with aspirations to regional leadership. On the other hand, any sign of a weakening or disinvestment in the US alliance system will provide great temptation for regional powers to fill the vacuum, ushering in a period of debilitating power rivalries in Asia. The stability and certainty provided by a robust US alliance system will ensure continued prosperity, a condition that will encourage potential challengers for regional dominance to accept the continuity of Asia's security order.

On the other side are those who argue that confronting a rising China will lock it into an antagonistic confrontation with the US and its allies. China must be worked with, rather than against, they argue. It must be given a stake in regional norms and institutions, and accorded space to expand into. A China with a stake in the region will see the most powerful country in Asia with a vested interest in the region's stability.

Between these two is a third option, a hedging strategy, involving the judicious combination of alliances and regional institutions. By investing in the alliance system, and thus raising the costs to a challenger, the United States and its allies can deter China from mounting a serious challenge to the status quo.

The counterpart to this 'hard' balancing is 'soft' engagement through regional institutions, in which the deeper engagement of China will help socialise Beijing into an acceptance of the status quo.

The rationale of hedging is to soften the confrontational aspect of hard balancing, while closing off China's other options to being socialised through regional institutions.

These are clear policy options, and they cover a wide gamut of behaviours and suggestions. I can't think of another major strategic conundrum that has attracted such stark and diverging policy solutions. Each of them – predominance, accommodation and hedging – carries within it a clear implication that the other options would be catastrophically mistaken.

The advocates of predominance argue that even the slightest suggestion of ceding ground to China, as advocates of accommodation and hedging suggest, will simultaneously dishearten allies and encourage Beijing to increase its demands.

Advocates of accommodation argue that a predominance strategy or a hedging strategy will socialise an antagonistic China. Hedging theorists are convinced that predominance without socialisation will antagonize a powerful foe, and that socialization without strength will open Asia's weak institutions to manipulation by Beijing. Despite these deep disagreements, there is one thing that all of these options share: a belief that powerful countries such as China and the United States will respond rationally to the incentives they are presented with. The predominance strategy is based on an assumption that countries will always respond to overwhelming military superiority by backing down and playing by the rules. The accommodation strategy assumes that countries will respond responsibly and with gratitude when others make space for them and show them respect. Hedging assumes that a complex mix of superiority and accommodation will channel the foreign policy of a rising state down a channel of acceptance and then investment in the status quo.

These seem to me to be very momentous bets, particularly given that even a cursory reading of international history suggests that states do not always respond rationally to the incentives they face. Indeed, it's not at all hard to think of countries that have acted wildly irrationally, with major consequences for all concerned.

The reason, of course is that strategy and foreign policy are the products of politics, and politics can be a deeply irrational process. It was that greatest of all naval strategists, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who once wrote:

> To understand in the best sense, it is necessary not only to recognize the interests of a nation, but to enter as well into its feelings ... The sentiment of a people is the most energetic element in national action. Even when material interests are the original exciting cause, it is the sentiment to which they give rise, the moral tone which emotion takes, that constitutes the greater force. Whatever individual rulers may do, masses of men are aroused to effective action – other than spasmodic – only by the sense of wrong done, or of right to be vindicated.

If Mahan is right – and I think he indeed is – the two great protagonists in the Pacific are unlikely to respond to each other like chess players or that great fiction, homo economicus.

I believe there is a great deal of evidence that both China and the United States are already acting according to deep, historically ingrained impulses and images of the Pacific. Their visions of how the Pacific Ocean has affected them, shaped them, sustained and threatened them, have become fundamental to the countries that America and China are today, and will be into the future.

These historical-cultural experiences mean that Washington and Beijing don't approach their strategies in the Pacific anew every day, but that their understandings of what is possible, desirable and unacceptable in the Pacific are deeply rooted in their senses of self.

Both China and America began as small civilisations a long way from their respective Pacific coasts, and for each country, the incorporation of its Pacific coast into its expanding terrestrial empire had a profound impact on it.

Unlike during the Cold War, when the aims of the United States and Soviet Union were largely a mirror image, the contest for the Pacific has Washington and Beijing playing different games, with different objectives and different rules, on the same playing field. It is this situation that is particularly dangerous. It means that a common language, a common set of understandings, and a common set of procedures for managing crisis will be very difficult to achieve. And it means that these are two great powers that are highly unlikely to respond rationally to whatever incentive structures exist. Because the Pacific lies at the core of China's and America's sense of security and self, neither side will be easily persuaded to moderate its claims.

So should we just sit back and watch the region and the world slouch toward oblivion? I don't believe so. Because the equation in the Pacific – and indeed in the Indo-Pacific – is much more complicated that just China versus America. China is not rising alone. The narrowing of the productivity gap between the developed and emerging economies – a development that my colleague Mark Thirlwell calls 'the great convergence' – is occurring in other substantial economies also: India, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand.

China is rising in a neighbourhood that is both crowded and jealous. Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia and India – with a combined population of almost 2 billion people – are not about to buckle under and live under Chinese regional hegemony. For that matter, the three largest of these countries – Vietnam, India and Indonesia – didn't much like the idea of American hegemony either. It is in the growing complexity of the power politics of the Indo-Pacific – the constantly shifting and cross-cutting partnerships and rivalries that are already developing – that the region's stability lies.

I believe it is the alternative – a bilateral contest between China and the United States – that would be the most dangerous scenario. But with a region of half a dozen jostling powers, both Beijing and Washington will be forced to moderate their objectives and temper their rivalry. From the other direction also, it will be in the interests of other regional countries to keep America and China engaged in the region.

For Australia, this means moving past discussion of a binary choice – America or China, security or prosperity. For Australia, the answer must be America and China – and Indonesia, and India, and

Vietnam, and Japan, and Korea, and so on. Our diplomacy and our strategy must become more creative, more flexible, more variegated.

We must draw inspiration from our maritime environment – the unconquerable sea, so bountiful to those who listen to its rhythms and logic, so frustrating and dangerous to those who try to impose different rhythms and logics on it. Perhaps this is the century in which Australia must embrace and listen to its maritime soul:

> The heave and the halt and the hurl and the crash of the comber wind-hounded.

The Evolution of Australian Maritime Strategic Thought

Peter Jones

> Maritime strategy is the direction of all aspects of national power that relate to a nation's interests at sea.
>
> Professor John Hattendorf[1]

A maritime strategy provides the intellectual framework for how a nation, or nations, in an alliance or coalition, can assemble and employ its assets in a maritime environment to achieve a desired end state. That requires consideration of finance, geography, force structure, industrial capacity, workforce – both military and industry – and political enablers and constraints of all nations, including the potential adversary.

These strategies should be in play both in peace and war. Since late nineteenth century, there have been various strategic theorists, such as American Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, who wrote *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, and the British Sir Julian Corbett, who wrote in 1911 *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. Through their analysis of naval campaigns of the past, they tried to codify concepts such as blockade, sea supremacy, sea control and sea denial.

Since Federation, Australia's maritime strategy has been the product of competing demands and tensions. Some of these have been of a grand strategic nature, such as imperial defence policy or superpower competition. There has also been how a fit-for-purpose maritime strategy can be developed and executed upon in a quintessentially maritime environment, when Australia's navy is the smallest of the three armed services. In developing different iterations of Australia's maritime strategy, often the strategy and its underpinning force structure has fallen short due to insufficient fiscal and human resources as well as policy staying power.

In the early years of the federated Australia, our prime ministers or their representatives took part in a series of imperial defence conferences in London, which discussed imperial defence strategy and the underpinning required forces and expenditure. From the 1909 Conference was spawned the Fleet Unit concept. The concept, conceived by the British First Sea Lord Admiral Jacky Fisher, was

that of a Fleet Unit, each consisting of a battle cruiser, a clutch of cruisers, destroyers and submarines that could be stationed around the world to defend trade routes, shipping and hold off enemy forays until a battle fleet came if it was required to settle the manner. There are four take aways from this:

- The first point is that, when the first Royal Australian Navy (RAN) fleet entered Sydney Harbour on 4 October 1913, it was the first of these Fleet Units. Indeed, it was the only Fleet Unit to be constituted before World War I. Here was an alignment between strategy, force structure and professional capability. The concept proved itself the following year when Vice Admiral von Spee decided to avoid Australian waters with the German Asiatic Squadron because of its presence. Instead, he tried unsuccessfully to return to Germany via Cape Horn.[2]
- More broadly, the second point is that Australia was, and continues to be, dependant on sea trade for the maintenance of its society and for export earnings. Today, Australia is the fifth largest user of shipping services in the world. Its maritime trade accounts for over 99% Australia's imports and exports by volume and over 79% by value.[3] By the nature of this sea trade, our maritime strategy inevitably involved allies, and typically the preeminent maritime power of the age, be it Britain or the United States. As such, our forces had to be able to plug into that strategy and be interoperable with that navy. It was true in 1913 and it is true 110 years later.
- The third is that, while maritime campaigns could be global, and Australia would have to contribute warships to it, often away from Australian waters, there is still the need for local naval defence of coastal waters and ports.
- The final point is that the 1909 strategy adopted by the UK and Australia led to decisions about the composition of the Fleet. This strategy-led approach to capability development is arguably the most effective, both in terms of achieving the desired end state and also from a resource perspective.

In the wake of World War I, the global balance of power changed dramatically. Britain, while still the preeminent maritime power, was perhaps inevitably going to cede its position to the US. For Australia, the growing naval and military power of Japan was a particular focus. During the interwar period, Australia still developed its defence strategies and force structures within a British imperial context. Successive RAN chiefs of Naval Staff played important roles in trying to maintain this alignment, as well as argue for adequate resources from the Commonwealth for Australia to 'pull its weight'.

One example of this relationship was the Australian decision in 1924 to acquire the modern and large submarines *Otway* and *Oxley*. They were to be first of six boats. This squadron would complement a larger British submarine fleet based in Hong Kong and Singapore to act as the prime maritime deterrent against Japanese aggression.[4] In the end, the Great Depression not only led to the

additional boats not being ordered, but that the first two boats were transferred to the Royal Navy (RN) because of their operating costs.

Despite this setback, in the mid to late 1930s Australia developed coherent war plans and a core force that could protect its key ports and coastal shipping routes, while providing a small cruiser and destroyer force for a British-led global maritime campaign if war was declared.[5]

During World War II, Australia initially dovetailed most of its naval forces into the British-led global maritime campaign, initially against Germany. It retained what it judged sufficient forces for defence of local waters and ports. Once Japan entered the war, the allocation of forces shifted to the Pacific and US leadership. As Captain Alastair Cooper wrote 'World War II was a catalyst in the inexorable Australian dissociation from Britain'.[6] From a technology and maritime strategy perspective, the conflict had demonstrated the pervasive influence of airpower at sea. For naval leaders in the post-World War II period, such as Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, Australia had to possess offensively capable task groups to protect trade and exercise sea control in concert with allies. In 1948, Collins wrote,

> no war is won on defensive measures alone. We must have offensive weapons to use, particularly in relation to our commitments under the United Nations and as a member of the British Commonwealth. Our Light Fleet Carriers provide the offensive weapon and must retain first priority.[7]

A key element of this strategy was continued presence of RAN units in South-East Asia in the form of a two-ship commitment to the British-led Far East Strategic Reserve and an annual deployment by the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* and her task group. These forces regularly took part in regional engagement through such entities as the Five Power Defence Arrangement and the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization. These activities bore some fruit, as demonstrated by the effective employment of naval forces in the Korean War (1950–1953), the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960) and the Confrontation with Indonesia (1963–1966). The RAN, in particular, maintained high levels of interoperability with the US so that it would be readily able to contribute in any conflict with the Soviet Union.

This approach to defence strategy and force structure determination dominated the Cold War period until the end of the Vietnam War. It has been characterised by Professor Jeffrey Grey and others as the 'era of Forward Defence'.[8] The 1968 announcement of the withdrawal of British forces from east of Suez[9] and then, a year later, President Richard Nixon's articulation of the less interventionist Guam Doctrine[10] led to a reappraisal of Australian defence policy and attendant maritime strategy.

From that time there was a growing emphasis on Australian self-reliance and more focus on defence of Australia's immediate north. Vice Admiral Sir Hastings Harrington, for example, emphasised the need to control the 'sea–air gap' between Australia and the Indonesian archipelago.[11] The self-

reliance theme was clearly articulated in the 1976 Defence White Paper – Australian Defence – which said 'we owe it to ourselves to be able to mount a national defence effort that would maximise the risks and costs of any aggression' towards Australia.[12] From a maritime perspective, there was still the need, as articulated in the document, to contribute to regional security and to protect trade. This required forces able to exert sea control as required. Arguably, the decommissioning of the *Melbourne* without replacement in 1982 was the result of budgetary competition rather than any strategic realignment. The 1987 Defence White Paper – Defence of Australia[13] – whilst having more emphasis of the strategy of denial in the sea-air gap, still envisioned operations in the western Pacific in support of regional security. This approach was broadly followed in the post-Cold War era 2000 Defence White Paper – Our Future Defence Force[14] – which stated that defence of Australia and its approaches was the most important objective.[15]

An important aspect of these policy documents was the recognition for the Australian Defence Force to have a 'balanced force', so possessing a range of capabilities to meet expected as well as unforeseen contingencies. As the 2000 Defence White Paper said,

> The emphasis will be on a professional, well trained, well equipped force that is available for operations at short notice, and one that can be sustained over extended periods.[16]

While the emphasis was on defence of Australia, operationally, the RAN and the ADF more broadly were involved in a range of peacekeeping, peace enforcement operations Cambodia, Somalia, the Solomon Islands and East Timor, as well as two wars against Iraq and another in Afghanistan.

One of the most strategically driven RAN chiefs of Naval Staff was Admiral Michael Hudson. He created the Maritime Studies Program under the leadership of Commodore Sam Bateman, the forerunner to the Sea Power Centre - Australia. Hudson was seized by the need for the RAN to be a leader in the development and articulation of an Australian maritime strategy. This is evidenced in his many speeches on maritime strategy. A particular theme developed by Hudson and Bateman was the importance and application of maritime strategy in peacetime to promote national and regional security. The establishment and regular staging of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium involving regional naval chiefs was a tangible example of this approach. For his part, Bateman went on after his naval service to be a highly influential strategist of international standing. He notably promoted the importance of confidence building measures and the importance of the application of international Law of the Sea. As Professor Geoffrey Till noted, 'Sam Bateman was notable for the breadth as well as the depth of his interest in oceanic affairs. He was interested, and interesting, in everything to do with the sea'.[17] This all-inclusive view of maritime strategy was an important contribution to contemporary maritime thinking.

Since the early years of the twenty-first century, China has grown significantly in the economic and military power. By the 2020s, the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) was largest and the second only to the US Navy in terms of combat power. There are two particular areas of contention: the various territorial claims in the South China Sea and a threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. As a major maritime trading nation, Australia has seen fit to deploy RAN and RAAF units to maintain freedom of navigation in some of the disputed areas of the South China Sea.

The other important thinker on Australian maritime strategy was James Goldrick, who had served on Admiral Hudson's staff as his research officer. Like Corbett's, Goldrick's strategic thinking was influenced by a deep immersion in naval history. He would, however, evolve his writing on maritime strategy based on his growing experience at sea. This culminated in his command of the multinational Maritime Interception Force in the Arabian Gulf in 2002, where he was a Corbettian practitioner of the concept of blockade. Like Bateman, Goldrick was able to articulate the importance of maritime strategy in peacetime and, in particular, explain its importance in the contemporary world. One example was his analysis of Chinese 'grey zone' activities and his articulation of strategies to counter this challenge to the law of the sea.[18]

This return to great power competition has influenced recent Australian defence policy and attendant maritime strategy. This is crystallised in the Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR).[19] To stress the significance of the DSR, arguably, there have been only five major course changes in Australian defence policy in just over 100 years, and the DSR has initiated the sixth.[20]

So what maritime strategy and ADF is emerging? The DSR posits that Australia's strategic posture now has to:

- deter through denial any adversary's attempt to project power against Australia through our northern approaches
- defend Australia and our immediate region
- protect Australia's economic connection to our region and the world
- contribute with our partners to the collective security of the Indo-Pacific
- contribute with our partners to the maintenance of the global rules-based order.

With fiscal and human resources front of mind, the DSR has introduced two new concepts. They are:

- impactful projection. That is to say, an emphasis on long-range strike capabilities with an associated commitment for much greater local munitions production. The latter point is a clear lesson from the Russo–Ukraine War
- a shift to a Focused Force rather than the long-held notion of a Balanced Force concept.

In practice, what does this mean? The Navy will, in its mature state, will be spearheaded by the eight nuclear attack submarines, possibly up to a dozen destroyers and frigates, and supported for littoral work by missile-armed corvettes. The exact composition of the surface force will be made clear towards the end of the year.

Corbett and many other strategists have emphasised the importance of being able to resource and sustain a nation's maritime security. Indeed, settling on a force structure that is affordable, able to be delivered and can be sustained will be the greatest challenge for Australia in realising the aspirations of the DSR. To illustrate the point, no country or navy of its size has acquired or operated nuclear-powered submarines, even with the assistance of allies. It will require great discipline to streamline and standardise other areas of the Fleet and indeed the ADF. Otherwise, they will suffer when the significant non-discretionary costs of a nuclear-powered Fleet start to make themselves apparent. To illustrate this point, it is expected that, in its steady state, somewhere in the region of 15% of Australia's defence budget will be devoted to the eight submarines and their support organisation.[21] The departure from the balanced force concept is one response to affordability, but unless done carefully can open capability gaps that can be exploited by an adversary.

Conceptually, while there is focus on deterrence in the DSR through denial, by implication there has to be much more. The DSR highlights the need to protect Australia's economic connection to our region and the world. Clearly, its aspiration is to be able to exert sea control when desired. In addition, a country does not acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines for sea denial of its approaches. That is what conventional boats are for.

This doctrinal point was also picked up in a broader context by Rear Admiral Sudarshan Shrikhande and Rear Admiral James Goldrick in their 2021 paper *Sea Denial Is Not Enough: An Australian and Indian Perspective*.[22] Their focus was dealing with the challenge of Chinese maritime expansion. In part they said,

> The key problem lies in repeated suggestions that India and Australia should each adopt a "sea denial" strategy to deter China and structure their maritime forces accordingly. This essentially simplistic approach is unsound. It firstly too often reflects a landsman's idea of the world, confusing mechanisms for the domination of land areas with what is needed at sea.
>
> The sea is a dynamic medium. It cannot be garrisoned. Although terms such as "sea control" and "sea denial" have the potential to mislead the inexperienced, neither relates to dominion over an area of water for its own sake, but to the ability to use (ie. control) or prevent the use of (deny) the sea.[23]

Clearly, there is much more work to be done in Australia's metamorphosis to align strategy, force structure and resources. As the DSR stated, a whole-of-government approach will be needed to realise Australia's ambitious national security plan. Yet Australia is not alone in this endeavour. Its efforts share common features with other nation's emerging strategic responses. The UK's *Defence's Response to a More Contested and Volatile World*[24] and the US *National Security Strategy 2022*[25] are such examples. All these strategies share some similar attributes. They:

- involve a whole-of-government response
- have greater co-operation with close allies, such as AUKUS and newer partnerships, such as the Quad
- call for more integrated force structure and operational concepts.
- embrace new and evolving technologies and that includes artificial intelligence
- seek more sovereign defence manufacturing capabilities
- have a recognition that the men and women of the defence forces and their supporting industries have to be attracted, trained and retained in a competitive labour market.

For Australia, its maritime thinking has shifted in emphasis in the years since Federation. It has, however, been bound by its geography, the importance of maritime trade to Australia, its finite fiscal and human resources and the shifting balances of global power.

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[1] DM Stevens (ed), *In Search of Maritime Strategy*, Sea Power Centre – Australia, Canberra, 1997, p 13.

[2] Von Spee's squadron was largely destroyed in the Battle of Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914.

[3] Australian Naval Institute and Naval Studies Group, University of New South Wales, *Protecting Australian Maritime Trade 2022*, navalinstitute.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Protecting-Australian-Maritime-Trade-Report-2022-Final-version.pdf

[4] JVP Goldrick, 'Buying Time: British Submarine Capability in the Far East, 1919–1940', Global War Studies, 2015.

[5] Report, *Seaward Defence of Australian Ports*, Australia's Submission No. 290/196/, 7 February 1933.

[6] DM Stevens (ed), *The Australian Centenary History of Defence: Volume III: The Royal Australian Navy*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2001, p 160.

[7] Minute from Chief of Naval Staff to Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, *A/S Warfare,* 1 November 1948.

[8] DM Stevens (ed), *In Search of Maritime Strategy*, Sea Power Centre – Australia, Canberra, 1997, p 99.

[9] P Darby,'Beyond East of Suez', *International Affairs*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford University Press, October 1970, 46(4):655–669.

[10] *See* Richard Nixon, 'The Silent Majority' [speech transcript], Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. nixonlibrary.gov/forkids/speechesforkids/silentmajority/silentmajority_transcript.pdf

[11] W Harrington, 'Chief of Naval Staff Haul Down Report', 8 February 1965.

[12] Australian Government, *Australian Defence: 1976 Defence White Paper*, 1976, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p 10.

[13] *See* Australian Government, *Australian Defence: 1976 Defence White Paper*, Parliament of Australia, aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/DefendAust/1976

[14] Australian Government, *Our Future Defence Force: 2000 Defence White Paper,* Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 2000.

[15] Australian Government, *Our Future Defence Force*, p 30.

[16] Australian Government, *Our Future Defence Force*, p xiii.

[17] JF Bradford, J Chan, S Kaye, C Schofield and G Till (eds), *Maritime Cooperation and Security in the Indo-Pacific Region: Essays in Honour of Sam Bateman.* Koninklijke Brill, Leiden, 2023, p 426.

[18] JVP Goldrick, *Grey Zone Operations and the Maritime Domain*, ASPI Report, Canberra, 2018. ad-aspi.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2018-10/SR%20131%20Grey%20zone%20operations.pdf?VersionId=V7EA5lJx4eMZPm7rr9snXkXq8Q46O.Wg

[19] *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023*, Department of Defence, Australian Government, 2023. defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-strategic-review

[20] The five previous major course changes in Australian Defence policy affected the Navy as follows:

- The first: in 1912 the Australian government agreed to build one of the Jacky Fisher-inspired Fleet Units, based around the battle cruiser *Australia*. It was to be the only such Fleet Unit realised.

- In the inter-war period, Australia's fleet, now reduced to a squadron, once again was integrated in to imperial defence plans. The RAN had a handful cruisers, a destroyer flotilla of the standard RN type and were to acquire a flotilla of submarines to operate in the north-east approaches to the Indian Ocean. In the end, only two boats were acquired, only to be given to the RN due to scarcity of operating funds.
- During World War II, the RAN ships initially integrated into the imperial maritime defence but in the second half increasingly placed emphasis on its contribution to the US 7th Fleet. Its integration into this fleet and its ability to finally begin to operate effectively in the vastness of the Pacific is arguably the RAN's finest moment.
- In the post-war period, the RAN embarked on a transition that I think Corbett would have been proud of. It was based on an analysis of the war in the Pacific War. Once again, the Navy had to be able to closely operate with the pre-eminent naval powers. This construct served Australia well during the Cold War period.
- The fifth reincarnation of the RAN, in the 1980s, was into a post-carrier navy with, much like Canada at the time, the ability to deploy and sustain a destroyer- and frigate-based task group for deployed coalition operations. But unlike Canada, in addition the RAN's provided six conventional submarines as a useful contribution to allied submarine operations in the Pacific. In addition, ever since the 1970s, there was an appreciation that, by virtue of its regional geography, Australia needed a modest but capable amphibious force. It was not until the 2010s that this aspiration was finally realised.

[21] Jen Parker (host) and Dr Marcus Hellyer, 'AUKUS DSR and Australia's Maritime Capability', Saltwater Strategist (podcast), Australian Naval Institute, 4 April 2023. soundcloud.com/saltwater-strategists/22-aukus-dsr-and-australias-maritime-capability-dr-marcus-hellyer

[22] James Goldrick and Sudarshan Y Shrikhande, 'Sea Denial Is Not Enough: An Australian and Indian Perspective', The Interpreter, 10 March 2021. lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/sea-denial-not-enough-australian-indian-perspective

[23] Goldrick and Shrikhande, 'Sea Denial Is Not Enough'.

24 Ministry of Defence, Defence's Response to a More Contested and Volatile World, Defence Command Paper, Government of the United Kingdom, 2023. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171269/Defence_Command_Paper_2023_Defence_s_response_to_a_more_contested_and_volatile_world.pdf

25 National Security Strategy 2022, October 2022, White House.

Reflections on the Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Ten Years On

Ray Griggs

I want to start by thanking Rear Admiral Justin Jones for giving us cause to revisit this topic ten years on from publishing a collection of essays that gave some substance to the notion of a maritime school of strategic thought. The intent of this piece is to reflect on some of the factors that have been at play over the last decade and how they have influenced the ongoing utility of what was proposed. For Australia, there has been some significant geo-strategic shifts, some of our making and others that are not, and they alone demand reflection.

But before delving into the events of the last decade and their implications, it is worth going back to why I kicked off this debate in the first place, which ultimately led to the 2013 publication. The purpose of the Lowy Institute speech in August 2012, and the subsequent speech at the Land Warfare Conference in October of that same year, was to highlight the need to end the largely binary discussion between the continental and expeditionary schools of thought and propose a genuine third way through a maritime school of strategic thought and its connection to our national prosperity.

These speeches were given at a time when the Defence focus was very much on the campaign in Afghanistan, where tactical detail about operations at patrol bases in Uruzgan were more prominent than what was happening in the South China Sea. That is not to diminish the efforts of our forces who were fighting and dying on combat operations but to merely observe that perhaps a more embedded maritime strategic outlook may have led to a more balanced view at the time.

The key question is what has changed and what hasn't?

One thing that has not changed is the pervasiveness of maritime trade. In revisiting the indicators that were used back in 2013, the Liner Shipping Connectivity Index continues to show increases in coastal nations' connectivity, in Australia's case around a 15% increase. Container traffic growth has remained strong, from around 650 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) in 2013 to 866 million

in 2022. One shift that has not been positive though is the cost of container movement which, based on the Drewry World Container Index, increased more than fivefold during the COVID-19 pandemic. While it has settled back from its peak in mid-2021 and costs continue to slowly decline, it remains around 24% higher than at pre-pandemic levels.

If there was an event to reinforce the importance of maritime trade and its link to prosperity it most certainly was the COVID-19 pandemic. For Australians, it brought home the vulnerabilities not only of our own domestic logistics infrastructure but of the global just in time trading system itself. To me it further reinforced my view that our economic centre of gravity remains protecting our ability to trade. For a nation with our strategic geography, the pandemic perhaps started to chip away at the 'coastal mindset' that leads us as a nation to think we are girt by beach and not by sea.

It would not be right to dismiss the pandemic as one of those events that we had no control over and therefore mark it down as a one-off event with few enduring lessons. What it showed and reinforced is that our ability to trade can be targeted and disrupted and this could be used to devastating effect. The realisation that perhaps we had gone too far in the loss of some strategically important manufacturing capabilities and had allowed the allure of mega markets to overcome the enduringly sensible nature of a diversified trade portfolio has been welcome. The government's response on the importance of sovereign advanced manufacturing is encouraging, as is its desire to reinvigorate an Australian flagged merchant fleet.

There are, of course, challenges ahead in relation to the prosperity that we reap from our ability to trade. The move to net zero in carbon emissions will lead to a significant re-shaping of our export mix over the coming decades. Regardless of the pace of that re-shaping, there will be continuing demand for our exports in whatever form that may be going forward. Importantly, our need for imports will be unabated and the vast majority of them will still need to traverse the world's oceans.

Our reliance on the sea as a source of food has not changed; global aquaculture production has increased 30% over the period and global fish production has reached nearly 185 million tonnes per year. Fish and seafood generally remain a crucial component of global diets. Arguably, fish as a percentage of overall protein consumption will only rise as pressure on emission reduction in terrestrial agriculture builds in a net zero context. Our collective sustainable management of ocean resources from a food security perspective alone demands our attention as a genuine national and regional security issue. When set against the backdrop of changing climate and severe weather events, the threat to species, habitats and, importantly, fisheries infrastructure, are also first order considerations.

Another requirement we still have is for strong global maritime governance, whether that be from a fisheries, non-living resource extraction, biodiversity, pollution prevention and control, or broader environmental perspective. The notion of the global commons remains strong and this at times

works against some ocean governance initiatives, particularly when we focus on the high seas and those parts of the planet that lie beyond jurisdictional limits. This segmentation, whether it be jurisdictional or sectoral, is often unhelpful and works against taking an integrated approach to maritime governance. It remains an important component of any maritime school approach.

One of the prime pieces of maritime governance remains the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Now in its fifth decade of operation, UNCLOS remains pivotal from a maritime strategic and operational perspective. It has continued to be tested in the last ten years and, while any convention can be ignored by those who want to ignore it, it remains a remarkable piece of governance architecture. But the architecture will only be effective if there is the will to support it, to practice the rights and responsibilities within it and ultimately to enforce it if required. What we have learned, though, is that when you do not practice the rights inherent in a convention then you cede those rights over time and often to a point where re-assertion of them becomes politically difficult if not impossible. In the current environment, this presents as a vexed problem.

One of the biggest shifts in the last decade has not been in any physical domain but in relation to cyber activity. This absolutely has manifestations in all physical domains but some suggest that its non-physical characteristics render those physical domains subordinate in some way. Like most things that drive effects, those effects will have an impact in our physical world in some way and this is the way we need to think of cyber activity. Cyber doesn't diminish the need for a maritime approach but it has certainly stamped itself as an important feature of our strategic landscape.

It has intruded into the maritime domain more than was envisaged a decade or so ago where there was a certain sense that with well controlled and limited pipes into platforms at sea it could be managed and controlled. But as those pipes have opened up and with greater interconnectivity between ship systems and the link between those systems and ashore, both in a military and commercial context, the impacts are more significant. So too is vital port infrastructure, where the efficient functioning of port operations is key to the effective delivery of product and profitability of operations.

So, given all this, what has changed in relation to a third way?

I don't believe that our strategic debate in this country is as binary as it was ten years ago. One of the biggest drivers here is the adoption and embrace of the Indo-Pacific framework. I have always liked the term Indo-Pacific, rather than Asia-Pacific, as it focuses the mind on the two great oceans and the role they play in our strategic reality.

The 2013 Defence White Paper talked of the emerging Indo-Pacific strategic arc and articulated the need for a maritime strategy, and its 2016 successor reinforced the importance of a stable Indo-Pacific region and of secure northern approaches and proximate sea lines of communication (SLOC)

by elevating these issues as two of the three strategic Defence interests. In the Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR), the centrality of the Indo-Pacific is clear, as is the articulation of threats to our trade and supply routes given the importance of these routes to our economic prosperity. The discussion around national resilience in the DSR is one of the more refreshing ones in our strategic artefacts of late. Its inherent whole-of-nation focus is vital and reinforces the need for an integrated approach to the range of resilience related challenges.

In these three documents I believe we see a much deeper understanding of the issues which underpin the maritime school approach. However, we also see in the DSR a classic continental strategy of denial recommended as a formal strategy for Defence. The risk in a strategy of denial is that it is essentially geographically limiting. The DSR's focus on anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities, while importantly filling a clear force structure gap, potentially shifts our thinking away from the importance of the broader global trading system.

If you take a maritime school of thought approach, one of the key military force structure attributes it leads you to is capabilities with reach and endurance. The AUKUS agreement, and the plan to acquire nuclear powered attack submarines, is not only a seminal shift in our strategic approach but the embodiment of a capability with true reach and endurance. It is a bold, audacious and no-fail plan. Successive governments have acknowledged the enormity of the task. Both have committed to it because of the shift in strategic weight it provides for the ADF and the nation.

In some ways, though it sits uncomfortably with a strategy of denial and it will be important not to project a geographically constrained sea denial mentality to our thinking about submarine (or broader maritime) employment. For too long we tiptoed around talking about the offensive nature of our conventional submarine capability; my making that somewhat obvious point publicly whilst Chief of Navy was considered by some to be risky. The reality is that, with the investment that will go into the future submarine capability, we need to be able to articulate to Australians the full range of strategic options that it will bring to our national power toolkit. It will certainly mean that our capacity to protect our ability to trade, and therefore our prosperity, will be significantly enhanced.

Reach and endurance, though, cannot rest in the submarine capability alone, we cannot afford to lose the ability to reach parts of the global system where our interests and our economic centre of gravity can be threatened – be that on or over the sea, on the land, in space or in the cyber domain. This, of course, presents as a resourcing conundrum, as it always has, when trying to develop a practical and useful middle-power force structure.

Whilst our strategic circumstances are more challenging than they were ten years ago, this does not automatically translate into a greater national security allocation of the GDP pie. The prosperity we seek to defend and enhance serves a broader national purpose. Citizen expectations around the level of government support in areas such as health, aged care, education and the National Disability

Insurance Scheme have grown as you would expect in a nation as prosperous as ours. However, the pandemic has gifted us a long-term debt challenge which, when combined with a long-term demographic structural change and its impacts on the national economy, will add further pressure on delivering citizen's expectations. This means Defence capability and investment arguments need to be even more well honed and argued against the broader agenda of the government of the day. All too often the realities of domestic and social-policy aspects of the budget are waved away, at least subconsciously, in the Defence planners' minds.

The purpose of this piece was to reflect on and survey the issues raised a decade ago. I believe the fundamentals and the need for a third way remain. There is no doubt that the changing geo-strategic circumstances have pushed us away to an extent from the old binary discussions. However, a bit like as in international law, if you don't use it, you lose it, so the need to keep articulating the case for, and the practice of, a maritime school of strategic thought remains constant.

Diplomacy, Deterrence and Defence

Mark Hammond

This paper is an edited version of a speech made at the Royal United Services Institute, London, on 27 Apr 2023.

In 2022, diplomatic efforts to prevent the invasion of Ukraine failed. For over 80 years, we had an ordered world, governed by agreed upon rules in a unipolar power dynamic. Now, the world is less ordered, rules of fairness are being challenged and the global power dynamics is trending multipolar. Thus, in 2023, deterrence and defence are, again, of global concern. The tenor and vibrancy of conversations around defence planning today indicates increasing determination to get diplomacy and deterrence right – to delay or prevent a need to focus on defending our nations with force. I submit that this stems from increased pressure on the rules-based order – the array of rules, treaties, norms and conventions that has underpinned security, prosperity and defence planning for decades.

The catalyst for these concerns can be debated, but, Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine, and its wanton disregard for civilian casualties and the laws of armed conflict, has reminded us that peaceful coexistence of nations is dependent on adherence by all nations to a set of rules, norms and principles that bestow equal rights to all states, not solely those large and powerful enough to enforce their will.

When powerful nations choose to ignore these rules, disregard diplomatic solutions and advance their interests by force, it is necessary to acknowledge the limits of diplomacy and to consider other options to safeguard national interests. After all, that which is a vital interest and cannot be assumed, must be assured. Absent the assumption of universal adherence to a rules-based order – which has arguably underpinned peace, security and prosperity since World War II – nations who can afford the investment look to other means to assure their security.

This is the context that has driven the Australian Government's Defence Strategic Review, the outcomes of which will ensure that Australia can assure its security amidst these challenges.

Australia and the Rules Based Order

Australia is the custodian of the third largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the world. Including the Australian Antarctic Territory, our EEZ comprises ten million square kilometres. We are the twelfth largest importer globally; our reliance on importing has continued to rise since the decline of our manufacturing industry from the 1970s. Thus, we are a three-ocean, island trading nation whose prosperity is derived from the sea lanes that sustain our maritime trade. Under the sea, fibre optic cables, often only as thick as a garden hose, are what secures our access to global financial markets and the internet. Our 1.5 trillion-dollar annual economy, including roughly 900 billion dollars in imports and exports, is dependent on the high data rate these seabed cables provide.

We live in an interconnected maritime region that is being reshaped, and our strategic environment is becoming more challenging. In short, it is becoming more dangerous and volatile. The Indo-Pacific is now home to the largest military build-up anywhere in the world in the last 70 years.

While we do not question the right to invest in and develop defence capabilities, I submit that such development must be done transparently, and with strategic reassurance, to allay concerns and suspicion fuelled by misunderstanding of intent.

Australia desires a region characterised by a strategic balance. A region where major powers contribute to economic prosperity and underpin regional security, and where international law and the sovereignty of all states – big and small – are respected.

It is now the Australian Government's view that enhancing our own defence capabilities will be essential for reducing the likelihood of conflict in our region.

And as a three-ocean nation dependent on seaborne international maritime trade, cutting edge naval capabilities are now particularly important for Australia.

Patrolling this vital terrain and maintaining watch over the modern data highways powering our nation is a key mission for our Australian Defence Force – especially our Navy.

We are a peaceful middle power, and we seek to avoid conflict through diplomacy by enhancing our effective partnerships with our neighbours and friends.

Regardless, we also seek to deter conflict by investing in capabilities that might deny nations efforts to impose their will against our interests by force, by imposing the prospect that such action would result in costs disproportionate to any possible gain. So, our approach to deterrence involves much more than just military capability.

Today, more than at any point in my career to date, the Navy is an integrated part of a whole-of-government approach to protecting Australia's interests, along with those of our allies and partners.

Deterrence is achieved by the Australian Defence Force through employment of credible military power, but also through supporting proficient statecraft and diplomacy. After all, collective power, as likeminded partners and friends, is more impactful than individual power.

This approach reflects the reality that a nation's security, and its ability to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous region, requires government to effectively harness all elements of national power, and that Defence strategy must be nested within this grand strategy. It is this context that has driven our nation to focus on developing a national defence strategy in the coming year, rather than relying on occasional white papers to describe our region and frame our defence planning. And I contend that this strategy must successfully grapple with the erosion of sanctuary formerly provided by geographic isolation.

A few words on Australia, the tyranny of distance, and the implication for the Royal Australian Navy.

Both the tyranny of distance, and protections offered by distance, have been central to defence policy in Australia since Federation. However, with technological advances and our reliance on our connection to the international community, distance no longer provides the protection it once did. Australian historian TB Millar observed that:

> Australia is a Paradox: the geography which make it difficult to invade and conquer Australia, also make Australia dependent upon seaborne trade. In other words, Australia might not be vulnerable to invasion, but the hostile power does not need to invade Australia, to defeat Australia.

In the intercontinental ballistic- and cruise-missile age, the concept of range is changing, and missile defence – and offence – is now a vital capability. Globalisation and the development of long-range conventional missiles means that the sanctuary provided by geographic isolation has been eroded – for Australia and for the rest of the world.

It is in this context that using a simple framework of diplomacy, deterrence and defence in discussing Australia's naval power allows our people to understand how their actions contribute to the national interest.

Diplomacy

The employment of a country's naval forces is a visible expression of its government's interests, priorities and national identity. We see this today in the operational cycle of our Fleet which is deliberately crafted to reflect government priorities and to project our national identity and values

into the region. Our Navy is a modest one, and where and when we deploy our ships is a conscious choice driven by assessments on the impact our projection of capability will be viewed with regard to our national interests.

Today, there is an expectation that the Australian Navy is constantly present in regions of strategic interest to Australia and that we are focused on enhancing international relationships and progressing national interests. This expectation leverages a key naval strength. Our ships are effectively floating embassies. Our ships and our people are present where our national interests are most acute. We support our embassies and high commissions – on and from the sea - across the Indo–Pacific, working to deepen our regional partnerships and to promote appreciation for and adherence to the rules-based order.

In this context, the surface combatants of our Navy continue to be a vital, visible expression of our national interests. We need them, but we need them to be capable of long-range operations across our region, and we need them to be capable of impactful power projection – for diplomacy, deterrence and defence missions. The Defence Strategic Review recommended a complete review of the size and lethality of the Navy's surface force – a review which will result in changes announced by government in 2024.

However, Australia's submarine forces are ill-suited to diplomacy roles. They fulfil a different function. They are the centrepiece of our deterrence strategy and are an essential capability for defending our nation from threats on and under the seas through the provision of ambiguity and credibility.

Deterrence

Credible naval power – wielded wisely, integrated with all other elements of national power, interoperable and visibly partnered with likeminded nations – illuminates the risks of conflict in the minds of those who would consider using force at or from the sea to achieve their aims. For an island trading nation, submarines are an essential cornerstone of deterrence.

Their very strength – stealth – limits their utility in a diplomatic role but enhances their effectiveness as a deterrence capability. A nuclear-propelled submarine adds the advantages of speed, reach and unlimited endurance – adding longevity to our arsenal. Add to this a lethal array of torpedos and missiles and you realise the potential to strike at sea and land targets with little to no warning, across the entire maritime domain. These unique attributes make them a powerful deterrent to states that might consider using force at sea to compel our island nation to act against our interests. This 'potential lethality' is difficult, and very expensive to counter. It ultimately raises a difficult question in the minds of those who might mean us harm. Is the loss worth the gain? And if deterrence fails?

We should all shudder to think about what a capable nuclear submarine force could do to opposing maritime forces, or to an opponent's maritime trade.

National Defence

But what is national defence? The Ukraine experience is instructive. National defence has phases – phase one being surviving and not losing. National defence is about survival first, victory second and then acceptance of a new normal at some point in the future.

When diplomacy and deterrence fail to discourage an adversary from using force to further their aims, conversations between governments turn violent. As Clausewitzian scholars would note, war is merely the continuation of politics. At this juncture, violence continues until one side loses the economic means, the resources, or the will to fight.

Through this lens the realities of Australia's economic dependency on the maritime domain, and the challenges it poses for our capable but modest Navy, now come sharply into focus and, I expect, will be a key focus of our new national defence strategy.

Australia's prosperity, following in the great British tradition, is reliant on free access to the maritime domain. Adherence to the array of treaties, laws and norms that constitutes the rules-based order has, since World War II, assured that maritime nations like ours have equal and unfettered access to the sea lanes and maritime commons upon which global prosperity depends.

But in a contested environment, this freedom of access – and the security and economic wellbeing of law-abiding maritime nations – is increasingly uncertain. In this context – and in the foundational spirit of RUSI – I will invoke a historical perspective to look for some guidance.

Writing in 1948, official First World War correspondent CEW Bean reflected on the historical abnormality that until 1914: 'British command of the sea had given us in Australia 126 years of [peace and] freedom without fighting for it'.

We took the deterrence and protection provided by the Royal Navy for granted.

Despite the advocacy of the first professional head of the Royal Australian Navy, Vice Admiral William Creswell, for a more capable Navy, and the RAN's obvious utility during the First World War, Australia was to become more dependent on the Royal Navy. We relied on the Royal Navy to deter aggression between wars, and at the commencement of the Second World War our Navy was smaller than it had been at the outset of the First.

The Royal Australian Navy's high rate of losses – including seven of the pre-war strength of only 13 warships by 1942 – then punctuated by the sinking of the Royal Navy's mighty HMS *Prince of Wales*

and *Repulse* of Force Z off Singapore in December 1941, highlighted the inadequate size and strength of our Navy, and the failure of our strategy of reliance on a great and powerful benefactor to deter aggression and military adventurism.

Yet since 1942, through the Cold War and its aftermath, we have relied on the might of the United States Navy to underwrite the rules-based order as guarantor of an accessible maritime commons. And like the Royal Navy of the 1930s and 1940s, it is not as large as it used to be, it is pulled in many directions and it cannot be everywhere all the time.

These lessons of history resonate as we again seek to contribute meaningfully to the peace and prosperity of our region as a trusted and capable partner. And it is this context that underpins Australia's pursuit of a more lethal submarine capability and an integrated defence force designed for impactful power projection, whose future structure has been illuminated by the Defence Strategic Review – the results of which constitute an inflection point for the Royal Australian Navy.

The AUKUS agreement which first flagged the intention to replace our Collins-class diesel electric submarine with nuclear propulsion – I stress, not nuclear armed, the recently released optimal pathway to introduce that capability to the Australian Navy, and the Defence Strategic Review are all reactions to a world which has changed markedly in the last three years.

One of the fundamentals of military planning is understanding changes with respect to their impact on critical vulnerabilities, and I think that in Australia, like many other countries, the obstruction of the Suez Canal by the *Ever Given*, the impact of COVID-19 on global supply chains, and the impact of the Ukraine invasion have heightened public awareness of our economic dependencies and increasingly influenced public conversations.

The decisions announced by the Australian Government reflect the rapidly changing regional strategic circumstances in which Australia finds itself. These circumstances demand that Australia be able to generate national power capable of deterring coercion or violence against our vital national interests, and capable of defending them should deterrence fail.

The risks that this entails are very real and sharpen our focus. I am particularly conscious that it is our sailors and officers who find themselves at the forefront of tactical interactions in the South China Sea tied to strategic discussions between nations.

Since the Second World War, the might of the US Navy and adherence by most nations to the rules-based order has enabled development of an interconnected world, fuelled by sea trade, and animated by the data transmitted via undersea cables. This rules-based order developed slowly and ultimately allowed hundreds of millions of people be lifted from poverty in recent decades. To paraphrase my

good friend Admiral Pierre Vandier: while peace has encouraged a degree of disarmament, disarmament has not assured ongoing peace.

So, the decades of peace wherein Australia could largely rely on the strength of a single, friendly, great power to safeguard the rules-based order has been replaced by competition between major powers, with the associated risk that the interests of other nations may be determined by their position on the hierarchy of power rather than their rights recognised under law.

But today, we are more dependent than ever on maritime trade and therefore on the stability afforded by adherence to the rules-based order. The bulk of imports and exports arrive in Australia by sea. The bulk of the data which enables our connection to the international economy travels by seabed cables.

These supply routes, the cables and infrastructure under the sea are therefore our vital terrain. As such, we seek the continued freedom of the sea so that Australia, and all maritime nations, may prosper and be secure.

But we are not alone in our dependence on the sea. Most Indo-Pacific nations are maritime nations. To paraphrase our foreign minister, Senator the Honourable Penny Wong, Indo-Pacific nations share a responsibility to maintain peace through diplomacy, we also have a responsibility to play our part in collective deterrence of aggression.

Australia's *National Defence* approach seeks to effectively employ all elements of national power – military, diplomatic, economic and strategic – integrated and focussed on imposing an unacceptable cost on military adventurism against our national interests.

One of my predecessors, Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, captured this nicely:

> Fear of the consequences of that Naval power is what deters armed adventurism. Our ability to deploy decisive lethality to sanction anyone who might wish to use armed force against our nation and its interests deters conflict and contributes to maintenance of peace and security around the world.

So, having established the maritime context within which Australia thrives, I will finish by summarising the Defence Strategic Review findings with respect to what Australia will do to enhance our diplomacy, deterrence and defence capability.

The Australian Department of Defence and Australian Defence Force will be refocussed on a strategy of deterring an adversary from projecting power through Australia's northern approaches and we are investing in capabilities to hold an adversary at risk at greater ranges from Australia.

Investments in the maritime domain include upgrading the existing and future surface combatants with long range guided weapons such as Naval Strike Missiles, Standard Missile 6 and Tomahawk Land Attack Cruise Missiles.

Additional investments are also being made in sea mines, uncrewed air, surface and underwater systems – which will act as force multipliers complementing our crewed systems.

And while the nuclear-powered submarine program will be a centrepiece of Defence planning from this point forward, we will conduct an independent review to determine the optimal and complimentary force mix for our surface navy to inform developments of the next generation Fleet. Across our services, we aim to achieve a constellation of credible capabilities to assure our security.

Australia's intent to transition our submarine force to a nuclear-powered platform is a clear expression that our government must have the ability to create hesitation in the mind of those who would consider initiating conflict with Australia.

It presents a strong deterrent to unilateral alteration of the status quo. It contributes to Australia's ability to be a trusted and capable partner to our friends and allies. Ultimately, it means for all our friends and partners that we are stronger together.

The Australian foreign minister Penny Wong has captured the calculus of diplomacy and deterrence eloquently:

> We must ensure that no state will ever conclude that the benefits of conflict outweigh the risks. This is fundamental to assuring the safety and security of our nation and our people. Our foreign and defence policies are two essential and interdependent parts of how we make Australia stronger and more influential in the world. Together, they make it harder for states to coerce other states against their interests through force or the threatened use of force.

In Conclusion

The oceans we rely upon are vast, and only nuclear powered submarines are near invisible and possess the endurance to appear almost anywhere in the battlespace. It is the right investment or our next generation submarine capability. Whilst I acknowledge that nuclear-powered submarines alone do not represent the totality of a nation's naval power, and are not the solution to every challenge facing our national security, nuclear powered submarines are nevertheless an important capability that our nation is acquiring to work with our allies and partners in deterring potential adversaries in our region and protecting all of our national interests. As history demonstrates time and time again, weakness invites armed adventurism, not the reverse.

The introduction of a next-generation nuclear-powered submarine capability, and enhanced strike capability in the guise of Tomahawk and Naval Strike Missile for our Navy, mark intent to shift away from a balanced ADF structure towards a much more focused design to impose an unacceptable cost on a potential adversaries' aggression or to deter them from unilateral alteration of the status quo.

National defence is not, and cannot simply be a military endeavour. Proficient statecraft and diplomacy to build relationships and partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and beyond, working with economic, strategic and military domains under national leadership is key to deterring violence.

Australia's reliance on the oceans to connect us to the world has always meant that the Australian Navy and our people are active across our region, and indeed across the globe, for over a hundred years.

Today, this role as active diplomats remains core business to the Australian Defence Force, and is in the DNA of our Navy, and our officers and sailors.

However, that is not the role of our submarine force.

The recent Defence Strategic Review has reinforced that there is an inextricable link between the security of our seas and the prosperity of our nation.

For Australia, we face the unavoidable reality that a nation dependent on the sea and seabed for its economic wellbeing must be capable of defeating threats on, over and under the sea.

Having said that, we are 'all in' on a strategy of diplomacy and deterrence because, to quote Professor Sarah Paine of the US War College:

> There is only one win-win solution. It is to share the oceans, trade in peace, and continue to hash out universal rules that we can all live by.

Part II: Reflections

A Question of Choice: Further Reflections on National Culture and the Development of Australian Maritime Thought

Michael Evans

In 2013, my essay in *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives* explored the cultural challenges facing the development a national maritime strategy. I concentrated on analysing the paradox of an island-continent embracing the terrestrial dimension of its geopolitical identity at the expense of oceanic consciousness. I suggested that Australia was only a half-made nation, possessing what DH Lawrence in his novel *Kangaroo* called a national psyche of a 'withheld self' dominated by outback over ocean, cultural inwardness and spiritual emptiness. In turn, these features contributed to a strategic immaturity that made defence – particularly maritime defence – the empty core of Australian identity. I noted how two centuries of security provided by Anglo-American naval power encouraged the evolution of a dependent, sea-blind continental culture symbolised by Anzac soldiers.[1]

The essay went on to ponder how Australia's maritime strategy could evolve in the twenty-first century against such heavy cultural odds. In 2013, I saw some glimmerings of hope in the socio-economic revolution of the years between 1983 and 2013, three decades during which Australia abandoned protectionism and opened its economy and psyche to globalisation. The result was a tripling of Australia's gross domestic product (GDP), the creation of the world's thirteenth largest, and seventh most developed, economy. There was a boom in prosperity and what was once an inward cringe translated into something of a self-confident outward strut. Australia joined the East Asia Summit and became a member of the Group of 20 (G20) economies.

I dared to suggest that a more self-confident Australia might yet embrace the sea and develop a genuine maritime strategy based on engagement with a dynamic Asian region as the centre of global power. I took consolation from force structure developments between 2003 and 2013 which returned the Royal Australian Navy to capital shipping in the form of helicopter carriers, destroyers and amphibious vessels while moving the Army towards a greater marine focus. I was cautiously optimistic that, over time, some type of enhanced Australian maritime consciousness embracing

foreign policy, trade and security would emerge, even if the speed and intellectual contours of the journey remained impossible to predict. I concluded:

> In the decades ahead, Australia will need to reconcile its terrestrial cultural identity with a new maritime consciousness. The latter must reflect its status as an outward looking, Western-formed middle power and an ally of America situated in the world's new Asian economic heart. Such an outlook will take statesmanship, time and effort to cultivate in the minds of the political, foreign-policy and economic elites of Australia. In defence and security terms, a new maritime outlook must be forged on the anvil of an unreserved engagement with archipelagic Southeast Asia.[2]

A decade on, I am less confident that Australia will embrace a genuine maritime strategy, still less an identity based on habitation of an island-continent, for three reasons. First, there is the persistence of an ingrained sea blindness in Australian national culture which shows no sign of diminishing. Second, the end of the long economic boom in Australia has led to the revival of a spirit of cultural inwardness, socio-political indifference and even regression. The final reason is the rise of a powerful and revanchist China and, with it, Australia's increased maritime dependence on the United States alliance.

The Persistence of Australia's Ingrained Sea Blindness

A reading of British naval historian Andrew Lambert's seminal 2018 study *Seapower States* served to deepen my view that Australia will face considerable difficulty in developing a national maritime identity that meets its geostrategic realities.[3] Lambert points out that maritime identities are as much cultural as strategic creations. Such identities require constant refinement and refreshment by states and governments if they are to evolve and endure. In Lambert's view, the modern concept of sea-blindness – so evident in Australia – reflects the failure of liberal democratic governments to sustain a narrative of identity.[4] He notes the importance of maritime heroes and iconography in a democratic state's history and concludes that a maritime country is best understood through the lens of national culture. He writes: Seapower remains a constructed identity, one that evolves across time and space. Recognising the continuities of this process enables us to understand how we, whoever we are, arrived at the present. The future has always belonged to seapower, but that identity remains a question of choice.[5] If Lambert is correct, then Australia's rendezvous between its Asian maritime geography and its Anglo-Celtic history – even if it becomes a matter of choice – will take decades and will involve the complexities of managing both cultural change and enlightened statecraft.

Despite a commitment of A$89 billion to the Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) shipbuilding recapitalisation, the September 2021 Australia, United States, United Kingdom (AUKUS) Pact on

nuclear-powered submarines, and the Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR), does not amount to the adoption by Australia of a coherent maritime strategy. As Senator David Feeney, then deputy chair of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), noted in October 2017, there is only a 'topsoil' understanding of maritime affairs in Australia.[6] This topsoil consists mainly of defence experts and a few industrialists who understand that the lines in the national anthem of 'girt by sea' mean more than living behind a defensive moat.[7] Fenney went on to bewail the paradox that underneath the defence and strategic community in Australia is a population which remains largely sea blind with the inward pull of 'the great sunburnt land' continuing to preoccupy Australians.[8] There is no 'dreadnought fever' or naval strategic imperative at work in the contemporary popular imagination to underpin Australia's shipbuilding initiative. On the contrary, Australian shipbuilding is seen by most in the electorate as a means of providing terrestrial jobs in South Australia in 'a salvage operation for Australia's manufacturing industry'.[9]

Under Australia's Defence Strategic Review 2023, the notion of 'a strategy of denial' has been adopted.[10] Yet this strategy seems to bear little connection to the ideas of control and denial derived from study of classical maritime strategy. Instead, the strategy draws on nuclear-age deterrence theory and pivots strategic thinking narrowly around a concept of conventional 'deterrence by denial'.[11] Yet any credible deterrent posture requires both a strong military and an adequate arsenal. In both respects, the DSR declares the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to be 'not fully fit for purpose' in both force structure and striking power.[12] In military strategy, it is impossible to separate denial from control and cost imposition measures since all are interconnected parts on a spectrum of deterrence and war-fighting effectiveness. If Australia is 'girt by sea' then that sea is still viewed in many official circles as less a space for manoeuvre than a moat around which a conventional deterrent might be developed. In short, 'deterrence by denial' is a continental strategy clothed in the thinnest of maritime raiment.

Pull over Push: The End of the Long Boom and the Return to Inwardness

The second area my 2013 essay failed to appreciate fully was just how powerful the forces of Australian exceptionalism remain as a force pulling the country back to embrace a culture of inwardness. In retrospect, I placed too much emphasis on globalisation slowly pushing Australia towards an outward-looking view of the sea and a more informed understanding of maritime affairs. A key book in tracing the return to inwardness in socio-economic affairs is William Coleman's 2016 edited book *Only in Australia*.[13] The latter study examines the phenomenon of Australian exceptionalism and what Coleman provocatively describes as 'a regression into national infantilism'.[14]

Coleman highlights how Australia reached a reformist 'climacteric' in the early twenty-first century and then began to falter in both policy innovation and imagination. Unlike many other advanced

countries, Australia has turned its back on further change by resisting key economic and industrial relations reforms to keep the country internationally competitive.[15] Coleman calls the ensuing stasis, the manifestation of an 'inertial society' in which collective egalitarianism and a nostalgia for the protectionist Deakinite Settlement of the twentieth century have taken hold of cultural elites. 'Planet Australia' is increasingly a country plagued by machine politicians and mediocre bureaucrats, weakened by 'a poverty of discourse' in public affairs and dislocated by falling living standards.[16]

For Coleman, a youthful country is developing a hardening of arteries and is drifting back towards sclerosis in its socio-political outlook. Thirty years of dynamic microeconomic reform from the 1980s into the 2000s are emerging as a historical anomaly. 'Australia', Coleman writes, 'is the country that won't move on, which is stuck in its way. Australia is not the world's social laboratory; it is a sacred grove dedicated to the dogged observance of customary gods'.[17] If Coleman is correct about a form of inward-looking Australian exceptionalism displacing the globally outward impulses that energised the country from the 1980s to the 2000s, then such a situation bodes ill for future defence policy in general and the cultivation of a stronger maritime strategic outlook in particular.

It is important to note that Coleman is not alone in his pessimism that the Lucky Country is heading for crisis. For example, Gary Banks, the inaugural Chair of the Australian Productivity Commission noted in March 2023 that Australia was 'sleepwalking' into a national crisis of confidence.[18] The country, he argues, is going backwards on policies of energy, industrial relations, taxation reform and government spending – all of which will affect defence funding and the provision of future ADF capability. 'I never thought', writes Banks gloomily, '[that] the sovereign risk issues prevalent in certain Third World or socialist countries would one day afflict my own'.[19]

Politics are always downstream from national culture, and in turn, it is impossible to separate stasis in politics from stagnation in defence circles. In the Australia of the early 2020s, beyond political rhetoric, there is a poverty of imagination to drive dynamic change and innovative thinking – still less the money and human resources – required for the future of Australia's defence strategy. In short, the societal trends outlined by Coleman and Banks, if allowed to fester, are hardly encouraging for an outward-looking maritime culture and strategy to evolve in the years ahead.

Revanchist China and Increased Australian Maritime Dependence on the United States Alliance

As Australia turns inwards and renews its 'withheld self', it will become more and not less dependent for its defence on the American alliance. In 2013, America was still the world's unchallenged global superpower. In 2023, that status has eroded and Australia's defence dependence on the United States is occurring at a time when the 'unipolar moment' of American military might has been proven to be a historical anomaly. The re-emergence of great power competition since 2016 has been swifter than many observers anticipated. Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' has become the 'history of an end' as Russia revived and China rose to become a peer rival to America.[20] Yet, Australia,

by flirting with a reversion to cultural insularity, is also placing itself 'outside history' when it comes to thinking about greater defence self-reliance. This Rip van Winkle mentality is memorably described in Christopher Koch's novel, *Highways to a War* when Aubrey Hardwick, an Australian Defence official in south-east Asia laments:

> The reason Australia's half-asleep is that it's *outside* history. The Japanese nearly woke us up, but they didn't quite get there. So we went on sleeping. I wonder who *will* wake us up? What do you think? Sukarno? The Communists in Asia? Is the domino theory true or false?[21]

The answer to Hardwick's questions must be the strategic shock of China's rapid rise to global power and Beijing's rapid penetration into the Pacific islands as symbolised by the 2022 Sino-Solomons security agreement. One hopes that it is Chinese revanchism in Asia – a force far more powerful than the Japanese of the 1940s or the Indonesians of the 1960s – has woken up Australia to dangers that lurk in its regional maritime environment.[22]

In 2013, the American pivot to counter China in Asia had only just begun and its parameters were still unclear. Australia was still providing niche expeditionary forces to support the alliance in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. Ten years on the geopolitical landscape is clearer and more ominous. It is now apparent that under Xi Jinping's leadership a revisionist China is intent on upending the balance of power in Asia by pursuing a massive military modernisation program. For both Republican and Democrat administrations in Washington, China has become America's preeminent strategic rival. Deterring and resisting any attempts by Beijing to achieve regional supremacy is now the overarching objective of US grand strategy in the twenty-first century. It is a policy in which Australia will be expected to pull its weight in the Asian maritime environment far beyond the provision of small land forces in a limited liability strategy.[23]

By 2025, the Pentagon estimates that China will have roughly an 8:1 advantage over the United States in numbers of ships and conventional submarines deployed in Asia, creating a 'deterrence gap'. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is also expected to lead in combat aircraft and in larger land-based ballistic missiles in the region, while its nuclear arsenal is on track to double in size by 2030.[24] Xi Jinping's unprecedented military build-up since 2012 led to the 2021 AUKUS pact, under which Australia is to receive nuclear-powered submarines. Few would have foreseen such a development a decade ago. Yet, it must be noted that the AUKUS pact is as much about American military vulnerability and its need for allies to deal with China, as it is about Australian security in the Indo-Pacific. Ironically, the AUKUS pact does not resolve Australia's own 'submarine gap'; it merely moves its trajectory from the conventional diesel dimension to the nuclear power dimension.[25]

A cloud of political uncertainty surrounds both the delivery timeline and even the likelihood, of Australia receiving Virginia-class American nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarines

(SSNs) by the 2030s. Again, another key book helps to clarify matters, this time in the form of Elbridge Colby's 2021 study, *The Strategy of Denial*.[26] In his book, Colby demonstrates how, in Asia, America has moved away from offensive control strategies to embrace defensive denial strategies involving creating an allied 'anti-hegemonic coalition' fighting to secure both Taiwan and the Philippines against Chinese predation.[27] Colby's book is clear on the need for Australia to possess a forward strategy of denial – and one that than can only be maritime in character. As he puts it:

> Though it [Australia] is distant from Taiwan and the Philippines, its fate is likely to be decided in the Western Pacific … Australia thus has a strong interest in ensuring that the [American-led] anti-hegemonic coalition checks China's focused and sequential strategy [against vulnerable Asian states] well before it reaches Australia's shores.[28]

It will be ironic if, after two centuries of dependence on the universalism of Anglo-American naval power, progress towards an Australian maritime strategy is accelerated by the external factor of relative Western decline. It may yet be the case that a maritime strategic outlook in Australia will come by imposition rather than choice, driven by the perceived weakness of America and its allies in defending Asia from a powerful China.

Conclusion

In 2023, the socio-cultural forces prevalent in Australia remain even more inimical to the formulation of a national maritime identity and oceanic sense of strategy than they were in 2013. Societal sea blindness seems ingrained and is exacerbated by a lack of affinity for maritime culture and history. The Great South Land is the world's smallest continent and its largest island. Nonetheless, it is a continental, not an oceanic, mentality that continues to dominate the Australian cultural imagination. Australia possesses no maritime creed, only a wafer-thin maritime disposition that is confined to the RAN and a handful of strategic analysts. This reality militates against the success of both a naval shipbuilding project and helps distort the 'strategy of denial' into a hollow Australian concept of deterrence by denial. Such a strategy lacks not only adequate force structure and capability but also demonstrates little recognition of how control, denial and cost-imposition operate – factors an educated grasp of maritime strategy would make clear and obvious.[29]

Added to cultural obstacles has been the end of the long economic boom since 2013. A renewed sense of Australian exceptionalism, of being somehow 'outside history' has developed over the last decade that harks back to an older, more insular past from Alfred Deakin to Malcolm Fraser. Inertia and raw politics, rather than initiative and sound policy, now dominate the Canberra political class and prevent reform policies from going forward in the national interest. The result is a form of stasis symbolised by an impoverished national conversation and by falling education and lower living standards. Finally, there is the renewed dependence on Anglo-American naval power at a time when, in Asia, that power is in relative decline in the strategic competition against China. The Chinese

strategist General Liu Yazhou calls Sino-American rivalry 'the duel of the 21st century'. His words leave little room for optimism:

> The competition between China and the United States in the 21st century represents a new era in human history. America—tough but young—and China—a strong and ancient nation—separated by the vast distances of the Pacific Ocean are playing the largest game of global power in human history … Their competition will be a power game unlike any the world has ever seen.[30]

The requirements of the American alliance have yoked Australia to the outcome of 'the largest game of global in human history'. AUKUS may give the illusions of a miracle submarine solution, the consolation of a bigger navy and a more credible national defence in the future but none of this will be without cost and risk.

It is important that the Australian electorate understands that improved defence now comes with a much bigger price tag. It is one that involves the forward maritime defence by denial of Taiwan and the Philippines – and any other Indo-Pacific states vulnerable to Chinese coercion. While Australia's destiny remains one without prediction, its people cannot prosper in a vacuum 'outside history' and its leaders should accept that the future involves engagement with the seas that surround an island-continent in Asia. To survive and prosper in the decades ahead, Australia will require a maritime concept of strategy, and if one is not chosen carefully and willingly, it will surely be imposed by circumstance and contingency.

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[1] Michael Evans, 'The Withheld Self: The Impact of National Culture on the Development of Australian Maritime Thought' in Justin Jones (ed), *A Maritime School of Thought for Australia: Perspectives,* Sea Power Centre – Australia, Australian Government, Canberra, 2013, pp 37–46.

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Finding the Range: Future-proofing the RAN

Geoffrey Till

Since 2013, and the original version of this paper, time has marched on, but Australia's naval planners are still, in the biblical phrase, 'looking through a glass darkly'. It is no easier now than it was then, to predict the future and its operational priorities for the Royal Australian Navy. This matters because the complex business of fleet design is all about striking the right balance in competing choices in the mix of naval capabilities the country requires. Cost-effective fleet design depends on accurately identifying what the Navy might have to do where, when and, very possibly, against whom. Projected answers to these questions reflect perceptions of the likely context which helps determine, or should do at any rate, the necessary size and nature of the fleet. Whether that fleet is ultimately deliverable, though, will reflect the financial and industrial capacities of the country and, crucially, on the extent to which those perceptions are shared by the general public, politicians and, particularly, the people with the money. This is as true now as it was then.

But there can hardly be any doubting that since 2013 that operational context has deteriorated sharply and, in the terms used in the original paper, has become much more competitive and much less cooperative. Such a trend was certainly evident even at that time. In the Indo-Pacific region, the West was registering disappointment that an emerging China, fired up with its comparative success emerging apparently so well from the Great Recession of 2008 to 2009, compared to its Western rivals, and growing richer and more powerful, was evidently not adopting values and patterns of behaviour compatible with the West's conception of a rules-based international order. In consequence, resolution of the vexing issues of the South and East China seas and Taiwan seemed to be receding rather than advancing. In the Atlantic theatre, the increasing truculence of President Putin's Russia manifested itself in an attack on Georgia in 2008, something of a military revival and significantly harsher strategic rhetoric from Moscow. This, too, suggested more trouble ahead.

Since then, things have indeed become much worse. In 2014, Putin alarmed NATO by taking back the Crimea, engaged in numerous 'grey zone' operations against the West and finally invaded Ukraine in February 2022. In China, President Xi became increasingly autocratic, suppressed the Uighurs, violated the agreement with the UK about the future autonomy of Hong-Kong and demonstrated an unmistakable willingness to engage in acts of military coercion to advance its claims over Taiwan and the East and South China seas. Seemingly, China was intent on wresting regional dominance from

the United States and determinedly constructing the range of forces, not least at sea, that would help it do so. Worse still, in some respects, China and Russia moved towards each over in their mutual dislike of what they conceived to be an American-run strategic status quo in a manner that to many seemed distinctly reminiscent of the bloc-on-bloc rivalry of the Cold War.

Inevitably, this has had significant consequences for the United States and its allies and partners, not least Australia. China's economic punishment of Australia for its implied criticism of Beijing's COVID-19 policy symbolised a new level of hostility in general strategic discourse that is forcing Australia, amongst many other countries, to spend more on defence and to shift its priorities from the softer, more cooperative side of naval activity to the harder, competitive one. In consequence, there has been more emphasis than there was ten years ago on a conscious determination to be able to fight and win the wars that cannot be deterred, and a much greater willingness to state that the capacity to do so is in fact the best means of deterrence. Moreover, the global consequences of the Ukraine war have hammered home the fact that the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic theatres are simply the two sides of the same coin, and that it is not possible to insulate one theatre from the troubles of the other.

The result of all this for Australia, as for others, is a much greater awareness of the importance of strategic range in both policy and operations than there was then. The consequences of this are obvious in the much greater presence and highly publicised naval deployments of the Europeans in the Indo-Pacific, as a means of advancing their increasingly articulated interests through long-distance engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Conversely, Australia, Japan and New Zealand and other countries too have been much more visible in NATO's councils in the Atlantic theatre, attending its July 2023 meeting in Vilnius for example.

The operational importance of range as the answer to Australia's habitual preoccupation with the tyranny of distance is equally clear. Australia now needs to grapple with the consequences of China's increasing strategic range, particularly amongst the island states of the South Pacific. Similarly, China's increasing military technical capacity to render the waters of the First and Second island chains more hazardous obliges the United States to develop greater strategic depth, most obviously indicated by the basing of its forces in Darwin. This adds to Washington's capacity to respond from a distance. The same driver required the RAN to start its long, ambitious project to acquire SSNs. Having the operational capacity to extend its defence forward provides Australia with greater strategic depth while also helping it to sustain its forward political and economic interests. It makes Australia more of a player and less of a bystander in the all-important Western Pacific, and also helps it keep a wary eye on developments in the Atlantic theatre though closer integration with two of its leading partners.

The revolutionary and potentially transformational AUKUS deal is the consequence of this growing focus on strategic and operational range. But the deal also illustrates that the demand for range is

not just a matter of the horizontal geographic extent of military power. It also reflects the need to more closely integrate the military levers of national power vertically with their all-important political and economic equivalents. Defence and deterrence policy has more and more to be considered as a unified and integrated whole in which all its constituents act in determined mutual support and not in competition with each other. Accordingly, naval activity has not just to illustrate partnership with those like-minded nations whose contributions are so essential but positively to sustain it. Naval diplomacy to win friends and influence people has never been more important than it is now. The same kind of enhanced collaboration with chosen partners is equally true in the industrial domain, not least as a means of fostering the ability to produce the required military-technological capacities that single countries, no matter how well endowed, will find increasingly difficult to deliver.

The Russia-Ukraine war illustrates not just the overall deterioration in the international system but also the potentially transformative impact on the conduct of naval operations of autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, hypersonics and many other apparently novel developments in military technology. Collectively, many believe that current experience suggests such technological developments make sea-keeping, especially but not exclusively in coastal waters, more of a challenge. The unpredictability of the impact of technological change reinforces the natural and traditional desire for naval planners to maintain as many options as possible and to double down in particular on the notion of maintaining a 'balanced fleet'. If this means adding new capabilities while trying to retain all the old ones, problems of affordability are likely to arise at the national level. Helping to keep abreast of, and hopefully lead, these responses to an uncertain but potentially transformative technological future in a helpfully collaborative manner is therefore another critical part of the AUKUS deal.

At the level of the individual war-fighter, the increasing complexity of modern naval warfare demands a wider and more challenging range of technical capacities, individual skills and innovative approaches of the kind so well demonstrated by the small unit tactics that characterise the bitter Ukraine conflict. This all suggests that the successful naval operations of the future will need to be more and more thought of as a whole-of-nation, rather than simply a whole-of-government, affair – in Vice Admiral Tim Barrett's words, a national enterprise indeed.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict also demonstrates all too clearly the unpredictability of war and its potentially very high risks and costs, not least in a nuclear age. Accordingly, since 2013, we have seen increasing resort to means of coercion other than the crude employment of lethal force. This extra focus of hybrid 'grey-zone' operations is far from new but has a particular salience now. This too requires navies to widen the range of their responses. In the South China Sea, for example, China's employment of 'lawfare' and the so-called People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia will pose increasingly disconcerting challenges to navies used only to the Mahanian simplicities of conventional naval warfare, difficult to cope with though they might be. Engaging in this

multidimensional kind of competition at sea demands the capacity to 'fight' even smarter than before and across a wider range of engagement. In order to deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression, naval responses will need to be very closely coordinated with, and take full advantage of, the political, economic, legal and operational tactics of dissuasion and, when necessary, intimidation.

At this stage of the argument, two points need to be emphasised when considering the apparent differences in the manner of likely naval operations brought about by contextual change over the past decade or so. The first is very obvious. None of this is entirely new and much of it was discernible in 2013, and indeed well before. Some of this cloudy intermingling of the demands of peace, war, and the twilight zone between the two, can be seen for example in the first hundred pages of Julian Corbett's famous *England in the Seven Years War*, which in fact serves as a masterclass in the conduct of irregular maritime (not just naval) operations. All the same, the extent to which the range of naval activities has grown in scale and complexity in recent years seems crystal clear.

The second point flows on from this. The resultant change in the switch from naval cooperation to competition is partial. Despite, but in some ways because of, the growth of great power competition, navies will still be required to extend their activities into the softer, more cooperative aspects of their activity. They will need to cooperate not just in leagues against each other, but also in common purpose against common threats. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic, plus the urgent demands of defence against climate change, and the continuing need to protect the sea-based trading system from which all benefit against maritime crime in its many forms underline the continuing need for navies to act in cooperative endeavour. The need to protect safe navigation and to deal with the whole range of low-intensity threats to maritime security will often call for very different weaponry, procedures and skills compared to the demands of defence against state hostility at sea, especially in an age of hybrid operations. Accordingly, Australia has large maritime responsibilities along with its rights. Meeting the requirements of both soft and hard maritime security will remain a particular challenge for the RAN, given the sheer size and complexity of its maritime domain and the manifold threats it faces.

Summarising, the range of naval activity which the RAN will need to deliver has become both complex and very extensive. Above all it has become highly unpredictable. Futureproofing the fleet in such circumstances, whilst always a challenge historically, seems especially demanding now. It calls for not just versatility in its equipment and people, but for the capacity to respond quickly to the unexpected situations that derive from the inevitable failures of prediction. The Ukraine war shows that the encouraged capacity for wide-ranging innovation, deriving especially from the middle and lower ranks of a navy, is likely to be particularly important for it to be able to navigate what looks like an even more challenging future than seemed probable a decade ago.

Grand Maritime Strategies Revisited in the Era of Real and Imagined Wars

Peter Layton

Over the last decade, the global geostrategic situation has significantly worsened. In Europe a very real war is underway, with Ukraine fighting for its survival against a Russia with imperial ambitions. This major war to erase a United Nations member state is the first since the 1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and seems set to create a military fault line across Europe for the foreseeable future.

In the Indo-Pacific, China's arms build-up, bellicose statements by its political leaders and the country's grey zone actions suggest to some that China might, in the near-to-medium future, use military force to resolve issues such as Taiwan's autonomous status. An imaginary war has been generated that worries many and which is now starting to influence defence thinking, plans and force structures globally. As Thomas Hobbes noted in his seminal 1651 book *The Leviathan*:

> War consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known.[1]

In response to these developments, nations have thought hard about their grand strategies – that is, about what objectives they will seek and how they will then build and apply their national power to achieve those objectives. Australia has been part of this global trend. In 2013, when this chapter's predecessor was written, the context allowed considering alternative maritime strategies but today much has been decided.[2]

This paper has four parts. First, the two strategies Australia has recently adopted will be discussed as relates to the earlier chapter's alternative options. Second, the strategy not chosen is briefly noted, as this reveals some shortcomings in those embraced; there are no perfect solutions when choosing strategies. Third, the implications that arise from this shift in Australian strategic thought will be examined. Finally, the paper will examine two key contemporary trends that might shape a possible 2033 successor to this chapter.

Strategies Adopted

Australia has embraced different strategies for different countries and purposes. The Defence Strategic Review 2023 noted that this was a time of heightened strategic risk with possibilities of a major conflict in the region. To address this risk, keep the peace and maintain regional stability, a balance of power strategy has been adopted. Australia's foreign minister sees this as a balance that 'underwritten by military capability' is of a scale 'sufficient … to deter aggression and coercion' and which generates 'a strategic equilibrium'.[3] This is a strategy of deterrence clearly focused at the great power level; the foreign minister declares 'America is central to [this] balancing'.

Balancing is a technique within the denial grand strategy approach described in the 2013 paper and involves relative power. A denial grand strategy assumes that superior power determines outcomes; others can be stopped from achieving their objectives by being more powerful than them. A state becomes more powerful than another by building up military and economic power, or by forming collective defence alliances with others, or by doing both.

Away from the great power level, Australia is employing an engagement strategy focused on middle and smaller powers. Defence Minister Marles notes, 'deterrence isn't an alternative to cooperation – together, they are mutually reinforcing'. Also described in the 2013 paper, an engagement grand strategy involves working with others to achieve common goals. Others attaining more power is acceptable, as long as one's own national objectives are met. Indeed, an underlying intent is to improve participant nations' situations, keeping all contributors connected and working together.

Engagement grand strategies can have long-lasting effects and be low cost, but they rely on finding useful partners. Australia, the ASEAN states and the South-West Pacific countries all share similar aspirations for a stable peaceful region that is resilient and prosperous. Australia can readily work together with these other nations for the common good to 'enhance our collective security and prosperity'. In the South-West Pacific area, for example, the foreign minister observes that this involves 'helping regional partners become more economically resilient, develop critical infrastructure and provide their own security so they have less need to call on others'.

Having these different strategies for the different states is important. Trying to combine denial and engagement means blending unlike grand strategic ways: denial tries to stop others while engagement works with others. In the period from 1933 to 1939, Britain used a combined denial and engagement grand strategy with Nazi Germany. However, the Germans played off both elements to their own advantage, becoming militarily stronger as a result and a much more dangerous foe.[4]

A Strategy Not Chosen

On the other hand, the third strategy discussed in the 2013 chapter has not been incorporated. A reform grand strategy is all about changing the ideas people hold. People come to see the wisdom in particular new ideas by careful persuasion rather than through superior force. At first glance, this strategy may seem not overly relevant to a time of real and imagined wars. However, Australia's ultimate goal is to have 'a predictable region, operating by agreed rules, standards and laws'. This is an institutional order where all nations abide by the rules they have agreed.

The denial grand strategy involving balancing is unable to be used to build such an institutional order. To achieve this, it may be necessary to use a reform grand strategy to change the thinking of the great powers so they embrace the idea of working with others for the common good. For this, timing is everything – the old ideas first need to collapse, pushing great-power decision-makers towards considering replacement ideas. Australia might need to be ready with a reform grand strategy to exploit some event, like a major economic, diplomatic or military crisis, that opens up space for new thinking.

Implications Arising

There are some implications from embracing denial and engagement strategies.

Denial is conceptually uncomplicated in using force or the threat of force to stop others, however, it is not a permanent solution. This grand strategy always considers war as an acceptable policy tool. Embracing denial carries a long-term commitment to a nation's military being in a state of permanent preparedness for fighting a major war. Such preparedness has significant enduring resource costs in terms of material, people and money that could be used for more productive purposes. Moreover, a good crisis management system needs instituting as, with all armed and ready to make war, a surprise event might quickly lead to an undesired conflict. A way to de-escalate a sudden rise in tensions activated by an accidental incident could be important.

In Australia's case, the nation has not fought a must-win war since 1945, and is arguably out of practice in terms of understanding the material and intellectual demands. As the war in Ukraine illustrates, major wars impose high costs in blood and treasure and a significant mobilisation of the whole society. In a major war in Australia's region, Australia would be important to both allies and adversaries, with substantial implications for national mobilisation. In terms of allies, it would guarantee support for an Australian national mobilisation even if in a form the provider thought advantageous to its own national interests. In terms of adversaries, an Australian national mobilisation would be likely to be directly threatened, distorted or disrupted by hostile actions. Being relevant to all combatants, whether adversary or allied, is historically the most taxing Australian national mobilisation circumstance.[5]

Engagement brings further implications. A major issue is that a force structure optimised for denial may not be well-suited for engagement. Denial focuses on war fighting and today that involves very sophisticated long-range sensors and missiles, complicated communication systems, space-based assets and distributed maritime operations. Moreover, in being cutting edge, much is likely to be highly classified and only sensibly revealed to close allies.

In contrast, engagement often focuses on operations other than war as a way to build friends and improve their national capabilities. Being peacetime missions, these operations can be with any other navies or coast guards, and include humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief activities, search and rescue training, fisheries patrols, counter-piracy tasks, multi-vessel manoeuvring, small boat operations, and emergency-response actions.

Accordingly, to be able to accomplish both denial and engagement, a mixed naval fleet may be needed. A bi-modal navy could have very different force structures for the two different strategies. As an extreme example, the denial strategy force might feature nuclear attack submarines while the engagement strategy force might comprise corvettes and patrol vessels. Such conceivable extremes would impose very different resourcing dilemmas and effectively create two different navies.

Importantly, the denial force structure is unlikely to be useful for countering grey zone actions. By design, such actions occur below the threshold of armed conflict and are not ones where navies wish to display to a potential adversary their high-end war-fighting capabilities. Nevertheless, countering grey zone actions is a developing area that appears becoming non-discretionary and for which appropriate types of equipment, skills and tactics will be needed.

Key Strategic Trends

There seem two key trends evident that will influence thinking about strategy over the next decade or so – the first when formulating strategy, the second when implementing.

Devising a strategy occurs within a particular geostrategic context – that is, the international relations of the time as influenced by enduring geographical factors. The real war today in the Ukraine looks set to impact the next ten years by creating a permanent zone of conflict – active or latent – between Europe and Russia. For Australia, this is a rather distant battle but it helps fuel global tensions, spreads discord and has the potential for major strategic shocks, for example, if Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons.

The imagined, rather closer, war between China and others also seems unlikely to be resolved over the next decade; its possibility will remain troubling and these worries might intensify. China's military build-up is planned to continue, including broadening into a major extension of its strategic nuclear missile force; Chinese leaders are expected to maintain making provocative statements; and

the country's grey zone actions are likely to persist, while expanding into new realms, as was evident in the sending of a large, instrumented balloon across the continental US.

Those formulating strategies over the next decade will do so influenced by this threatening and maybe worsening geostrategic context. Alongside this activity is strategy implementation, which, at the grand strategic level, involves the building and application of national power. Over the next decade, the national power potential of today's emerging technologies will start to be realised. This is a development the earlier chapter did not consider.

The most likely technologies to enter common military usage over the next ten years include artificial intelligence, quantum computing and robotics. Greatly simplifying matters, artificial intelligence will allow finding targets hidden in high clutter backgrounds, quantum computing will provide the very high-speed processing power required, while robotics will take over many of the dull, dirty and dangerous military tasks. On future battlefields – as in Ukraine now – much will be seen, what is seen will be hit, and what is hit will often be destroyed. Modern military forces will embrace long-range firepower, dispersed forces concepts, multi-domain operations and the use of deception. The building of such power is now occupying the great powers and several smaller ones.

Conclusion

This is a dangerous time and the future looks even more unsettled. Since 2013, Australia has decided to adopt denial and engagement strategies. These are now beginning to influence how Australian national power, including military power, is applied.

Over time, the two strategies will also shape the building of Australian national power, as the recent decisions driven by the Defence Strategic Review on reconfiguring the ADF suggest. Trying to implement both denial and engagement strategies simultaneously has a logic but may be difficult to resource. Adequate workforce seems the greatest concern; emerging technologies may perhaps become seen as both the solution and essential.

Given today's real and imagined wars, this chapter presents a rather darker strategic vision than its 2013 predecessor, however, this shouldn't be the final word. The task of strategists is to determine how to favourably shape the future. EH Carr wrote that international relations 'is the science not only of what is, but of what ought to be'.[6] In this view, strategists should aim for creating preferred futures derived from their understanding of current realities. Our strategic thinking needs be focussed on making a tomorrow better than today. Let's all aim for the 2033 successor to this chapter to be set in such a time.

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[1] Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651, Chapter XIII.

[2] Peter Layton, 'Big Thoughts: Grand Strategy and Alternative Maritime Strategies', in Justin Jones (ed), *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia*, Canberra: Sea Power Centre – Australia, 2013, pp 63-68.

[3] With the exception of the quotes from Hobbes and Carr, all quotes in this paper are from: Penny Wong, *National Press Club Address: Australian Interests in a Regional Balance of Power*, 17 April 2023, accessed 27 August 2023. foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/national-press-club-address-australian-interests-regional-balance-power

[4] Peter Layton, 'To Engage China, or Balance It? Lessons From a Failed Grand Strategic Exercise', *War on the Rocks*, 20 July 2018, accessed 28 August 2023. warontherocks.com/2018/07/to-engage-china-or-balance-it-lessons-from-a-failed-grand-strategic-exercise

[5] Peter Layton, *National Mobilisation during War: Past Insights, Future Possibilities*, ANU National Security College, Canberra, 2020, pp 22–29.

[6] EH Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, reissued with a new preface from Michael Cox, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016, p 6.

Forever Inescapable: The Maritime Context of Australia's Quest for Viable Strategy

Chris Rahman

The role of the sea in shaping Australia's geostrategic circumstances is inescapable, and permanent. The assertion of those facts by this author a decade ago still holds for the world of 2023.[1] At the risk of redundantly repeating truisms: Australia is still an island surrounded by three oceans. The complex archipelagic geography to Australia's immediate north and north-east still consists of many thousands of islands, which pose potential strategic risk in a context of ever expanding great-power threat. Australia remains heavily trade dependent, most of which, whether by volume, value or strategic importance, is carried by sea, while all our international electronic commerce relies upon a small number of vulnerable fibre-optic submarine cables. And our alliance arrangements are still maritime-centric; a fact that has held true despite the technological advances that have ushered in, progressively, the air, space, and cyber ages of global connectivity.

Geopolitical Evolution

However, while those mundane maritime facts remain forever salient, the strategic context has continued to evolve since 2013. This can be summed up by stating that the strategic problems clearly evident in 2013 still dominate, only even more so. First, the extent of the China threat has intensified rather than dissipated. War has broken out in Eastern Europe. The alignment between neo-imperial Russia and neo-fascist China is profoundly unnerving. That partnership, increasingly also involving Iran and other anti-liberal, anti-Western states, represents a new totalitarian axis. This metaphorical rogues' gallery has nothing less than revolutionary intent to overthrow the existing international system ordered around liberal principles, and replace it with one conducive to their own anti-liberal preferences. With war raging in Ukraine, smouldering conflict in the Middle East largely sponsored by Iran, and the threat of Chinese aggression in East Asia and the western Pacific, the prospects of global conflagration unfortunately once more confront Western, including Australian, policymakers.

As the ascendant rogue state, China lies at the heart of the challenge, while the Sino-Russian axis has truly global geopolitical implications: simultaneously undermining security in the two most important Eurasian zones, Europe and East Asia, and their adjacent offshore regions. Beijing's revolutionary project to gain hegemony in East Asia and the western Pacific and, ultimately, supplant

the United States globally, is perhaps more obvious today than in 2013, although that project has been a long-term objective pursued consistently across different leadership eras.[2] As explained by a former Chinese Communist Party Central Party School professor, China's decades-long exploitation of the West's engagement policies had, until recently, successfully managed to disguise its inherently hostile, totalitarian intent.[3] Thus, while the China threat assuredly is hardly novel, it has advanced politically, economically, technologically and strategically compared with a decade ago. China's position has been assisted by the West's limited willingness to fully comprehend the urgent dangers amid other domestic or international distractions. That critique applies to Australia too, where the implications of generally sound strategic policy have yet to be fully assimilated into logical national security outcomes, including for the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Another change to the current geopolitical environment when compared to that of 2013 is the seemingly imminent demise of this so-called second era of globalisation, which has shaped international economic intercourse since the conclusion of the Cold War. This process has been termed the 'great unwinding' by Australia's preeminent political commentator.[4] Globalisation's reversal, in part at least, is driven by considerations of national security. There is a genuine need to deny rogue states, particularly China, Russia and the nuclear-weapons proliferators, leading-edge Western technology, which can be, and has been, exploited by those anti-liberal forces to threaten their neighbours, the West and the liberal system itself. Further, global supply chains of critical materials and componentry have been allowed to become deeply compromised by those rogue states. That danger applies especially to China, which, by subsidies, below market–level pricing and protection-enabled economies of scale, monopolises certain key sectors and has created dominant positions in others. Thus, the buzzword of recent times has been economic 'decoupling' from China.

The cost and difficulty of actually achieving such a break has led to a new favoured term, economic 'de-risking', promoted by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen,[5] and quickly adopted in Washington and other Western capitals. However, the internal logic of 'de-risking' is such that a great deal of actual decoupling will be required, especially in technology and related materials sectors. However, while the security risks are real, which make 'de-risking' essential, there has been predictable political exploitation of the national security rationale by protectionist and economic nationalist forces, increasingly in Australia as in America and Europe. Legitimate 'de-risking' will be economically difficult and costly enough, without the added burden of big government intervention and protectionism, which cannot but compromise productivity and long-term economic growth, thus prospectively undermining the ability to fund urgently needed defence and national security projects.

Maritime Implications of De-globalisation

An important question arising from de-globalisation will be how it might affect international seaborne trade. That can only be a matter for speculation. Trade overall, though, is unlikely to decline in the new era of intense strategic competition – or cold war – but rates of trade growth conceivably

might reduce, while the geographical patterns of that trade might change. North-east Asia still collectively comprises the primary geographical concentration for Australia's commodities and merchandise trade. That trade must pass through the various maritime chokepoints of archipelagic South-east Asia or Papua New Guinea. If technological 'de-risking' is to occur, as it must, then merchandise imports from China logically should be expected to decline. Chinese manufactured goods in that case are likely to be displaced by products either sourced largely from South-East Asia or India. That imlies, with the exception of Indian products, that the Eastern Archipelago may even grow in importance to Australia. Further, Australia's continued dependence on liquid fuels refined in Singapore, in particular, and also Malaysia, ensures that the security of shipping through Indonesian waters will be a leading wartime concern for Australian defence planners.[6]

'De-risking' will have specific implications also for the maritime sector. China's burgeoning global interests in shipping, port infrastructure and logistics services, increasingly incorporated into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), potentially have wide-ranging strategic meaning.[7] The technological elements of this maritime expansion under the Digital Silk Road component of the BRI, particularly in leading-edge logistics data management platforms, pose a specific risk which needs to be better understood and addressed by the West.[8] Further, general global reliance, and Australia's total dependence, on limited networks of submarine fibre-optic cables for international data traffic, including international finance and electronic commerce, is highly vulnerable to damage or destruction, cyber warfare exploitation or other malign interference.

The combination of commercial maritime vulnerabilities encompassing shipping, ports, logistics management, supply chains, cyber warfare, cables and more, coupled with geographical vulnerabilities such as chokepoints and critical infrastructure located both onshore and off in increasingly crowded littoral areas,[9] ensure that maritime security is more difficult and complex for a sea-dependent state such as Australia than ever before. Moreover, while trade might suffer relative to its former trend as a result of cold war de-globalisation pressures, that must be considered trivial compared to a situation in which war involving China actually breaks out, for all of those maritime vulnerabilities noted above, either directly or indirectly, will be threatened by Chinese action.

That very real threat requires a far more concerted Australian effort not just at the policy and grand strategic levels of deliberations, but also in contingency planning for the joint ADF: economic warfare is sure to feature heavily following a Chinese act of aggression in the western Pacific. The ADF will thus need to be prepared to conduct both offensive and defensive economic warfare operations throughout the Indo-Pacific, but particularly throughout maritime South-East Asia and Papua New Guinea. A looming defensive economic warfare requirement is directly contrary to the bizarre contention of former prime minister Paul Keating that China is unable to 'fundamentally threaten our

connections with the outside world'.[10] Keating's ignorance is one thing that certainly hasn't altered over the past decade![11]

Strategy and Maritime Geography

Sea power has always been intimately connected with economic factors. Australia's inherently maritime geographical setting demands that economic elements are integrated into any national strategy. The initial Griggs conception of a maritime school of strategic thought itself took a grand strategic approach, involving integration of all aspects of national power.[12] Two decades prior to the Griggs speeches, the inaugural director of what is today Sea Power Centre – Australia and his deputy described a 'maritime school of strategic thought' as potentially providing 'the foundations on which the nation can move towards a concept of maritime power applicable to Australia's unique geo-strategic circumstances' – one which would reflect 'the importance of the maritime interests and the maritime environment in their entirety to Australia's security'.[13] Maritime factors, including our geographical circumstances, must, therefore, be central to any meaningful national form of strategy.

The discussion which follows establishes the need to align and, indeed, integrate the higher level of strategy with the narrower requirements for joint ADF maritime strategy and the elusive companion war-fighting concepts that Australia's interconnected policy, strategic and geographical contexts demand. It does so in the context of the Defence Strategic Review 2023, which is in part sound but also misguided for the pursuit of viable strategy at all levels.

In certain respects, the Defence Strategic Review is an admirable document. It correctly identified two major flaws in existing policy. First, it rejected the concept of a balanced ADF, instead arguing for a focused force capable of joint, integrated long-range operations. Second, and as a consequence, it stressed that the Army must transform itself into a lighter, more mobile force for littoral warfare.[14] However, it also made a number of errors. Chief among those is to misidentify the primary task of the ADF in the current circumstances. Its adoption of a denial strategy is not unreasonable but seems to make the fundamental mistake of conflating tactical or operational considerations with higher-level political-strategic objectives. In the current context, the higher goal for Australia and the Western alliance must be to deny China its own objectives of regional hegemony.[15] Such hegemony is the fundamental danger to Australia, its allies and partners. The ADF's strategic, operational and tactical missions must flow from that higher objective.

Australia itself will not be a central enemy objective in any future war, yet the review unfortunately perpetuates the predominant, highly parochial tradition of Australian defence thinking by stressing the need to deny enemy attempts to 'project power against Australia through our northern approaches'.[16] Despite explicitly rejecting the infamous Defence of Australia doctrine,[17] the review nevertheless contradicts itself by stressing the need for a unilateral capability to deter or deny attacks on Australian territory. Although it plans to do so at much longer ranges than previously

considered, it repeats the traditional strategic error and sustains the equally egregious fallacy of defence self-reliance, despite an acknowledgement that Australia does not possess the ability to defend itself independently against a great power adversary.[18] It is thus also quite a confused document.

That is not to deny the need for limited homeland defence. As has been made clear by the ANZUS alliance's US Force Posture Initiatives,[19] a leading role for the Australian continent will be to act as a vast rear area base for coalition operations and sustainment, much as it did during World War II. Therefore, defence of bases, logistics, 'joint facilities' and related critical infrastructure will be necessary. That need not include defence of cities, however.

The Defence Strategic Review's focused force concept, and its continuation of a previously developed stress on joint long-range capabilities for maritime operations, mean that many of the capabilities needed for the ADF to be able to make viable contributions to alliance/coalition strategy to deter or defeat Chinese or axis attempts to overturn regional and global order are in sight, if not yet in place. But there remain questions whether all the necessary elements for joint maritime strategy have been considered, or if all recommendations are appropriate for the task. For example, the review's clear preference for the acquisition of small surface combatants has not in any way been justified.[20] If there is a case for such vessels, it has yet to be made. Further, given that maritime South-East Asia and the South Pacific are likely to be primary theatres for ADF deployments, more thought needs to be given to developing fast, low signature, relatively long-range intra-theatre sea and air mobility assets. Such transportation assets may be essential to providing small army units sufficient mobility to perform maritime missions, including scouting and anti-scouting (or reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance in current US Marine Corps terminology),[21] contributing to sea denial and sea control, and possibly assaulting enemy base infrastructure.

In developing appropriate capabilities, developing joint maritime strategy, and aligning them with higher level national and coalition strategy, one important piece of the strategic puzzle remains conspicuously absent. That missing element comprises the specific methods, or ways, of achieving strategic objectives. In other words, how is denial of Chinese hegemony to be effected? What are the war-fighting concepts needed to bolster the credibility of deterrence and defeat aggression when deterrence fails? With the notable partial exception of not uncontroversial US Marine Corps reforms, even the United States has yet to convincingly articulate how it is to fight and win in the western Pacific.[22] For Australia, political acceptance of overall strategic purpose – that is, denial of Chinese hegemony – is vital: as Williamson Murray reminds us, failure at the lower levels of strategy may not create an irretrievable situation, but fundamental flaws in policy or higher strategy, or a misalignment between them, can be fatal.[23] And in designing policy and strategy for Australia's geopolitical environment, the maritime context literally is inescapable.

This activity was supported by the Australian Government through a grant by the Australian Department of Defence. The views expressed herein are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or the Australian Department of Defence.

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[13] WSG Bateman and RJ Sherwood, *Principles of Australian Maritime Operations*, SDSC Working Paper no 265, ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 1992, p 3.

[14] Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023*, 2023, pp 53–54 and 58–60.

[15] *See* Elbridge Colby, The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2021.

[16] *Defence Strategic Review 2023*, p 6, see also p 37.

[17] *Defence Strategic Review 2023*, p 32.

[18] *Defence Strategic Review 2023*, p 37.

[19] Department of Defence, 'United States Force Posture Initiatives,' defence.gov.au/programs-initiatives/united-states-force-posture-initiatives.

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Support on Land, Success at Sea: Revisiting the Question of Maritimising Australia as a Nation

Alexey D Muraviev

Ten years ago, a push was made to transform Australia's strategic culture, to give our national defence and strategic thinking and planning a true long-term maritime focus. The intent was formally manifested in the 2013 edition of the Defence White Paper (DWP 2013): 'Australia's geography requires a maritime strategy for deterring and defeating attacks against Australia and contributing to the security of our immediate neighbourhood and the wider region'.[1]

Over the following ten years, Canberra committed considerable resources to bolstering national maritime capability, both its military and merchant arms. The ambition is to secure Australia's security, sovereignty and prosperity, hence national survival and future growth by means of enabling uninterrupted use of the maritime medium. At the same time, questions remain about positive shifts in the national mentality on the role of the sea for us as a country as well as on the national maritime strategy

Ten Years On: Good Ambitions

Any nation's strategic success at sea – e.g. its ability to take full advantage of its geography combined with transforming the maritime domain in a protected medium for multi-faceted interactions with other international players – is determined by its capacity to be a *maritime nation*, not just act as a *maritime power*. A fundamental difference between a maritime power and a maritime nation is that the former has means to extract economic benefit, exercise military power, and exert strategic influence across the maritime domain.

A maritime nation, in addition to above means, has developed national traditions and a whole-of-society appreciation of the vitality of the sea for its wellbeing and national survival. In other words, when four principal fundamentals/pillars, which form the basis of national maritime power – the country's geography; national strategy vis-a-vis the maritime domain; key sovereign enablers; and the national maritime culture – act in concert and complement each other.

Reflecting on the evolution of Australia as a maritime nation over the past decade, its successes and shortcomings, enables us to understand the current state of its four principal fundamentals/pillars, which is reflected in the colour scheme of chart 1.

Of the four core pillars, Australia's geographical circumstance remains unchanged and represents one of the country's core strengths. As advocated in my first contribution to this debate, because of its strategic geographical positioning, Australia continues to uphold potentially commanding role in the emerging strategic geo-maritime tripod based on the following vectors:

- the Pacific geo-maritime vector
- the Indian Ocean geo-maritime vector
- the Antarctic geo-maritime vector.

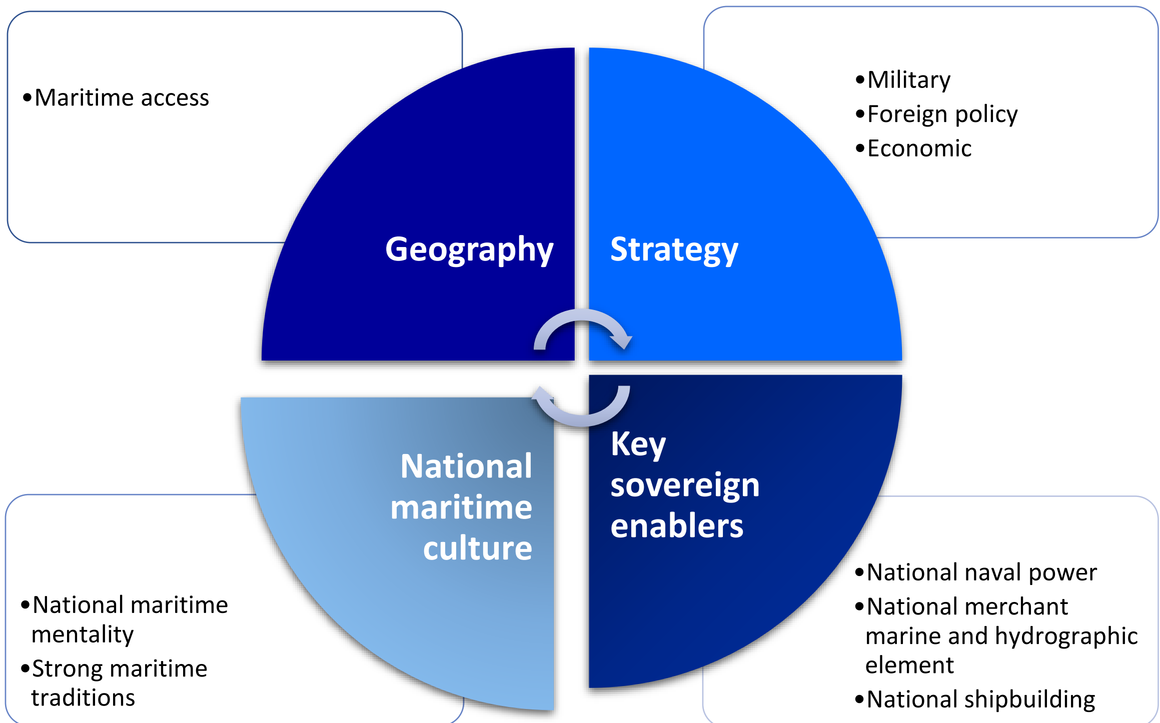
The second most developed pillar, which deserves recognition, forms key sovereign enablers. Over the past decade, the federal government invested considerable effort in upgrading core national maritime capabilities as part of strengthening of the country's standing as a developed maritime power (chart 1). By August 2023, the successive Coalition and Labor governments declared and started implementing what seems to be a three-tiered approach to modernising national maritime capability: 1) naval capability upgrade; 2) investment in the development of sovereign shipbuilding, and research and development capability in support of current and future naval developments; 3) intent to invest in the national merchant marine capability.

The naval angle of this approach is illustrative of Canberra's ambitions in the maritime domain. The DWP 2016 declared an intent for a long-term upgrade of the national naval capability: 'Modernising our maritime capabilities will be a key focus for Defence over the next 20 to 30 years.'[2]

Back in 2018, the Australian Government announced plans to considerably modernise the Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) surface and sub-surface arms by launching several long-haul construction programs worth $88.5 billion. They included:

- the new-generation Hunter-class large guided-missile frigate (SEA 5000)
- the new-generation Attack-class conventional attack submarine (SEA 1000)
- a new line of ocean-going offshore patrol vessels (SEA 1180).[3]

Chart 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Australia as a Maritime Nation



In September 2021, the SEA 1000 project, which was supposed to deliver 12 new-generation Attack-class conventional submarines at an estimated cost of $50 billion, was scrapped in favor of acquiring a smaller fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines. Under the new agreement, which was detailed in March 2023, the RAN's future Submarine Force would operate two types of subsurface platforms: the US-made Virginia-class and the future SSN-AUKUS submarine, which will be jointly developed by the UK and Australia. The cost of acquiring a nuclear submarine fleet could be as a high as $368 billion,[4] effectively making it one of the top most ambitious and expensive defence acquisition projects in the Australian history.

Combined with an upgrade to its amphibious capability/sea lift, which is now built around two 28,000-ton Canberra-class landing helicopter dock (LHD) units and the HMAS *Choules* landing ship dock,[5] the ongoing modernisation represents the single largest and concerted effort to qualitatively transform Australian naval power in preparation for meeting emerging security risks and threats across the maritime domain. Some observers speculated that, by recalibrating the RAN into a balanced and potent fighting force with a strong power projection and sea denial elements, Canberra is gearing up to challenge China's growing assertiveness at sea in concert with the United States Navy (USN) and other allied navies.[6] Others call for more investment, particularly in the surface fleet.[7] But overall Australia's naval modernisation is on positive trajectory.

The intent by the federal government to strengthen national shipbuilding was reflected in the Naval Shipbuilding Plan, which was released in May 2017 and called for targeted investments in physical infrastructure ($1 billion in shipbuilding and sustainment facilities) as well as human infrastructure (about $92 million in skilled workforce).[8] The overall goal is to create a sustainable sovereign capability in support of national maritime ambitions. Since the release of the plan, work continued to improve both physical and human naval shipbuilding and sustainment infrastructures across key jurisdictions, which traditionally supported naval construction and/or basing and maintenance of naval assets.

The final element of the three-tiered approach worth highlighting is the discussion to bolster Australia's sovereign merchant marine capability. Currently, the country operates 11 Australian flagged various purpose vessels with a tonnage of over 2,000 tonnes.[9] This small fleet is responsible for some 70 per cent of coasting shipping and just two per cent of international maritime transit. The latter suggests an overwhelming dependency on foreign shipping for the transit of vital commodities, strategic raw materials and other goods to and from Australia. That in itself poses a potential strategic vulnerability in times of geopolitical uncertainty and risks of major international conflict.

To partially mitigate these risks, the Albanese government appointed the Maritime Strategic Fleet Task Force in October 2022 at a cost of $6.3 million. Its mission was supposed to map out provisions for a bolstering of Australia's sovereign capability in merchant marine by means of adding up to 12 new Australian-crewed and -flagged ships to a current fleet.[10] The idea of a national strategic fleet of some 12 units was proposed by Labor as its policy and an election promise back in 2019, when the size of the Australia-owned and operated ships shrunk from some 100 units, back in the 1990s, down to just 13.[11]

In sum, apart from our *konstanta* (geography), Key Sovereign Enablers is the most developed/attended to pillar, which contributes to the ongoing maritimisation of Australia.

Ten Years On: Unresolved Business

Despite noticeable achievements, there are also shortcomings when it comes to understanding and assessing national maritime strategy and national maritime culture.

It goes without saying that the Strategy pillar is one of principal fundamentals in the development and effective functioning of a country as both a maritime power and a maritime nation. In regards to the evolution of Australia's views on the national maritime strategy over the past 10 years, some positive trends are evident.

Reflections in DWPs that Australia's military strategy is by default a maritime strategy underlines a concerted approach towards reading Australia for a power contest in the maritime domain.

The adoption of the Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy (CMSS) in 2021 represents a serious attempt to justify the strategic importance of the maritime vector for Australia and its economic interests, particularly highlighting the sheer size of national physical presence in the maritime domain:

Covering almost one tenth of the Earth's surface, it includes more than 8,000 islands, 60 marine parks, approximately 34,000 kilometres of coastline (excluding all small offshore islands) and more than 1,000 estuaries … Our jurisdiction extends into three of the world's five oceans—Indian, Pacific and Southern—and into the Timor, Tasman, Arafura and Coral Seas, as well as the Torres Strait.[12]

Finally, the adoption of the Blue Pacific initiative in mid-2022 suggests that the government supports a broader political, socio-economic and humanitarian agenda for the Indo-Pacific maritime domain.[13]

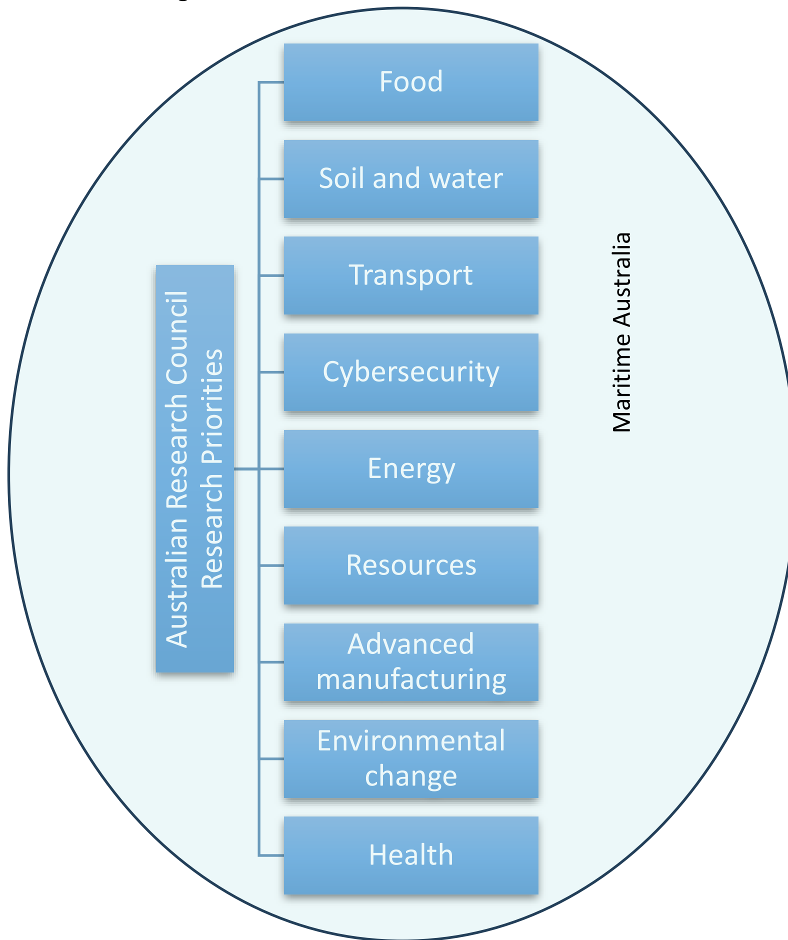
Yet, what is clearly lacking is the elaboration and adoption of a comprehensive national maritime strategy, which would provide a consolidated long-term strategic outlook on Australia's multifaceted interpretation across the maritime domain in economic, security and defence, scientific and environmental, foreign policy and humanitarian spheres. Ideally, such an overarching strategy would be linked to more specific strategic and doctrinal statements such as the next Defence and Foreign Policy white papers. The maritime domain's pivotal role in Australia's national security, economic and civilisational wellbeing have to be clearly articulated and reflected in future editions of both of these policy documents, in addition to the published CMSS.

Similarly, an overarching theme of maritime Australia could also be linked to the current list of science and research priorities and associated practical research challenges, which was endorsed by the government and managed by the Australian Research Council (ARC, Chart 2).[14]

Finally, but not the least, such a strategy should also address an underdeveloped state of the fourth pillar – national maritime culture.

In my initial submission ten years ago, I called for an adoption of a new nationwide agenda, which should alter our national mentality by making it *girt by the sea*, not *by the beach*.

Chart 2: ARC's Existing Science and Research Priorities



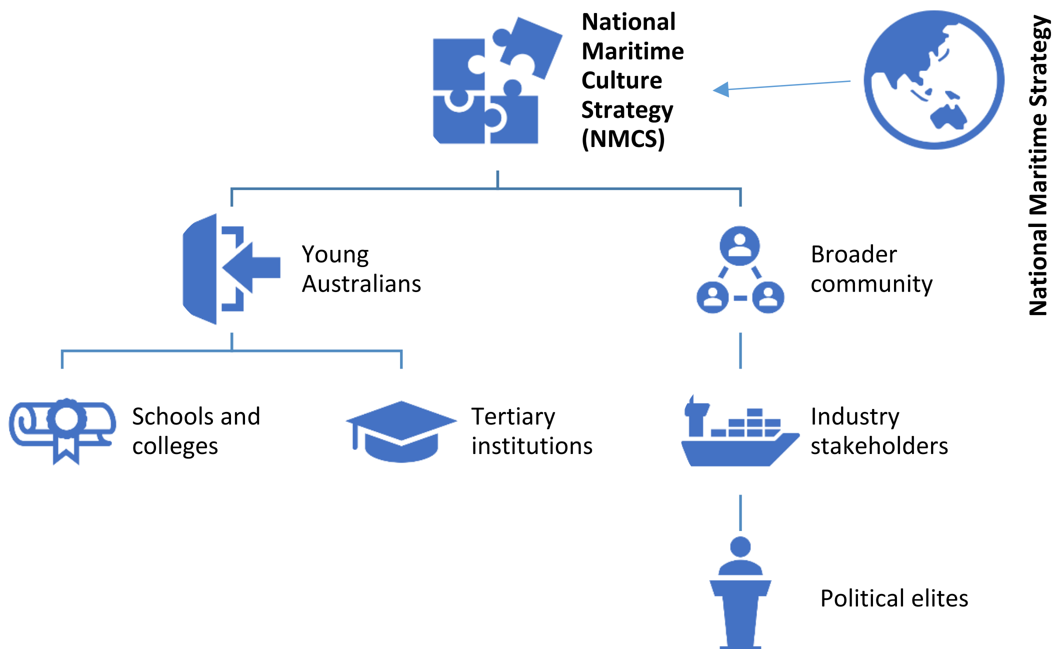
Over the past five years, the RAN and the Australian Department of Defence (DoD) launched several promotional video campaigns aimed at 1) sustaining recruitment in the service (for example, 'Live a Story Worth Telling', 2023; 'Your Navy Story', 2021); 2) raising broader awareness of the importance of the sea for Australia ('For Australia, if It Matters, It's Maritime', 2022; 'We are Royal Australian Navy and This Is What We Do', 2021; 'The Navy – Protecting Australia', 2019). All of these campaigns were actively promoted through various social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter) with various results. Data analysis of popular social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) suggest that traditional recruitment campaigns achieve better results and are more likely to attract appropriate audience.[15] At the same time, 'raising awareness' promotions performed modestly relative to recruitment.[16]

However, it should not be the Navy's prerogative to engage in promoting national maritime agenda. There are many other industry actors that benefit from utilising the maritime domain or depend on

it. Hence, a comprehensive whole-of-government approach is required. It is clear that in its absence the question of raising national awareness of the vitality of the maritime domain for Australia is not reaching a widespread audience. This question is becoming critical in times when the government invests considerable resources in various capability upgrades discussed above. Yet, the majority of Australian taxpayers remain blissfully unaware of why such resources are being committed, and that more may be required.

Closing this gap should become a matter of national importance. Ideally, the government needs to consider elaborating and adopting a national maritime culture strategy (NMCS) as part of a comprehensive national maritime strategy. The key aim of an NMCS would be to target key elements of the Australian society, with a particular emphasis on younger Australians. Maritime matters, including the country's rich maritime heritage, its proud naval history, should be discussed and studied at schools, and later in tertiary institutions (chart 3). This is where the DoD and the ADF could take the lead and partner with academia to develop special units and courses – use institutional platforms to promote the maritime agenda. New generations of Australians should understand that their country's future, and many of their own futures, is or may be maritime driven and maritime dependent.

Chart 3: National Maritime Culture Strategy



Beyond working with younger Australians, the government should launch special promotion campaigns raising general awareness among the broader community, as well as working closely with

relevant business bodies. Finally, Australian politicians should develop a good 'situational awareness' on maritime-related matters, understanding -the need to be both strategic and systematic on them (chart 3).

Australia has committed considerable resources in bolstering its maritime capability with more to come in due course. Yet, there is no real debate to explain to taxpayers why we need and ought to spend so much on maritime defence, maritime strategic fleet and other elements of national maritime power. For an island nation, for which national prosperity and survival rests at sea, the majority of Australians remain blissfully unaware of the obvious. Same can be said about parts of the political elite.

The business of raising national awareness of the importance of the ocean should not be the RAN's prerogative. It requires the whole-of-government strategic approach and a long-term commitment. Winning people's support on the matter is as important as investing in technological capacity to benefit from our geography. Support on land means success at sea. Without a true national maritime culture and a clearly defined comprehensive maritime strategy Australia will stop short of becoming a nation girt by sea.

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[3] Stephen Kuper, 'Focus Shifts to Navy Modernisation', *Defence Connect*, 17 December 2018. defenceconnect.com.au/maritime-antisub/3310-fleet-week-as-focus-shifts-to-navy-modernisation

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[6] David Axe, 'Australia Has a Plan for Battling China – and Lots and Lots of Submarines', *Forbes*, 3 July 2020. forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/07/03/australia-has-a-plan-to-grow-its-navy-add-lots-and-lots-of-submarines/?sh=21aa1ca662b2

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[12] *Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy*, Australian Government, 2021. homeaffairs.gov.au/nat-security/files/australian-government-civil-maritime-security-strategy.pdf

[13] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Joint Statement on the Announcement of the Partners in the Blue Pacific Initiative' [media release], Australian Government, 25 June 2022. dfat.gov.au/news/media-release/joint-statement-announcement-partners-blue-pacific-initiative

[14] Australian Research Council (ARC), 'Science and Research Priorities', ARC. arc.gov.au/funding-research/apply-funding/grant-application/science-and-research-

[15] For example, as of 16 August 2023 both 'Live a Story Worth Telling' and 'Your Navy Story' generated 176.3 thousand views on X (formerly Twitter). Data was collected by the author.

[16] For example, 'For Australia, if It Matters, It's Maritime' achieved 28.4 thousand on Facebook; 'We Are Royal Australian Navy' and 'This is What We Do', 11 thousand; 'The Navy – Protecting Australia', 47.6 thousand. Data is at 16 August 2023 and was collected by the author.

Australia, Defence Policy and Maritime Strategy 2013–2023

Peter J Dean

When last addressing this topic, this paper's focus was on issues of an Australian maritime strategy, with a particular focus on the new Australian Defence Force (ADF) amphibious capability and its role in both this strategy and regional military diplomacy. The discussion was bounded by the then chief of Navy Vice Admiral Ray Griggs's call for a 'maritime school of strategic thought.' That argument rested in conceptualising such an approach in relation to the nation, and specifically the political, defence and policy communities, on a need to move from a 'girt by beach' to a 'girt by sea' understanding of Australian strategy.[1]

In 2013, Australia was still stuck in a paradigm of a public discussion of our maritime interests that was heavily focused on boat people arriving on our shores. This paper argues that the Australian community has adapted to a much broader maritime concept of its identity, beyond irregular migration. The main driver for this change in the ten years since the first publication, it argues, has been fundamental changes to Australia's strategic circumstances during this period. While this has not driven a comprehensive maritime approach to strategic affairs that Admiral Griggs called for, the changes in the Indo-Pacific strategic environment have helped to reconceptualise Australia's understanding of its role in the region and maritime affairs. As a result, it could be argued that 'articulating and embedding the notion of a maritime strategy in the general consciousness' has, at least somewhat, improved. But where maritime issues have taken a central role is in the nation's strategic policy, and to this end the most recent articulation of Australia's strategic policy has resulted in its biggest reconceptualisation in almost 50 years.[2]

This paper's assessment focuses on the arc of Australian strategic policy since 2013, with a focus on the lead up to and the development of the maritime elements of the Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR). It argues that at the heart of these changes has been the recognition in the Defence Strategic Review 2023 of the centrality of maritime issues to Australia's geography, security and strategy.

Australia's Maritime Policy Arc 2013-2020

Ray Griggs's call for a maritime strategy to be 'integrated across [the] whole of government' has made significant traction since 2013. Rightfully, such a conceptual approach has been more applied than esoteric. It has not seeped into unwanted attempts to define 'maritime' in the same dimension as moral conditions such as 'freedom', or 'democracy' as part of a broad conception strategic interests or objectives that leave defence forces grasping at straws (for example, how does one force structure for 'freedom'?), nor has it tried to posit itself as some form of Australian 'grand strategy'.

Rather, over the last decade, a 'maritime school of strategic thought' for Australia has been centred on how a maritime focus is appropriate to the overall national strategy and the national policy framework. The notion of a 'maritime strategy', as it fundamentally relates to military strategy, rests on the notion of the use of armed force for the achievement of policy. As one of the fathers of maritime strategy, Julian Corbett, has noted, 'by maritime strategy we mean the principles which govern a war in which the sea is a substantial factor.'[3] Beyond this reference to 'war', it is also a strategy that is as much about winning the peace as it is about 'how [it will] lead to a successful conclusion of a conflict'.[4]

The notion of 'maritime' has, since 2013, become more central to descriptions of Australia's strategic geography in the now-called 'Indo-Pacific', as well as becoming more directive in helping to define Australia's strategic interests. From 2013, Australia's military strategy has been focused on the 'maritime domain'.[5] This reflected the broader policy framework during this period, which was set down in the 2009 National Security Strategy and the 2013 Defence White Paper, updates through the 2016 Defence White Paper and 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, and substantially reconceptualised in the 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the Defence Strategic Review 2023.

The release of the first two of these Commonwealth policies – 2009 National Security Strategy and the 2013 Defence White Paper, along with the broader regional strategy in the Asian Century White Paper – taken together represented, arguably, the closest Australia has come to a publicly declared 'grand strategy'. The approach was rather messy and lacked an overarching unifying strategy concept, however it did represent a broad direction to Australia's approach to its strategic circumstances and the changing nature of the Indo-Pacific strategic environment at the time. Unfortunately, since then, strategic drift in policy terms, combined with the rapid, and unforeseen changes to the strategic environment, left national policy without coherency or direction for much of the rest of the decade. Indeed, in defence, a fundamental policy dissonance from 2016 combined with an increase in defence funding without strategic coherency fundamentally undermined Australia's response to the rapidly deteriorating strategic environment.

The major starting point for an increased focused on maritime issues in strategic policy was the release of the 2013 Defence White Paper – including the preceding force posture review in 2012

that directly fed into the white paper's development. This policy document reconceptualised Australia's strategic geography and focused it squarely on the Indo-Pacific – a vast maritime theatre of interests that emphasised Australia's position on the hinge of the Pacific and Indian oceans and at the fulcrum point of this strategic region. It noted that 'the emerging Indo-Pacific system is predominantly a maritime environment with Southeast Asia at its geographic centre' and that 'maritime disputes such as in the South China Sea and East China Sea, regional flashpoints, and the increasing military capacity of many states, increases the risk of destabilising strategic competition'.[6]

The 2013 white paper noted that a 'Secure Australia' included 'strategic interest [that] encompasses defence against attacks on continental Australia, our maritime territory, our offshore territories and the critical sea lanes in our approaches'. It also linked our maritime interests to international law and the maintenance of the rules-based international order, noting that 'Australia has interests in the peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes'. Importantly, the document highlighted the critical link between 'our national prosperity', which is 'underpinned by our ability to trade through Indo-Pacific maritime routes', and the 'economic importance of northern Australia and our offshore resources'.[7] This dependency, the white paper notes, requires 'an effective, visible force posture in northern Australia and our northern and western approaches [which] is necessary to demonstrate our capacity and our will to defend our sovereign territory, including our offshore resources and extensive maritime areas'.[8]

This maritime conception of Australia's strategic geography, economic interests, its island status and the criticality of Australia's northern approaches would lay the foundation of the contemporary approaches to Australia's strategic policy. However, the 2013 Defence White Paper maintained the notion of a 'balanced' ADF force structure and did not fundamentally address arguably the biggest structural issue in Australian defence policy – the link between strategy, force structure and capability.[9]

Despite this limitation, the 2013 Defence White Paper was a major strategic step forward. In the subsequent decade, the core notions of maritime interests in the region would be maintained. The core geographical conception of Australia's strategic geography, the Indo-Pacific, would also be cemented. Notwithstanding these positive moves, some key initiatives of this white paper, such as the emphasis on a new force posture (based around the 2012 Force Posture Review), and a focus on Australia's northern approaches, would quickly wither.

Despite these limitations, the broader strategic conceptual approach, focusing on Australia's maritime interests, would be maintained and enhanced under a succession of Coalition governments. The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper (FPWP) provided for a broader framework for national policy in the region. Importantly, both this document and the 2016 Defence White Paper maintained the focus on the Indo-Pacific, creating a bipartisan approach to the conceptualisation of Australia's strategic geography.[10] The FPWP highlighted the increasing nature of our 'Contested World' while centring

Australia's focus on a 'Stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific' (as opposed to the United States' concept of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific') that included 'Safeguarding maritime security'. The FPWP highlighted:

- 'Government's substantial investments in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities allow us to anticipate risks in our air and maritime approaches, as well as help our partners'
- 'Maritime Border Command [developing] the advanced capabilities necessary to protect our maritime security interests'
- the 'Australian Defence Force (ADF) … particular focus [on] modernising our maritime capabilities'
- the centrality of maritime security to regional partnerships with a focus on 'counter illegal fishing, improve coordination and communications on search and rescue, and upgrade navy-to-navy links'
- common interests in upholding international law, especially in relation to freedom of navigation and maritime security
- recognition of 'maritime and land border disputes [as] a growing source of potential instability in a more contested Indo–Pacific'
- the centrality of maritime security to economic trade and energy flows, the seas congested and contested nature in our region, regional expansion of maritime capabilities, the role of South-East Asia, India and regional forums for maritime security
- the importance of our 'maritime Exclusive Economic Zone, including waters surrounding our offshore territories, is the world's third largest. Our marine resources are vital for our economy'
- the centrality of 'tackling security challenges, with a focus on maritime issues' in the Pacific.[11]

The 2016 Defence White Paper maintained the focus on the maritime domain by highlighting the need for a 'A secure, resilient Australia, with secure northern approaches and proximate sea lines of communication'. These were defined as 'Australia's first Strategic Defence Interest'. A 'secure nearer region, encompassing *maritime* Southeast Asia and South Pacific (comprising Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Pacific Island Countries), [formed] our second Strategic Defence Interest'. Thus the centrality of maritime issues was critical. Taken together, the 2016 and 2017 policy documents provided an exceptionally strong basis for Australia's maritime interests. It meant that Admiral Griggs's vision in 2013 for a maritime school of strategic thought had taken some major steps forward.

However, the 2016 Defence White Paper also outlined policy priorities that were to fundamentally undermine the strategic logic of this approach, introducing a fundamental dissonance in Australian Defence policy. It did so by declaring that the force structure priorities of the ADF were be *shared equally*. This not only included the priorities on a secure Australia and near region but most significantly a much broader third interest – 'a stable Indo-Pacific region *and a rules-based global order*'.[12] It argued that 'Australia must continue to play its part in responding to challenges to the global rules-based order beyond the Indo-Pacific, as Australia is currently doing in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and in maritime security and peacekeeping operations in the Middle East and Africa'. This effectively meant that contributions to Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan the Middle East and Africa were as much force-structure priorities as the defence of Australia and its northern approaches. It basically meant that every potential operational contingency was of equal priority. This once again entrenched the notion of a 'balanced force'. Worse, it meant that with everything a priority, nothing was a priority. Every conceived capability and platform request could be justified by the ADF with no overarching policy guidance on what to prioritise.

The underpinning logic between strategy and force structure in the ADF, always a vexed issue in Australian defence policy, was now fundamentally broken. It meant that the seventh (1976, 1987, 1994, 2000, 2009, 2013 and 2016), and most likely final, Australian Defence white paper,[13] was a document bereft of any coherent strategic logic that knitted together strategy, force structure and capability: a coherency that Stephan Fruhling has noted is traditionally one of the weakest areas of Australian strategic policy.[14]

Two new policy documents introduced in 2020 did nothing to solve this issue. In fact, they exacerbated the problem. While the Defence Strategic Update (DSU) that year recast the strategic environment, the Force Structure Plan released concurrently with the DSU was merely a refresh of the Defence Integrated Investment Plan from the 2016 White Paper. This approach persisted with the dislocation of force structure priorities from strategy. Thus, the dissonance in Australian strategic policy became entrenched.

This fundamentally undermined what was, with the DSU, a major step forward in Australia's attempts to come to grips with the Indo-Pacific strategic environment. The DSU was widely praised for its frank assessment of the changing strategic order and received bipartisan endorsement. However, the decision to develop a force structure plan based out of the now redundant assessments of the 2016 White Paper, rather than on the new and refreshed DSU assessment, only served to widen the logic gap.

Without a unifying logic between policy, strategy and force structure, the ADF was adrift in a sea of programs and capabilities that lacked direction and guidance. A focus on maritime geography and issues outlined in the broader strategic concept and the Foreign Policy White Paper did nothing to rectify this dissonance. Force structure in defence must be focused on achieving the identified

interests and objectives – defence strategy cannot set policy, but rather a policy is needed to set strategy.[15] The 2016 White Paper, by making everything a priority, provided neither a strategy nor set policy priorities for force structure.

As noted, at one level, coherency on the maritime domain was maintained and, in fact, tightened. The 2020 DSU decided on a new strategic environment focused heavily on Australia's immediate region:

> The Government has decided that under this new framework, defence planning will focus on our immediate region: ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific. This new framework will provide a tight focus for defence planning and alignment with broader initiatives such as the Pacific Step-up.[16]

The DSU highlighted the intensity of strategic competition in this region: 'regional military modernisation includes the introduction of advanced strike, maritime surveillance and anti-access and area denial technologies, which have implications for Australian operations in the region'. It noted the role of maritime security in regional relations, although it did persist with an unfortunate habit in Australian contemporary policy documents of referencing the RAN's capabilities as 'maritime' – setting these apart from the air domain, land domain, space domain, and information and cyber domain capabilities. Such an approach allows for maritime capabilities to be conceived of as less a part of the entire force and more easily dismissed as a single service prerogative. This approach fundamentally overlooks, as Colin Grey has highlighted, that sea power is only one 'enabling instrument of [a maritime] strategy' / approach.[17] Only when combined with the land, air, cyber and information realms can these five domains of military power combine to impact upon the maritime environment which dominates Australia's strategic geography. This integrated approach is a critical enabling element that helps to guide and direct strategic outcomes. As Corbett states, the army and navy (and now the three additional domains – air, cyber and space) should operate as 'lobes of one brain, each self-contained and instinct with its own life and law, yet inseparable from the other: neither moving except by joint and unified impulse'.[18]

The 2020 DSU did, however, provide an excellent alignment of Australia's new focus on its immediate region with a changing strategic environment and the rising threat from the People's Republic of China (PRC). While 'maritime' features heavily in all of these policy documents there was no unifying vision for Australia's maritime interests and no clear logic on the interplay between national strategy, diplomacy, defence strategy and force structure. However, implicitly what emerged was the criticality of 'maritime' as an operating environment – for trade and energy, diplomacy and foreign policy, security, and defence strategy.

Australia's Embrace of a Regional Balancing Strategy

2023, however, saw two major clarifications of Australia's strategic approach to the emergence of a multipolar Indo-Pacific. These were found in foreign minister Penny Wong's address to the National Press Club on 17 April 2023 and a week later the release of a public version of the DSR. Wong's speech, drawing on language directly from the DSR, placed the new defence policy in a broader scope. This represents the clearest articulation of a coherent Australian national strategic approach to managing competition and the risk of conflict in an evolving Indo-Pacific. It is the essence of an Australian grand strategy in a multipolar Indo-Pacific.

The speech, entitled 'Australian Interests in a Regional Balance of Power', outlines a regional balancing strategy for Australia, as a pathway to maintaining peace in the Indo-Pacific. This is a strategic approach that 'harness[es] all elements of our national power to advance our interests … [as] the implications of unchecked strategic competition in our region are [so] grave'. The speech crafts a vision for the region that specifically rejects the emergence of a hierarchical order dominated by one state (the PRC) and outlines 'a region that operates by rules, standards and norms – where a larger country does not determine the fate of a smaller country; where each country can pursue its own aspirations, its own prosperity'.[19]

As a regional power in an emerging multipolar order in the Indo-Pacific, this strategy is about how Australia 'contribute[s] to the regional balance of power' in concert with allies and partners. The cornerstone balancing power in the region is the United States, supported principally by its main alliance partners Japan, Australia the Republic of Korea and the Philippines. But this is not a US-centric order, nor does it attempt to reaffirm US primacy. As the DSR acknowledges, the era of US primacy is over. This is about the maintenance of a favourable regional balance, aimed at supporting regional states' sovereignty and their ability to operate free from coercion. It is a regional order that, as Wong outlines, is broadly supported in the Indo-Pacific.

> It's clear to me from my travels throughout the region that countries don't want to live in a closed, hierarchical region where the rules are dictated by a single major power to suit its own interests. Instead, we want an open and inclusive region, based on agreed rules, where countries of all sizes can choose their own destiny.

It is also broad based, as 'strategic competition is operating on several levels. Domains that we might prefer to separate – economic, diplomatic, strategic, military – all interwoven, and all framed by an intense contest of narratives.'[20]

The source of strategic competition and the risks and points of tension, including their maritime foundations, is made clear in the foreign minister's speech:

> Tensions have risen between states with overlapping claims in the South China Sea. Compounding that have been the militarisation of disputed features and dangerous encounters in the air and at sea. China continues to modernise its military at a pace and scale not seen in the world for nearly a century with little transparency or assurance about its strategic intent. In August last year, five Chinese ballistic missiles were reported to have fallen in Japan's exclusive economic zone. And just last week, we saw China practice strikes and blockades around Taiwan. On top of that, North Korea continues to destabilise, with its ongoing nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile launches, threatening our friends in Japan, the Republic of Korea and the broader region. Altogether, this combination of factors and the risk of miscalculation comprise the most confronting circumstances in decades.

Fundamentally this strategic approach, 'and this balance' as Wong outlines, 'must be underwritten by military capability'. As part of a balancing coalition, Australia has 'a responsibility to play our part in collective deterrence of aggression. If any country can make the calculation that they can successfully dominate another, the region becomes unstable and the risk of conflict increases'.

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Wong's speech, drawing heavily on the approach set out in the DSR, outlines a broad grand strategy for Australia in an era of strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. Its foundations can be found in the strategic outlines provided by the 2020 DSU. However, on coming to power in 2022, the Albanese government recognised the dissonance with the previous government's policy approach. The 2020 DSU was the diagnosis of a major problem, but left the new government with no approach as to how to address the major strategic concerns it outlined. It was this lack of a coherent strategic approach to respond to the strategic assessment of the DSU that was the driving force for the decision to appoint Professor the Hon. Stephen Smith and Air Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK AFC (Retd) as independent leads to conduct a Defence strategic review. Their job was to articulate a strategic approach that addressed the DSU's strategic new circumstances and aligned force structure and posture for the ADF.

The DSR's articulation of a regional balancing strategy provided for national level strategic coherency from which defence policy and strategy could be developed. This is a formal articulation of an implied strategic approach that has been in train by Australian governments since the 2012 Force Posture Review, and arguably as far back as the 2009 Defence White Paper. A section entitled 'Statecraft', in the public version of the DSR, outlines a range of internal and external balancing activities that various Australian governments have undertaken over the preceding decade or more. These include:

> Internal measures [that] have included: increased defence and national security spending; the reorganisation of elements of the national intelligence and national security community; substantial investments in cyber security; changes to foreign investment laws; and measures to resist foreign interference and protect critical infrastructure.
>
> External approaches have included measures such as: the adoption of the strategic framework of the Indo-Pacific; expanding regional strategic multilateral, trilateral and bilateral partnerships, including the reinstatement of the Quad partnership with Japan, India and the United States; enhancing United States Alliance force posture arrangements in Australia; capability development being pursued through AUKUS; enhancing regional military exercises; and a substantially heightened focus for Australian diplomacy in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.[21]

The DSR also outlines the need for a change in defence strategy to respond to this approach. Articulated through a new concept of 'National Defence', the DSR outlines an approach that incorporates a whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approach to addressing the accelerating risks in the Indo-Pacific. Its geographical focus replicates that of the DSU but with a tighter frame that emphasises 'maritime' South-East Asia and the Pacific and the centrality of Australia's northern maritime approaches.

Fundamentally, National Defence 'encompasses the defence of Australia against potential threats arising from major power competition, including the prospect of conflict'. This is central, as it evolves the defence of Australia concept which was focused on low-level and escalated low-level threats. The move to the risk of major power conflict means the adoption of 'accelerated preparedness' and the movement of the ADF from maintaining a regional military capability edge (which it could do against South-East Asian and South Pacific states but not against a major power) to a focus on developing an asymmetric capability edge provided through critical capabilities, including nuclear-power submarines and advanced technologies delivered through AUKUS. This is enabled by a focus on denial – the key unifying strategic concept for National Defence, as its draws together deterrence by denial with a military strategy of denial in Australia's northern approaches. National Defence also drives a focus on the development of defence planning through a focus on net assessment (threat-based defence planning based on one identifiable major threat), the development of the ADF as 'a fully joined-up and Integrated Force', on a set of critical capabilities for the ADF to achieve the strategy and the move away from a balanced to a focused force.[22]

The focus on net assessment is critical. As Stephan Fruehling has noted,

> the most important paragraph of the DSR is that 'the ADF needs a much more focused force structure based on net assessment, a strategy of denial, the risks inherent in the different levels of conflict, and realistic scenarios agreed to by the Government.'

Fruehling goes on to note that the DSR requires that the

> ADF to be designed to meet one, extant, actual, clear and present threat (from China) rather than a range of possible or notional adversaries. Also sometimes called 'threat-based planning', ADF force design should in future reflect much more closely the actual shape and challenges that a conflict with China would present.[23]

The adoption of a regional balancing strategy, deterrence by denial and National Defence (with its emphasis on a focused force driven by net-assessment defence planning) thus removes the dissonance that sat at the heart of Australian Defence policy from 2016 to 2023. National Defence aligns strategy, force structure and capability development. It reframes key strategic concepts in Australian defence policy, including the role of the US alliance, self-reliance and Australian sovereignty, the (asymmetric) capability edge and provides for a strategic planning coherence that has been absent from the department for decades.

The DSR and Maritime Strategy

This then begs the question of how Corbett's thinking and Admiral Griggs's call for a maritime school of strategic thought relates to the Defence Strategic Review 2023 – one which has been billed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles as 'the most ambitious review of Defence's posture and structure since the Second World War'.

Fundamental to this assessment is to return to Corbett's thinking about the role of a maritime strategy in which he argued was fundamentally about the 'principles which govern a war' or, in this case, peacetime defence policy and strategy, 'in which the sea is a substantial factor' in achieving national objectives. With this yard stick in mind, what is clear from the strategic documents over the last decade and, in particular, the 2023 DSR is an acceptance of the notion that while we do not live at sea it is absolutely critical to human existence, as is the nature of the sea lines of communication and control of the global commons to influencing how – and sometimes whether – people live and work.[24]

In the long-running battle in Australian strategic policy over conceptualising Australia's defence based on the geography of the nation as either a continent or an island, the policy direction for the past decade has been clear. At the apex of this evolution is the 2023 DSR, which clearly articulates Australia's island status, emphasises the importance of Australia's maritime approaches, and highlights the littoral and archipelagic nature of its immediate surrounds and northern approaches.

The word 'maritime' appears 36 times in the public version of the DSR, and the word 'littoral' 11 times. The DSR uses 'maritime' in a broad context, including for:

- Navy force structure and capabilities
- the maritime strategic fleet
- a domain
- a 'critical capabilities' requirement (enhanced, all-domain, maritime capabilities for sea denial operations and localised sea control)
- an expression of geography
- a focus for deterrence
- a descriptor of Australia – 'a maritime nation'
- a focus for a 'capability in long-range strike'
- a requirement for Army capability - 'land-based maritime strike'
- air domain force structure – 'strike capability (maritime and land)'
- maritime domain awareness and security.

It is clear from the DSR that the maritime and littoral spaces in Australia's northern approaches are the *key* terrain for the ADF. Maritime is embedded in the taskings for the Navy, Army and Air Force. In fact, Army is now required to define itself as a maritime force. The DSR states that 'Australia's Army must be transformed and optimised for littoral manoeuvre operations by sea, land and air from Australia, with enhanced long-range fires'. It must develop 'a fully enabled, integrated amphibious-capable combined-arms land system'. Army must be able to deliver a 'littoral manoeuvre capability by sea, land and air and long-range fires, including land-based maritime strike'.[25]

The DSR may well be, as the Deputy Prime Minister states, 'the most ambitious review of Defence's posture and structure since the Second World War', but it is not because of any revolutionary approach to defence policy and strategy. The drivers of this ambition and the scale of change are the fundamentally different strategic circumstances that Australia faces. What the DSR does do is provide coherency to a national and defence response to these circumstances. The DSR recognises and embraces the maritime nature of Australia's island status. It reflects that fact that 99 per cent of Australian trade comes (and goes) via cargo ships. That 95 per cent of Australia's telecommunications — digital, and internet — come in via undersea cable. That Australia has the world's third-largest maritime exclusive economic zone, covering 8.2 million square kilometres, and that the economic and conservation value of this zone is considerable, as it contains oil and gas fields, fisheries and shipping lanes.[26]

A maritime strategy does have different meanings for different countries and their unique circumstances. For Australia, such a strategic approach is framed by our enduring strategic circumstances. These include geography, demography and culture, as well as the political system, the economy (and economic interests) and the nation's military capacity.[27] It must also reflect the changing nature of our regional order in the Indo-Pacific. As a result, an Australian maritime 'strategy' – or strategy where maritime issues are fundamental – is one which implies a number of key defining elements, including:

- the critical operational environment for the ADF
- a description of the key terrain,[28] with a focus on Australia's northern approaches
- the focus of operations for the integrated force
- a reflection of Australia's 'primary operating environment', i.e. the main emphasis of ADF operations in our own region
- a link to the notion that Australia is an island and its northern geographic region that is fundamentally archipelagic and littoral
- a recognition of Australia's exceptionally broad maritime interests (including the Southern Ocean).

Underlining this approach is the fact that 71 per cent of the world's surface is water and that a significant bulk of its population lives within 200 kilometres of the sea. Of critical importance is the enduring geographic features of Australia – an island with vast littoral and archipelagic northern approaches and broad regional and maritime interests. This is important, as in Australia's region all the decisive 'turning points of world history in general and of occidental history in particular, have been of a maritime nature'.[29] This is central to the DSR's approach.

Ultimately, the DSR reflects the fact that, as a trading nation, the security of Australia's maritime approaches is essential to its national survival, peace, and prosperity. As the current Chief of Navy, Vice-Admiral Mark Hammond, recently noted, 'Sea lines of communication are the lifeblood of this nation'.[30] In placing the maritime domain at the centre of its strategic approach, the DSR significantly advances the idea of a maritime school of strategic thought for Australia.

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[1] Andrew Forbes, 'Australia's Maritime Past, Present and Future', in Geoffrey Till and Patrick C Bratton (eds), *Sea Power and the Asia-Pacific*, Routledge, Milton Park, 2012, p 167.

[2] This related to the Defence of Australia strategic doctrine adopted in the 1976 Defence White Paper and the reconceptualising of this extant strategy in the 2023 Defence Strategic Review.

[3] Julian S Corbett, Some Principles of Maritime Strategy, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1988 (1911 repr.), p 4.

[4] Peter Layton, 'Australia's Many 'maritime strategies', The Strategist, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 28 March 2013. aspistrategist.org.au/australias-many-maritime-strategies

[5] Department of Defence, Defending Australia and Its National Interests: Defence White Paper 2013, Australian Government, Canberra, 2013, Section 3.42, p 29.

[6] 2013 Defence White Paper, p 8.

[7] 2013 Defence White Paper, pp 24-25.

[8] 2013 Defence White Paper, p 24.

[9] Hans J Ohff and Jon Stanford, 'Why Is Australia Still Investing in a Balanced Defence Force?', The Strategist, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 7 July 2021. aspistrategist.org.au/why-is-australia-still-investing-in-a-balanced-defence-force

[10] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, Australian Government, 2017. dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf

[11] DFAT, 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, pp 18, 19, 27, 41, 46, 58, 99.

[12] Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2016, Sections 1.15-1.16, p 33. Emphasis added.

[13] The 2023 Defence Strategic Review recommended abolishing white papers and replacing them with a bi-annual national defence strategy (NDS). This approach was accepted by government and the first NDS is due for release in early 2024.

[14] Stephan Fruehling, 'The Defence Strategic Review: A Revolution in Australian Defence Planning?', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 26 April 2023. Most likely the last as the DSR recommended the end of White Papers and their replacement with a National Defence Strategy to be delivered every two years.

[15] Hew Strachen, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy', *Survival*, Autumn 2005, 47(3), pp 33, 54.

[16] Department of Defence, 2020 Defence Strategic Update, Australian Government, Canberra, p 6.

[17] Colin Gray, 'Sea Power in Modern Strategy', in David Stevens and John Reeve (eds), *Southern Trident: Strategy, History and the Rise of Australian Naval Power*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2001, p 35.

[18] Julian Corbett, *England in the Seven Years War, Volume 1*, 2nd edn, Longmans Green, pp 218-219.

[19] Penny Wong, *National Press Club Address: Australian Interests in a Regional Balance of Power*, 17 April 2023. foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/national-press-club-address-australian-interests-regional-balance-power

[20] Wong, *National Press Club Address*.

[21] Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, sections 3.16–3.17, pp 33–34.

[22] Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023*, pp 32–33.

[23] Fruehling, 'The Defence Strategic Review: A Revolution in Australian Defence Planning?'

[24] Peter J Dean, 'Air-Sea Battle and the Utility of Land Power in the Asia Pacific', *East Asia Forum*, 12 October 2012. eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/05/air-sea-battle-and-the-utility-of-land-power-in-the-asia-pacific

[25] Australian Government, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023*, p 58.

[26] Peter J Dean, 'The Basis for an SSN Capability for Australia', United States Studies Centre, 13 March 2023. ussc.edu.au/the-basis-for-an-ssn-capability-for-australia

[27] There is no space in this paper to define these in detail.

[28] I do not subscribe to the concept of an 'air-sea gap' to our north but rather an air-sea-land operating environment in our immediate approaches and beyond.

[29] Gerd Hamann, 'Maritime Strategy', in J Schwarz, WA Herrmann and H Frank Seeler, *Maritime Strategies in Asia*, White Loftus, Bangkok, 2002, p 19.

[30] 'Leaders discuss future of nuclear-powered subs', Department of Defence, Australian Government, 23 December 2022. defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2022-12-23/leaders-discuss-future-nuclear-powered-subs

Land Forces and Maritime Strategy for Australia: An Update

Ian Langford

Introduction

When I wrote the essay 'Land Forces and Maritime Strategy for Australia' in 2013, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was in the midst of a significant capability uplift of its amphibious platforms and embarked force elements. The arrival of the Canberra-class ships has since had a positive and dramatic impact on the ADF; it was very much *the* focal point of the ADF's joint force contribution in that era to Australia's maritime strategy, reflected through the tone and tenor of the 2013 Defence White Paper.

The two landing helicopter dock (LHD) vessels were commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in 2014 and 2015, and today continue to provide the core amphibious capability of the ADF. The primary role of the LHD is to support regional operations. They have the capacity to transport, deploy and support a wide range of land forces, including helicopters, landing craft and troops. These platforms have enhanced Australia's ability to conduct limited amphibious assault, humanitarian aid and disaster relief missions, and other operations involving the projection of military power from the sea. Operational deployments and major activities since 2014 include Operation Bushfire Assist (2019–2020), Exercise Talisman Sabre, Rim of the Pacific exercises, humanitarian interventions throughout the Indo-Pacific region, as well as participation in Indo-Pacific Endeavour, a regional deterrence and stability operation that takes place annually.[1]

Of particular note, Army's component of the ADF's amphibious capability has also been significantly enhanced over this same time; the creation of the Joint Pre-Landing Force, the increase in acquisition of LHD-capable Chinook helicopters, and the regular projection of Army capabilities across Australia's inner strategic arc (to include armoured and mechanised forces), all are testament to the realisation of an ambitious plan, executed in and around 2013, that reflects an ADF determined to develop a credible amphibious capability.

While impressive for its time, most pundits would now agree that, ten years later, Australia's maritime capabilities require further update and modification. As the world has changed, and the

security environment across the Indo-Pacific adjusts to meet the shifting power and dynamics of the region, the ADF now needs to evolve *beyond* its amphibious capabilities in recognition of these changes; especially critical to this evolution is the role of land forces.

Evolving Nature of the Operating Environment

Since 2013, the world has changed in some ways imagined and in other ways unexpectedly. Predictions made in my previous paper that attested to warfare's unchanging nature, humanity's increasing urbanisation, the impacts of digital connectivity, and the convergence of joint forces to a 'multi-domain' capability have largely borne true. Two other earlier points made, however, have had a more profound impact on the operating environment than previously anticipated: nation-state rivalry, and the proliferation of emerging technology and the security impacts that will result.

Threats have increased from rival nations and rogue states. While the return of great power competition was anticipated, few, if anyone, predicted Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the rapid contestation now occurring in the South China Sea, or the militarisation of the space and cyber domain. Russia's invasion has confirmed the return of high-intensity conflict as a mechanism of state power in the modern world. Others are now watching. China's continued development of permanent infrastructure on reefs and atolls throughout the maritime commons in the vicinity of the South China Sea now threatens long-held international conventions on the law of the sea, as well as acts as an affront to other countries who also claim to sovereignty in these areas.

Coupled with the return of great-power competition is the rapid militarisation of the space and cyber domain, which by themselves represent two new decisive vectors in modern warfare. Operational experiences in Ukraine, as well as demonstration of ground- and space-based anti-satellite technologies, have created an entire new attack surface against other states' space and data-driven critical infrastructure. The 'Web War One' attacks against Estonia in 2007 were an early insight into the cyber-attack vector which has become common and prolific in modern conflict such as we see in Ukraine, as well as in other 'non-conflict' and 'pre-conflict' environments. The 2021 attack against the critical Colonial Oil pipeline infrastructure in the United States is also evidence of this.[2]

In addition to the emerging domains of space and cyber is the newer, more nuanced distinction of the maritime domain, to now include the 'undersea' and 'on-sea' environments. The 2022 attack on the Nord Stream pipeline, which links Russian gas to Western Europe, demonstrated to the world the vulnerability that on-sea infrastructure has from sabotage and military attack.[3] Given Australia's reliance on undersea fibre-optic cables, where more than 95 per cent of all national data is transmitted, the requirement to protect and defend on-sea infrastructure is now urgent, particularly so after the Nord Stream event.[4]

Lastly is the imminent disruptive impact of emerging technology, to include robotics and automated systems (RAS), artificial intelligence (AI) and directed energy (DE). Each is now seen as fundamental to future military capability. While drones have been part of the military capability inventory for more than 20 years, their proliferation as the 'small, cheap and many' component of any military contingency plan which seeks to rapidly generate *mass* has unleashed a demand signal for this capability the world over. There is now seemingly a RAS solution for almost *all* military missions that are either high risk or likely to result in high attrition. Coupled with this is the transformational impact of AI in terms of data processing, decision-making, command and control, sensing and targeting. Additionally, DE is now being introduced into militaries, initially as defensive counter-missile and counter-RAS systems, with the fielding of offensive strike systems likely in the next 10 to 15 years. When combined, RAS, AI and DE are set to fundamentally accelerate and change the character of war and conflict in the coming age.

With these change factors now at play, the past ten years has validated the view that the world is at the beginning of its next revolution of military affairs. The return of war as a tool of statecraft, the militarisation of space and cyber as war-fighting domains, and the rise of emerging technology as a functional determinant of military power are all evidence of this. While war's nature proves that human beings remain central to a countries ability to fight and win in conflict, increasingly, access to critical technology will equally be decisive in terms of its ultimate conclusion.

Land Power in Maritime–Littoral Environments

In both the Forward Defence (1945–1972) and the Defence of Au*stralia* (1973–2022) epochs of Australian Defence policy, the Australian Army was thought of in two ways: *forward and expeditionary*, with a focus on fighting from the land against other land forces as part of a military alliance, or *concentrated forces,* focused on continental defence and rear-area security operations. With the release of the Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR), the Army is now arguably on the cusp of a third epoch: *stand-in strike forces.*

Unlike the Defence White Paper of 2013 (which was the government defence policy when this paper was originally conceived), the 2023 DSR emphasises an Army evolution towards a 'focused force', with specific structural determinants to include long-range strike, littoral-force manoeuvre and *all domain* command and control.[5] It also notes that, in terms of geography, Australia's area of military interest should be the strategic region encompassing the north-eastern Indian Ocean through to South-East Asia, tracking eastward into the Pacific Ocean, with a specific focus on the continent's northern approaches. It is logical, given this geography, to therefore see that the concept mechanism by which the DSR will be executed is to be via a maritime strategy. Any modern maritime strategy involves air, sea and land forces operating jointly to influence operations and events, something the DSR alludes to strongly.

The government's recent DSR announcement that Army will essentially co-equal Navy and Air Force as a legitimate contributor to strike is significant; the acquisition of long-range strike launchers and munitions, as well as the procurement of anti-ship missiles, reflects the direction given to Army to evolve its force structure to not only be dominant in the land domain, but also contribute to other domains *from* land which will be critical to joint operations, especially in archipelagic areas of the Indo-Pacific region. Important Army missions include the ability to assert sea control from land around maritime chokepoints, the provision of capabilities as part of an ADF missile defence system, *stand-in* forces that can engage in close combat and survive in contested areas, contributions to the ADF targeting and kill chain to include strike, and lastly, to establish and command operational theatres. Planned acquisitions in military satellite communications, over-the-shore logistics, target acquisition and weapon-location radars as well as High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems are all indicative of this future land force.

Army will also enhance its land force credentials by concurrently procuring a littoral force projection capability which will be critical to supplementing the existing ADF amphibious manoeuvre system as well as reduce the liability on Navy and Air Force to deploy Army into the region. The likely acquisition of medium to large landing vessels, capable of littoral and (where appropriate) open-sea passage reflects capabilities akin to the US Army Maritime Operations Branch of the Second World War (little is known or understood of the activities of the US Army to resupply troops cut off in the Philippines between December 1941 and May 1942, except to say that the US Army performed this role, independent of the US Navy or Air Force).[6] This role will be important for the entire joint force, who will not be able to only rely on its marquee platforms and capabilities to do all of its missions, especially in high threat environments.

Conclusion

Much has changed since 2013. The priority then to generate a credible ADF amphibious capability was successful; the assigned forces of 2023 owe their lineage to the work of those involved in this important initiative a generation earlier. As impressive as that was, however, these amphibious forces need now further evolution; future capabilities must now include an ability for other domain forces, to include the land force, to contribute beyond the amphibious system only and deeper into the DSR-inspired ADF future maritime strategy.

The 2023 DSR has directed these significant changes and the Army is now evolving into a land force capable of both amphibious *and* littoral force projection, focused on the Indo-Pacific region. This critically includes the ability to stand-in contested areas and engage in close combat. This force adjustment reflects the changes in Australia's security environment, specifically the re-emergence of great-power competition, the impact of emerging technology and the incorporation of space, cyber, undersea and on-sea threats as they relate to sovereignty and regional security. All will be

critical to a future ADF that is capable of protecting and defending Australia's land and maritime interests as we move into the middle part of this twenty-first century.

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[1] Department of Defence, 'Operations', Australian Government, accessed 12 September 2023. defence.gov.au/operations

[2] John Easterly, 'The Attack on Colonial Pipeline: What We've Learned & What We've Done Over the Past Two Years' Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency, 7 May 2023, accessed 10 September 2023. cisa.gov/news-events/news/attack-colonial-pipeline-what-weve-learned-what-weve-done-over-past-two-years

[3] 'Intelligence Suggests Pro-Ukrainian Sabotaged Pipeline', *The New York Times*, 7 March 2023, accessed 11 September 2023. nytimes.com/2023/03/07/us/politics/nord-stream-pipeline-sabotage-ukraine.html.

[4] Sherryn Groch and Felicity Lewis, 'A Dozen Undersea Cables Connect Australia to the Internet. What Happens if They Get Hacked – or Cut?', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 2022, accessed 10 September 2023. smh.com.au/technology/the-internet-is-run-under-the-sea-not-in-the-cloud-what-happens-if-the-cables-get-hacked-or-snipped-20221025-p5bsov.html

[5] Alex Bristow and Marcus Schultz, 'Army Has a Critical Role in Defence Strategic Review's "Integrated Force"', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, 22 June 2023, p 2.

[6] Charles Gibson with E. Kay Gibson, *Over Seas: U.S. Army Maritime Operations, 1898, Through the Fall of the Philippines*, Ensign Press, USA, 2002, p 14.

Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia Legal Considerations: Updated and Revised

David Letts

A decade ago, these five legal considerations were identified for inclusion in the first edition of *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives*:

a. the impact of increased regulation in the maritime domain

b. legal challenges of enforcing Australian sovereign rights in maritime zones that are subject to Australian domestic jurisdiction

c. protection of Australian sovereign interests in the region

d. the use of force by Australian forces at, and from, sea

e. the impact of emerging technology on naval operations and other activities in the maritime domain.

In the years that have followed the publication of the first edition, each of these considerations have been challenged to some extent, and new legal issues impacting the maritime domain have emerged – both in Australia's immediate region and further afield. This chapter will reflect on the legal picture that was addressed in the first edition in order to evaluate what assumptions and arguments held true, which of these diverged from the expected outcome and the implications that arise from this evaluation for Australia.

Maritime Regulation

The overarching legal regulatory framework that existed a decade ago, and which continues to inform Australian maritime thought and operations at sea, is the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.[1] While there have been no changes to the substantive articles in the LOSC itself during the past decade, a number of significant issues have arisen as a result of actions taken by Indo-Pacific regional states. The catalyst for many of these issues has been the growing assertiveness of China in the South China Sea, with that state undertaking an aggressive program of

building facilities on contested maritime features throughout the South China Sea, and then accompanying this building activity with threats to freedom of navigation being undertaken through the adjacent waters and airspace.

The increase in Chinese building activity in the South China Sea, and the accompanying assertiveness of Chinese responses to the presence of vessels and aircraft that China objects to navigating close to the maritime features that it claims, can be linked to the decision by the government of the Philippines to seek an arbitral ruling under the LOSC. Using the provisions of the LOSC to engage in arbitration with China was undoubtedly a source of major irritation to the Chinese, as is evidenced by China refusing to accept the arbitral tribunal's competence to adjudicate on the issues raised by the Philippines.[2] China did not appoint an agent for the proceedings or send any representatives to the hearings with China's consistent position being that 'it does not accept the arbitration initiated by the Philippines'.[3] Australia has stated in numerous official communications that it supports the validity of the arbitral tribunal's ruling and the

> Australian Government has consistently called on the parties to the arbitration to abide by the Tribunal's decision, which is final and binding on both China and the Philippines … Adherence to international law is fundamental to the continuing peace, prosperity and stability of our region. It allows all states – big and small – to resolve disputes peacefully.[4]

A decade ago, in the first edition, it was noted that challenges to warship sovereign immunity were placing pressure on long-held legal positions adopted by many states, including Australia, regarding the sovereign immune status and inviolability of warships (and military aircraft). These issues have been increasingly challenged by China during the past decade, with numerous examples of actual or attempted interference with warship passage rights and aircraft overflight rights. Whether or not the increase in Chinese challenges to the presence of military vessels and aircraft in the South China Sea arose because of the Philippines' initiated arbitration is open to debate. Continuation, or resumption, of naval activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region from the United States, a number of European states, Canada and Australia could also play a factor in raising Chinese objections to vessels that China considers do not have a right to navigate through these contested waters. However, any such argument from the Chinese is rejected by states such as the United States and Australia, who have pointed to longstanding practice of naval presence and activity in the South China Sea, and the legal right for warships to navigate in these waters is entrenched in the LOSC and customary international law.

One aspect of Chinese practice in the South China Sea that was not envisaged when the first edition was published was the increasing use of so-called 'grey zone' tactics to disguise the true intent and nature of activities undertaken by Chinese vessels. These tactics arise when a deliberate shroud is

placed around the activities of vessels and aircraft with the intention of creating doubt and confusion as to the precise nature of the activity. For example, China has increasingly made use of its maritime militia to interfere with other vessels' passage rights in and around the contested maritime features that are occupied by China. The most striking example is the repeated interference by China with re-supply efforts at Second Thomas Shoal where the Philippine navy vessel BRP *Sierra Madre* has been located since May 1997.[5]

Domestic Jurisdiction

A decade ago, three specific issues arising from Australia's domestic legal framework were identified as being relevant to an Australian Maritime School of Strategic Thought: constitutional limitations on Commonwealth powers; the role that could be played by Australian states and territories and human rights obligations under Commonwealth legislation. Each of these issues remains relevant, but none of them have proven to be a barrier to Australia setting out its maritime strategic objectives and moving ahead with them. In terms of enforcement powers under domestic law, one part of domestic Commonwealth legislation that has been very well received by those agencies with responsibility for enforcement at sea is the *Maritime Powers Act 2013*. This Act commenced its operation in March 2014 and this legislation finally consolidated maritime enforcement powers across the range of maritime enforcement agencies into one piece of legislation. The effect was indeed 'strategic', as it was no longer necessary for maritime law enforcement officials to grapple with multiple enforcement regimes when conducting operations at sea, regardless of whether the issue being addressed was a fisheries, customs or migration offence.

The *Maritime Powers Act* can be contrasted with the way in which Australia has approached maritime security doctrine through adopting a number of discrete strategies that are not fully linked or coherent. Harmonisation of these strategies should occur so that in the future Australia can benefit from one overall maritime security strategy, with sub-elements if needed. This approach would see elements from Defence white papers, Foreign Policy white papers, civil maritime security strategy and the Guide to Australian Maritime Security Arrangements being combined into a single comprehensive maritime security strategy.[6]

Briefly looking at domestic legal issues involving other states, some of the recent actions of China in passing domestic laws that are not consistent with its international legal obligations raise concern. For example, the 2021 Chinese Coast Guard Law, which *inter alia* purports to empower the China Coast Guard to use lethal force against foreign flagged vessels in disputed South China Sea waters, is evidence of a willingness by China to implement highly contentious domestic laws.

Protection of Australian Regional Interests

The decade since publication of the first edition has seen some seismic shifts in the regional security landscape, dominated in the Indo-Pacific region by the ongoing tensions between China and numerous states. In Australia's case, the consistent messaging from governments of both sides of politics regarding adherence to international laws and the international rules-based order has been a constant part of Australia's Foreign and Defence policy throughout the decade. In the latter part of the decade, Australia's position in relation to China and challenges posed in the South China Sea led to some unwelcome and unnecessary legal processes instituted by China through the imposition of trade bans and outrageous tariffs on imported Australian goods. Thankfully, in the past year, there has been a clear thawing of the China–Australia relationship and this has been achieved without Australia shifting from its strong stance on maritime freedom and adherence to widely held concepts of international law.

One issue that was briefly mentioned in the 2013 publication was whether ASEAN could potentially play a role in peacefully resolving South China Sea disputes. It was posited then that China was not interested in engaging in any facilitated dispute resolution either with ASEAN or any other regional organisation, and this situation has been clearly highlighted with the stalled South China Sea Code of Conduct discussions. There does not appear to be any realistic prospect of the code of conduct being completed in the near future; also, given that the code of conduct was first proposed in the 1990s, legitimate questions can be asked about whether any code is needed at all.

A decade ago in the first edition, Australia's involvement with international legal bodies to pursue sovereign maritime interests was highlighted with the pending completion of the Antarctic whaling case: *Whaling in the Antarctic (Australia v Japan: New Zealand Intervening)*.[7] That case was finally decided in 2014 when the International Court of Justice ruled that Japan's whaling practices in the Antarctic were not being done for the purposes of scientific research and therefore were in breach of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. The effect of the court's ruling was the cessation of the Japanese whaling program in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, which marked a resounding victory for Australia in terms of achieving its regional interests.

A different story emerged with the decision by Timor-Leste to commence legal proceedings against Australia arising from that state's dissatisfaction with a number of treaties that had been signed soon after Timor-Leste achieved independence in 2002.[8] In this case, Australia sought to use the legal measures available to it in order to prevent Timor-Leste from proceeding with its legal action under the LOSC, but ultimately this was not possible and Australia was obliged to participate in compulsory conciliation pursuant to Annex V of the LOSC. To Australia's credit, and in direct contrast to the behaviour of China in the arbitration with the Philippines, Australia accepted the judgement against its arguments that the conciliation commission had no jurisdiction to hear the case, and proceeded to settle the conciliation with Timor-Leste as quickly as possible.

These two cases, along with the lessons from the Philippines–China arbitration, demonstrate how states can use the international legal architecture to pursue their maritime strategic interests. However, in doing so, it is incumbent upon states to act with equal willingness to accept an adverse decision as well as those decisions that are favourable. Japan and Australia both showed their readiness to behave in this way, and also showed their acceptance and adherence to a rules-based maritime order.

Finally, the decade has seen a strengthening of regional security alliances, with the most recent example being the agreement signed between Australia and the Philippines in September 2023 to upgrade the bilateral alliance to a strategic partnership.[9] Although such agreements do not involve binding treaty obligations, they do describe clear intent on the part of both countries to increase their mutual security commitments with an obvious focus on maritime issues.[10]

Use of Force at Sea and Emerging Technology

Perhaps it has been fortunate that during the decade since publication of the first edition there has not been any significant use of force in the region and armed conflict in the maritime spaces remains almost completely absent. This does not, of course, mean that Australia's maritime strategy should dismiss the possibility of armed conflict at sea occurring, and there are a number of recent military acquisition decisions by Australia that reinforce the need for more advanced weapons and greater use of emerging technology.

Paramount among these decisions is the announcement that Australia will work with the United States and United Kingdom to develop a nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarine force over the next few decades under the AUKUS framework. This announcement has been coupled with the decision to buy an inventory of land-attack missiles that can be launched from naval platforms, as well as Australia deciding to invest in an offensive naval mine capability. New naval combat helicopters are also being procured and a new fleet of surface combatants is also on its way. Development of autonomous platforms that can operate in the air, on the surface and sub-surface is also well advanced.

The assessment from a decade ago about ensuring that Australia complies with its weapons review obligations under Additional Protocol 1 Article 36[11] remain extant, and must form part of any weapon acquisition strategy.

Conclusion

The legal complexities that are associated with a Maritime Strategic School of Thought for Australia have not diminished in the decade since the original publication. If anything, the legal picture has become more clouded, with a range of continuing pressures on Australia throughout the decade, and

an ever-growing list of legal and compliance obligations. The continuing pressures that are applied by states that knowingly and consistently fail to live up to their international legal obligations make it all the more important for those states that do routinely abide by the rules-based order to continue to do so – and to call out and place pressure on those who do not. Over the past decade, Australia has shown that it is willing to push the legal boundaries when it is in the national interest. However, Australia has also shown that it is a responsible international citizen that operates with the measured framework that applies to a free and open Indo-Pacific under a rules-based international order.

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[1] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Law of the Sea*, 10 December 1982, 1833 UNTS 397 ('LOSC').

[2] *See* 'The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China), Permanent Court of Arbitration. pca-cpa.org/en/cases/7

[3] 'The South China Sea Arbitration'

[4] *See* Marise Payne, 'Marking the 5th Anniversary of the South China Sea Arbitral Award', Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, 12 July 2021. foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/marking-5th-anniversary-south-china-sea-arbitral-award

[5] Jon Hoppe, 'The Measure of the Sierra Madre', *Naval History Magazine*, February 2022, 36(1). usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2022/february/measure-sierra-madre

[6] This approach has been adopted by a number of states in recent years: the USA, UK, Russia and New Zealand, as well as the European Union.

[7] *See* 'Whaling in the Antarctic (Australia V. Japan: New Zealand Intervening)', International Court of Justice. icj-cij.org/case/148

[8] The 2002 Timor Sea Treaty and the 2003 International Unitization Agreement for Greater Sunrise were terminated upon entry into force of the 2018 Treaty between Australia and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste Establishing Their Maritime Boundaries in the Timor Sea (the Maritime Boundary Treaty).

[9] 'Joint Leaders Statement – The Philippines', Prime Minister of Australia, 8 September 23. pm.gov.au/media/joint-leaders-statement-philippines

[10] See, Karen Lema, 'Australia, Philippines Upgrade Ties to Strategic Partnership', *Reuters*, 8 September 2023. reuters.com/world/australia-pm-says-new-strategic-partnership-strengthen-ties-with-philippines-2023-09-08

[11] Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1) of 8 June 1977, 1125 UNTS 3.

Part III: Fresh Perspectives

Australia is a Maritime Nation

Angela Gillham

Events of the last four years have served to focus the minds of state and federal governments, and the business world, on Australia's existing and future supply chain resilience and related sovereign maritime capability. Up to this point, perhaps because of sheer luck, the strategic and long-term impact of ignoring the gradual yet consistent decline in Australian shipping had not been fully understood or recognised – we are yet to suffer the consequences of the risk we are taking as a nation. Australia's almost complete reliance on foreign assets and human capital to provide critical linkages between our industrial, manufacturing and population centres, and to connect us to the world, has the potential to materially affect the lives of everyday Australians. As a major global exporter of raw materials, safe and efficient throughput at our major exporting ports has been a focus for the important role these sectors play in facilitating the economic activity that underpins our national prosperity. More recently, the spotlight has been on the role shipping plays in delivering essential imports and coastal bulk transport for manufacturing and construction, as well as ensuring our national energy security, and the fact that very little of this critically important transport work is done by Australian-controlled assets. Access to low-cost shipping brings many benefits to the economy, but until now the broader strategic implications of allowing the depth and breadth of our sovereign merchant maritime capability to erode so significantly has not been appreciated. With respect to Australian sea transport, a singular focus on keeping costs borne by the shipper and the taxpayer down has not served the national interest, and we find ourselves in a vulnerable and precarious position with respect to our national resilience.

The events alluded to need little introduction: some regional communities fleeing the Black Summer bushfires could only be reached from the sea; the COVID-19 pandemic and its complex, multi-faceted, and ongoing impacts on supply chains; flooding in South Australia that cut the east-coast rail services to Western Australia and the Northern Territory; extreme flooding in the Fitzroy River region cutting road access and isolating remote Kimberly communities that could only be provisioned by sea; and, perhaps most alarmingly, the invasion of Ukraine affecting global supply chains and energy security along with the growing geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region. These are events that immediately come to mind, but they are increasing in frequency, severity and, in slightly nuanced ways, highlighting the growing need for national resilience in the form of strong and enduring sovereign merchant maritime capability.

A causal link can be made between the reduction in Australian merchant maritime capability, in terms of assets and human capital, and the reduction in Australia's sovereign manufacturing, particularly the significant contraction of the petroleum refining industry to its bare minimum. Dedicated vessels on routes servicing the aluminium and steel industries were displaced by foreign ships while financial incentives for Australian shipping were withdrawn. This led to significant competitive disadvantages and measures to reserve domestic cargo for Australian ships (cabotage) were eroded. This pattern of decline continues today, after the 2012 attempt at reform of the fiscal and regulatory settings failed to go far enough to level the playing field.[1] In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic, and related supply-chain disruptions, highlighted that the just-in-time system of trade we have come to rely on, and its associated economic efficiencies, is fallible. Again, this singular focus on supply-chain cost minimisation denies the nation the broader benefits, including increased national resilience, which are derived from a strong sovereign merchant maritime capability.

At around 10 million square kilometres, Australia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is one of the largest in the world. The nation's maritime search and rescue responsibilities cover 11% of the world's surface. We have 17 'nationally significant' ports, and many more minor ports in remote and regional areas, providing a critical lifeline connecting Australian communities to each other and the world. As an island nation, our reliance on shipping seems obvious and logic dictates we should have a strong seagoing culture and affinity with maritime trade borne out by proactive policies that encourage and support a thriving shipping industry, as is the case in other maritime nations. Yet the reality defies such logic. A decade ago, this publication highlighted Australia's obsession with looking landward and conquering the continent's wide expanse. While this still rings true, the strategic context has evolved.

Globally, our industry faces a skills shortage. Domestically, we are on the verge of a maritime skills crisis. The decline in Australian ships has seen a corresponding decline in training opportunities, and the supply of highly skilled Australian seafarers has all but dried up. Impacting the supply side is the cost associated with traditional cadet training pathways and the lack of alternative options. The situation is particularly severe with respect to higher qualified deck officers and marine engineers. Compounding the issue is the fact that many end users of maritime skills, with a few exceptions, cannot and do not train or contribute to training and skills development for current and future needs. These end users include resource companies, ports, and regulators that employ personnel whose skills and experience obtained at sea is critically important to the safe and environmentally responsible functioning of ports, terminals and the broader maritime industries. The 2018 MIAL Seafaring Skills Census[2] predicted a shortfall of more than 560 seafarers by 2023. The census did not predict industry attrition resulting from COVID-19 and the upswing in maritime skills demand resulting from increased activity in the existing offshore resources industry, nor did it consider future demand driven by the burgeoning offshore wind industry and the government's commitment to building a maritime strategic fleet – as discussed below. As an island nation, utterly dependent on

sea transport, the ongoing development of these skills is critical to supply chain security and the overall functioning of the Australian economy.

Since *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought* was published, the cause and impacts of climate change are no longer up for debate and, globally, we have evolved towards mitigation and adaptation. For the shipping industry this represents an unprecedented challenge in the energy transition. For Australia, with the fifth largest shipping task in the world, it is a significant opportunity to pivot to supplying the low- and zero-carbon fuels that promise to decarbonise the global shipping industry and the world. Over the next 20 years, decarbonisation also has the potential to change the energy security landscape for Australia along with related domestic and global shipping patterns. The expected increased frequency and severity of climate-related natural disasters will draw heavily on Australia's defence force for humanitarian aid and assistance at a time when the adequacy of the nation's defence force capabilities, for the purpose of national defence, is being called into question. The recently released Defence Strategic Review (DSR), commissioned by the current government to 'assess whether Australia had the necessary defence capability, posture and preparedness' in the current strategic environment is instructive. Among other critically important recommendations, the DSR makes the case that, in the face of an increased disaster relief task, the ADF must be the force of last resort. State and Commonwealth jurisdictions must develop civilian national resilience measures to provide domestic disaster and recovery support. An enhanced sovereign merchant navy capability has a significant role to play.

The DSR articulates this need for an enhanced sovereign maritime capability through the national defence lens. Articulating the change in defence posture from Defence of Australia to National Defence, among key elements of successful implementation, the DSR highlights *climate change action* and *domestic resilience*. In the opening pages, as part of the National Defence Statement, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Richard Marles, describes Australia's strategic posture as laying in the 'collective security of the Indo-Pacific' and 'in the protection of our economic connection with the world'. As VADM Ray Griggs (Retd) noted in *Maritime School of Strategic Thought*, about two thirds of our exports, and almost half our imports, pass through the South China Sea. The potential consequences of a conflict in this region would be far reaching. The DSR recommends a refocusing of defence resources from land forces to on-water capability and emphasises the need for an integrated, whole-of-government approach to national defence, highlighting the importance of Indo-Pacific regional partnerships. History informs us about the importance of a sovereign merchant navy to national defence capability. The challenge that has been set by the DSR, to increase national resilience in the current complex strategic environment, can only be met with the assistance of a strong and enduring sovereign merchant navy. Along with a strong diplomatic and investment focus in the Pacific and South-East Asia, the current government's commitment to a strategic fleet is an important part of a unified national strategic approach.

In his National Defence Statement 2023, and in the context of enhancing national security and building resilience, Deputy Prime Minister Marles specifically called out the interrelationship between DSR recommendations and government policy priorities by referencing the government commitment to 'establishing a civil maritime strategic fleet' as part of government efforts to 'make Australia more stable, confident and secure'.

Announced as Labor Party policy in 2019, the strategic fleet concept includes the establishment of a fleet of up to 12 Australian-flagged and -crewed vessels privately owned and operated on a commercial basis. These vessels could be requisitioned by government in times of need. It's important to note that Australia already has a considerable strategic fleet – vessels that the government sees fit to own, operate, or charter, such as the Defence Marine Support Services Program and Border Protection fleets, the Antarctic Division icebreaker, CSIRO research vessel, and Australian Maritime Safety Authority emergency response vessels. While significantly reduced in number, the Australian maritime industry remains a dynamic and diverse sector, which includes businesses already heavily invested in providing support services to Australian government fleets and has a proud history of working together and supporting our nation's needs. The strategic fleet policy would seek to expand the existing strategic fleet to include commercial vessels for the purpose of increasing Australia's supply chain security, and provide the assets for defence sustainment, mobilisation, and humanitarian assistance domestically and within our region, if required, and deliver the employment and training platforms needed to meet Australia's strategic maritime skills requirement.

Internationally, there are examples of broader concepts of strategic fleets: regimes adopted by the United Kingdom, via the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and in the United States of America via the Military Sealift Command. Both nations also have significant nationally flagged fleets that can be requisitioned as required. It goes without saying that every nation with a large nationally flagged fleet recognises the benefits associated with having a strong shipping industry, such as the creation of skills, revenue generation from the ensuing economic clusters that develop in support of large fleets,[3] control of critical strategic assets, supply chain security and economic diversity. To secure their industries, these nations offer a wide range of incentives, direct subsidisation and apply protectionist measures, or in some cases a combination of all three. To make a considerable contribution to national resilience, an Australian strategic fleet would form the nucleus of an expanding national commercial fleet that could be deployed in any trade anywhere in the world – provided a comparable fiscal and regulatory environment was implemented for Australian flagged shipping, which allows Australian shipping businesses to compete with foreign companies on an equivalent cost base.

Given the current strategic environment, Australia must aggressively pursue the revitalisation of our sovereign merchant maritime industry. We need a long-term and bipartisan strategic approach to

provide the necessary policy certainty and integration. The mechanisms and drivers for policy implementation and, perhaps more importantly, the implications for Australia of failure in this policy area, resulting in further decline in our sovereign maritime capability, are widespread and cross into numerous portfolios, including defence, resources, jobs and skills, climate, energy security, home affairs, and foreign affairs. Equally, there are significant benefits to be derived across those portfolios from policy success, including increased defence sustainment capability, capitalisation of Australia's offshore resources endowment (fossil and renewable), development and supply of critical maritime skills, which are needed across the economy (not just on ships), Australian control over our own energy supply chains, improving energy security, and a greater capability to render assistance to Australians and our Pacific neighbours in the face of increasing climate-related natural disasters.

We must recognise our place in the world, face up to our strategic challenges, and build national resilience – an important part of which is rebuilding our sovereign maritime capability. After all, Australia is a maritime nation.

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Maritime Thinking and Critical Seabed Infrastructure

Samuel Bashfield and David Brewster

Introduction

In Vice Admiral Ray Griggs' 2013 articulation of a Maritime Strategic School of Thought for Australia, he correctly noted that Australia is 'absolutely reliant on good order at sea'.[1] However, in illustrating why the sea is vital for Australia's security and prosperity, one vital domain was absent – the seabed. The seabed is a vital conduit for a range of critical infrastructures – systems and networks – that sustain Australian society. Seabed infrastructure is becoming an increasingly important security domain, alongside other elements of Australia's maritime interest.

So-called 'seabed warfare', which involves the disruption of critical seabed infrastructure, is not a new threat for Australia. In the years before 1914, Britain sought to build the 'All Red Line', a worldwide network of secure communications, using undersea telegraph cables that landed only in British controlled territories. One of Australia's first naval actions in the First World War arose when the German SMS *Emden* targeted and destroyed a cable landing station on Cocos Island in an attempt to sever Australia's communications to Britain via the All Red Line. Seabed warfare also occurred during the Cold War, as when the United States tapped a Soviet cable in the Sea of Okhotsk as part of Operation Ivy Bells. As the recent attacks against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and submarine cables show, critical seabed infrastructure is again in the cross hairs.

This chapter seeks to supplement Australia's Maritime Strategic School of Thought by examining how Australia could conceptualise and safeguard seabed infrastructure that is critical to Australia's interests.

Critical Seabed Infrastructure

There is a range of infrastructure on the seabed which is critical to Australia's interests, and will likely become more critical in coming years. While submarine fibre-optic cables are the most crucial seabed network in operation, the seabed also hosts electricity cables and gas pipelines. Offshore platforms for the extraction of gas are also now a key contributor to Australia's economy. Seabed mining is also proliferating throughout the Indo-Pacific, and will likely become a key source of critical minerals.

Submarine cables are the veins of modern global telecommunications. In excess of 500 submarine cables containing optical fibres traverse the globe, spanning around 1.3 million kilometres.[2] In the Indo-Pacific, submarine cables carry over 95 per cent of international data traffic, including telephone and data communications.[3] Australia is connected to the world by just over 20 cables, which primarily land in Perth and Sydney. While data is also transmitted by satellites, submarine cables carry the great bulk of data internationally, due to the low cost, high speed and high bandwidth provided. As an island nation, Australia is particularly vulnerable to disruptions and outages in submarine communications cables.

Other critical seabed infrastructure is operational and planned off Australia's coasts. The Australian Government is prioritising establishing offshore renewable infrastructure, including offshore wind and solar farms, wave energy plants and undersea interconnectors at various sites around Australia's coast, all of which must be connected to shore via submarine cables.[4] In 2023, Australia's first offshore wind zone in the Bass Strait was given governmental approval and other offshore wind farms are planned.[5] Australia also currently has an extensive network of gas pipelines crossing the North West Shelf in the Indian Ocean which carries gas from offshore extraction platforms to the mainland for liquefaction and export.

Australia may also soon be exporting solar power to Singapore via the world's longest undersea high voltage direct current cable, the Australia-Asia PowerLink.[6] It is planned that this cable, costing over A$30 billion, will transmit solar-generated electricity from the Northern Territory via the Lombok Strait to Singapore, which currently relies on gas for the majority of its electricity generation.

Despite the importance of submarine cables and other critical seabed infrastructure in enabling Australia's economy and society, their security receives relatively little attention. According to scholars Christian Bueger and Tobias Liebetrau, submarine cables (and, by inference, also other seabed infrastructure) suffer from a 'triple invisibility' problem, in that cables are first invisible as infrastructure, second, invisible because they are under the water surface and third, because they are located out to sea.[7] This triple invisibility problem has resulted in a lack of research and understanding into best-practice governance, law enforcement and emergency management, as well as how actors interact in different regions.[8]

Seabed Warfare

Around the world, submarine cables currently suffer between 150 to 200 average cable faults annually,[9] with the majority arising from natural, commercial and recreational (e.g. boating) causes. According to the International Cable Protection Committee, fishing and anchoring accounts for approximately 70 per cent of damage to submarine cables.[10] Damage can also be caused by natural phenomena such as earthquakes, landslides, volcanic activity and extreme weather.

Seabed warfare describes operations that involve undersea networks and systems capable of operating on the seabed, interacting with seabed systems, and taking actions against other systems.[11] Essentially, seabed warfare refers to operations incorporating the sea floor, targeting cables (data and power), sensors and energy transmission and extraction infrastructure.

The Nord Stream attack in 2022 is a prominent example of modern seabed warfare. While there have been several instances of actual or suspected seabed warfare in and around Europe in recent years, there are also cases in the Indo-Pacific of suspected intentional operations to disrupt critical seabed infrastructure. In February 2023, the Taiwanese archipelago of Matsu experienced internet outages after cables were severed in suspicious circumstances. There have been 27 cable incidents in the past five years, and some analysts believe China is behind the outages – as an element of its Taiwan harassment.[12]

The Indo-Pacific's vulnerability to seabed warfare is also increased by the existence of maritime chokepoints through which many communications cables pass (e.g. the Malacca Strait) and the presence of many island states that rely on a single or small number of cables for external communications.

Australia's Response

Australia's response to critical seabed infrastructure and the proliferation of seabed warfare is mixed.

On the positive side, Australia has a strong legislative regime to help protect submarine cables in Australian waters. Australia's *Telecommunications Act 1997* outlines protections for submarine cables and is considered a world-leading protection regime. The Act empowers the Australian Government to declare a 'protection zone' around submarine cables within Australian territorial waters, restricts certain potentially damaging activities within protection zones, sets out stringent criminal penalties for unlawful conduct and stipulates that telecommunication carriers must apply for government permits to install cables.[13] Three protection zones have been established, in Sydney's northern and eastern beaches, as well as off Perth's coast.

However, there are significant gaps in strategy and doctrine. Australia has not published any seabed defence strategy, and its 2022 Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy does not attempt to address the unique challenges associated with protecting critical seabed infrastructure.[14] The Defence Strategic Review 2023's consideration of undersea warfare is limited to the Australian Defence Force's role in anti-submarine warfare rather than critical seabed infrastructure.[15]

RAN doctrine currently gives only limited consideration to the seabed. According to the 2010 Doctrine, the seabed as an 'increasingly important source of [exploitable] resources' is acknowledged.[16] The seabed receives more attention in the unclassified 'Future Maritime Operating

Concept – 2025: Maritime Force Projection and Control' paper, in being regarded as one of seven 'domains', being the 'most opaque and cluttered of the environments'.[17] The paper largely focuses on undersea mines, although it alludes to the seabed's possible 'future utility as a manoeuvre space, allowing for pre-deployment of mission modules into a theatre of operations and using the seabed as an offshore logistic warehouse'.[18] The 'Future Maritime Operating Concept' notes that:

> In 2025, the seabed will be the most complex domain that an adversary (conventional or non-conventional) may use to deter or destroy maritime forces. Surveillance and disposal of sea mines and other seabed-based threats is a time intensive and complex task. Deploying mine warfare assets ahead of the main force is the conventional way to ensure safe passage of mission essential units.[19]

Capabilities are being acquired to respond to threats to seabed infrastructure. Australia has recently acquired a 107 metre–long vessel to be renamed the Australian Defence Vessel (ADV) *Guidance*[20] to support undersea surveillance systems trials, including the ability to deploy undersea crewed and uncrewed vehicles, and robotic and autonomous systems.[21]

Australia is also in the process of acquiring control of new cable networks in the Pacific in response to moves by Chinese state-owned companies to build systems linking Pacific island states. For example, Australia owns a substantial share of the communications cable that connects Sydney with Port Moresby and Honiara, which was developed to avoid it being owned or operated by a Chinese company.[22] In 2023, Australia announced it was partnering with United States and Japanese governments to fund the East Micronesia Cable, which will connect the Federated State of Micronesia (FSM), Tarawa in Kiribati, and Nauru to an existing cable system, again to avoid a Chinese controlled cable.[23]

Critical Seabed Infrastructure and Australia's Maritime School of Strategic Thought

The 'triple invisibility' of seabed infrastructure has contributed to the relative underdevelopment of Australia's strategic thinking on critical seabed infrastructure. Australian society depends heavily on critical seabed infrastructure in communications and other vital services. Consideration of seabed security shouldn't be limited to anti-submarine warfare and mines, but needs to reflect the reality that a range of civil critical infrastructures traverse this murky domain. A national seabed warfare strategy should cover matters such as defence capabilities (platforms and personnel), the enhancement of national industrial capabilities for seabed infrastructure, and the development of international treaties to protect seabed infrastructure in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It's time that critical seabed infrastructure receives commensurate and sustained attention.

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Reflections on a Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Ten Years On

Euan Graham

Australia's strategic circumstances and policy settings have changed considerably since *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives* (MSSTA) was published in 2013. In that year, Australia became the first country to embrace 'Indo-Pacific' as official nomenclature, via the Defence White Paper (DWP). That deliberate inter-oceanic framing of regional geography, still contentious in 2013, is now firmly established as the primary reference point for Australia's defence engagement and wider statecraft. The Indo-Pacific has since been adopted by the US and most of Australia's regional partners.[1] It is worth remembering that Canberra was the first to promote a consciously maritime conception of the surrounding macro-region.[2]

Australia's heightened focus on the Indo-Pacific bears out Peter Dean's contention, in his MSSTA essay, that 'the epicentre of global strategic power and competition has moved much closer to home and this will continue into the foreseeable future'.[3] The notion that Australia is a 'three-ocean' country, with a corresponding requirement to look to the Southern Ocean as well as the Indian Ocean and Pacific, has also gained some intellectual traction, though this has not led to increased resources in support of Australia's extensive Antarctic interests.[4] Canberra's attention is more intently focused on its watery neighbourhood than it was ten years ago, but the extent to which it has made the conceptual adjustment to maritime strategic thinking remains debatable.

The Indo-Pacific reframing of the region was followed, in 2017, by the revival of the Quad, grouping Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo and Washington. The reconstitution of the Quad, as Australia's most important 'minilateral', which now meets annually at leader level, would have been difficult to predict in 2013, as would Australia's later and separate invitation to re-join the Malabar exercises, alongside the navies of India, Japan and the United States, in 2020. Australia's strategic imperatives seemed more ambiguous a decade ago than they do now. The Quad's underlying rationale hints at the formation of a proto-coalition among four major maritime powers, spanning the Indo-Pacific, with the heft and common threat perception to counter-balance a China with increasingly expansionist characteristics. It remains unclear how durable or effective the Quad experiment will be, now that its

agenda has at least temporarily steered away from hard security, in large part to placate jittery sensibilities in South-East Asia.[5] But it is a prime example of maritime thought influencing Australian statecraft. Meanwhile, the growth of naval and maritime cooperation between India and Australia, over the past decade, has been a runaway success.[6] The 'Indo' portion of the Indo-Pacific now registers much more in the Australian strategic consciousness.

The constant over the past decade has been a continuous deterioration in Australia's security environment, though armed conflict between states remains fortunately absent within the region. China is no longer perceived as a remote security concern, whose 'assertiveness' is confined to the South China Sea and East China Sea. Beijing has repeatedly tangled with Canberra across a broad front of national and regional security concerns, while bilateral relations became openly coercive in the economic domain from 2020 onwards.[7] A People's Liberation Army (PLA) presence has become more regular in Australia's immediate periphery than was the case in 2013, including regular naval transits and intelligence gathering within the exclusive economic zone.[8] Concern in Canberra that a hostile power could establish military bases, or some other form of forward lodgement in Australia's approaches, has become more real than at any time since the early 1940s.[9] Russia's expansionist war in Ukraine, though outside the scope of Australia's direct defence interests, has served as a general reminder that armed aggression by major powers has not been banished from international relations. The conflict's complex maritime dimensions, in the Black Sea, have yielded far-reaching operational and strategic lessons on blockade, amphibious warfare, 'lawfare', sea control and sea denial. The termination of strategic warning time, in the Defence Strategic Update (DSU) in 2020, has removed any perceived cushion for the ADF to be able to expand and restructure itself ahead of a major armed conflict in Australia's surrounding region.[10] The Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR) identified 'readiness for future contingencies, and transitioning new and technologically advanced capabilities into service' as the Navy's biggest challenges.[11]

Since 2013, Canberra's alliance relations with the US have cleaved significantly closer in military terms, as political doubts paradoxically have mounted about the reliability and even the domestic stability of the United States. Australia's maritime cooperation with other key Indo-Pacific partners has deepened in tandem, Japan and India in particular, but also some South-East Asian countries including the Philippines. Australian ships, aircraft and submarines are a more common sight across the region, from the annual Indo-Pacific Endeavour engagement activity to more niche exercises and novel interactions.[12] Australia's navy is being heavily leaned on as a diplomatic tool of statecraft, stretching the limits of its capacity, as a medium-sized force with just 11 surface combatants (destroyers and frigates) in the current order of battle. Meanwhile, the requirement to respond to climate emergencies and natural disasters has predictably intensified since 2013, although the DSR has sought to curb recourse to the ADF as a 'force of last resort for domestic aid to the civil community'.[13] Humanitarian aid and disaster relief in Australia's immediate region remains an important maritime mission.

In the past decade, European countries have shown steadily rising interest in the Indo-Pacific region, which has manifested in an uptick in military, and particularly naval, engagement among the larger European military players. This continues, in spite of the ongoing fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The UK has emerged as a more important defence partner for Australia in the wake of its disruptive departure from the European Union. That would have been a brave bet to make back in 2016, but Whitehall's post-Brexit defence 'tilt' towards the Indo-Pacific region has been matched by a consistency of effort, paying off in the form of strengthened security ties with Australia and Japan in particular.[14] Since its announcement in September 2021, AUKUS has been at the centre of an invigorated UK strategic partnership with Australia, but maritime defence cooperation runs through other multinational frameworks, such the Five Power Defence Arrangements in South-East Asia.[15]

The geographical ambit of Australia's defence planning and operations has contracted since 2013, as the ADF has drawn down from coalition commitments and discontinued naval patrols in the Middle East to enable a more concentrated focus on the eastern Indian Ocean, maritime South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific. Back then, Australia's maritime security was defined across a smorgasbord of potential threats and challenges, including terrorism and border controls. That remains so today, but state-led threats are now uppermost in questions of force design and contingency planning. A renewed emphasis on deterrence and 'lethality', since 2020, has seen investments in long-range strike capabilities across all three armed services. The Australian Army, which was just starting out on its amphibious force development journey in 2013, has been encouraged to get its expeditionary 'ducks' in a row with greater urgency since the DSR, and equip itself for a maritime strike role. The Royal Australian Air Force has responsibility for some key maritime missions, including operating 12 P-8A Poseidon anti-submarine and surveillance aircraft. The ADF appears more jointly maritime focused than has been the case for a long time, though capability constraints still circumscribe Australia's ability to project force in contested environments.

AUKUS represents a bold departure in terms of capability development for the ADF at large and the RAN especially – something that no-one foresaw in 2020, much less in 2013. In other ways, AUKUS signifies a return to basics, as an invigoration and conjoining of Australia's oldest maritime partnerships, pooling their advanced technologies to counter common threats to the international system. It also represents the striking of a grand bargain that dovetails with *American* maritime strategy, leveraging access to Australia's strategic geography for US forward-deployed forces on a scale unmatched in living memory.

The announcement of the AUKUS optimal submarine pathway has catapulted Australia's navy into a much more prominent and public position than was the case in 2013. The submarine force has never before had such a conspicuous role in the defence of Australia, alliance relations or regional deterrence – though the advent of AUKUS bears out Al Palazzo's prescient prediction that submarines 'should become the principle strike platform of the future fleet'.[16] While AUKUS brings

with it the allure of greater bandwidth and more resources for maritime strategic thinking within government and parliament, a focus on submarine and undersea capability carries with it risks of distortion and opportunity cost for the other, important functions of an ocean-going navy and a defence force that is busy retooling itself for expeditionary operations.

Much has changed, indeed. Yet not that much.

A Maritime School of Strategic Thought has its origins in the desire of then-chief of Navy Vice Admiral Ray Griggs to fashion a distinctively Australian maritime strategy, cognisant of 'the opportunities, dependencies and vulnerabilities that come with it'.[17] The 2013 DWP duly stated that 'Australia's geography requires a maritime strategy for deterring and defeating attacks against Australia and contributing to the security of our immediate neighbourhood and the wider region'. Yet ten years later, Australia is no closer to realising the modest objective of developing a national maritime strategy. If anything, as measured by defence policy statements since 2013, the direction of travel has been backwards: there was no reference to maritime strategy in the 2016 DWP, the DSU or the 2023 DSR. Other countries, such as the UK, have recently issued national, cross-cutting maritime strategies.[18] *Inter alia*, a national maritime strategy could provide an opportunity for the Australian Government and Department of Defence to contextualise the still largely undefined roles that Australia's new nuclear-powered submarines are likely to play in Australia's defence and deterrence. The new national defence strategy promised for 2024 presents a clear opportunity for a strongly undergirding maritime foundation.

The absence of a national maritime strategy is a strange lacuna within Australia's strategic policy, given the trend towards ever-greater dependence on the maritime economy, on one hand, and a worsening regional security outlook and unprecedented adversarial naval build-up on the other. Geoff Till's sage guidance, back in 2013, retains its relevance: 'as a major trading state, Australia's security and prosperity depends on the stability of the worldwide sea-based trading system … when Australian forces contribute to the "defence of the system" either in near seas or more distant ones, they serve Australian national, as well as more altruistic and humanitarian, interests'.[19]

Perhaps what Australia is missing most is not a new maritime strategy, but a national maritime *narrative*, at the political level, that can serve to educate and persuade the Australian public of the links between national prosperity, the integrity of the international maritime system and the need to invest appropriately in the means to protect it. Australia's dependence on the sea runs deeper than just prosperity. The Australian government, at all levels, would quickly struggle to maintain many basic services, ADF operations included, without assurity of seaborne supply. *Supply* is an apt name for a class of naval replenishment vessel, one that reaches back to Sydney's tenuous colonial foundations far removed from its main sources of succour.[20] But how many people beyond the maritime and national security fraternity are aware of Australia's continuing vulnerability to supply disruptions? The statistics of Australia's fuel reserves and high energy-import dependence, charted

in Part IV of MSSTA ('Economic Perspectives'), have not changed significantly since 2013 and still make for alarming reading.[21]

The COVID-19 pandemic, though not a defence contingency as such, revealed insights into the vulnerability of Australia's maritime supply chains and wider community attitudes. The first and most startling observation was that the closure of Australia's international borders, albeit on health grounds, was a popular policy by and large.[22] Second, a perverse consequence of so many Australians being confined to their houses was that collective boredom drove up demand for imports to the point that an already strained maritime transportation system was pushed to the edge of breakdown.[23] With the beach off limits to many Australians, the nation still managed to intensify its economic dependence on the sea.

While the navy suffers more than most from the chronic national malady of sea blindness, it requires more than the Navy's efforts to fix the affliction. ADF veterans have been generally well represented in Parliament. But how many Australian politicians have a personal connection to maritime industry? As Guy Blackburn argued in his MSSTA chapter ten years ago, 'Australia does not have a strong history of mercantile culture', as evidenced by the dominance of the 'continentalist school of thought'. To echo a point raised by Alexey Muraviev, in his contribution, Australia's dearth of maritime culture (*not* tradition) is crying out for a dedicated media campaign. When was the last time an Australian TV station broadcast a documentary or fictional series featuring the RAN as a blue water navy?[24] Ten years on, what seems to register most in popular consciousness are endless shows about border security. Or, consider one widely referenced scene from the ABC comedy series *Utopia*, lampooning the circular logic of maintaining a navy in order to defend Australia's trade with China, from China – clever, funny, but also misleading.[25] The cultural aspect, explored in Part II of MSSTA, remains key to understanding the limitations of spread for maritime thought across the Australian polity.

Within the Australian defence debate, the old crocodile of continentalism stubbornly refuses to become extinct. It has evolved to slink out into the salty moat to feed now and then, but remains landlubbing in its slow-beating heart. Some commentators in this tradition still seek to isolate fortress Australia behind the moat and see the DSR's strategy of denial as a validation of that primal impulse.

Developmental difficulties and cost blowouts that have dogged the procurement of Australia's next generation of naval surface combatants, over the past decade, have not helped to make the case for fleet recapitalisation to the public, especially now that it must be funded in parallel with the AUKUS submarine endeavour, which sceptics have latched on to as if it were a freestanding, viable alternative to a surface fleet. As my former ASPI colleague Jen Parker wrote recently, channelling the late and much-missed James Goldrick: 'Concepts of sea denial, sea control and power projection should not be viewed as discrete from each other, but rather on a spectrum of degrees of control'.[26]

An overall defence strategy based on denial should not be conflated with the more limited definition of sea denial.

Trends in the last decade have justified Ray Griggs's call for a distinct, Australian maritime school of thought, one that also transcends a narrowly naval lens on strategy. We're halfway there.

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Antarctica Adrift? The Southern Flank in Australian Maritime School of Thought

Elizabeth Buchanan

Antarctica has many identities in popular conception: in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was defined by heroic expeditions and tales of human endeavour against the odds, and it became a unifying frontier during the Cold War. Today, the erosion of European stability in Ukraine has further underscored Antarctic 'exceptionalism' in that the global rules-based system continues to function at the South Pole.

Rising global demand for resources paired with renewed great power competition now featuring the US and China has returned the continent on the international strategic agenda. Antarctica presents unfettered strategic reach into the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic oceans – a potential drawcard for states seeking to control the world's seas. Hydrographic resource mapping has found vast deposits of precious minerals, oil, and natural gas, both on and offshore Antarctica. Of course, the region holds immense krill fisheries, a fundamental building block of global food chains, and a strategic resource only increasing in value due to rising food insecurity.

While the post-Cold War international system has defined Antarctic governance for decades, the US–China competition is rewriting its rules and norms. For instance, Beijing is using the system Washington constructed to grow economically (and therefore militarily). The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), anchored by the 1961 Antarctic Treaty, has managed quite successfully to keep international conflict away from the continent. After all, it was a treaty designed to quell Cold War conflict spilling over to the South Pole by designating the continent as a scientific preserve.

Military activity (unless in the support of scientific ends – like logistical heavy airlift provided by the US Air Force) and nuclear weapons testing were banned. However, some states have increasingly exploited this environment crafted by the treaty via legal loopholes (or simply artful interpretation of laws) to subvert the protective foundations of the ATS.

The contemporary hallmarks of an Antarctic 'great game' are now apparent. Grey-zone tactics such as subversion, deception, and the differing interpretations of international agreements have become commonplace in the region – predicated on the ATS itself. Coercive statecraft lies beneath the surface of Antarctic geopolitics and all stakeholders are on thin ice.

The ATS makes Antarctica unique in operational terms: stakeholders have essentially agreed to disagree on the status of its sovereignty. For some countries, like China, Antarctica is a global commons, while for others (like Australia and France) it is administered as claimed territory. At the most recent Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in Berlin, the Antarctic Treaty secretariat scolded the United Nations for continued reference to Antarctica as a 'global commons'.

The reality designation wise falls somewhere in between. Seven claimant states – Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom – have their territorial claims to Antarctica frozen, as codified by the 1961 Antarctic Treaty. The treaty also preserves the United States' and Russia's rights to make a territorial claim to any (or all) of the continent. Alliances elsewhere do not necessarily translate in the Antarctic context, including 'great mates' Australia and the US: Washington does not acknowledge or accept Canberra's sovereign claim to 42 per cent of Antarctica.

Today, 54 states have acceded to the Antarctic Treaty, including 29 consultative parties (CP) that have voting rights – a status achieved through displaying commitment to and scientific research in the Antarctic. The 1961 treaty's key elements include the freedom of scientific investigation, research and cooperation, and peaceful use of the continent. Another significant tool in the ATS is the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (the Madrid Protocol), which entered into force in 1998 and designates Antarctica as a natural reserve for global peace and science. The protocol prohibits resource mining and extraction, except for scientific research.

The Antarctic Treaty has no expiration date and its architects constructed it to continue in perpetuity. Should any consultative parties seek amendments to the treaty, the ATS requires consensus to open a review conference. Tellingly, although this avenue has been open since 1991, no state has ever pulled the trigger. This underscores the reality that states seek to uphold the status quo afforded by the treaty rather than gamble their stake by calling a review conference (akin to opening Pandora's box). The Madrid Protocol also requires unanimous agreement to initiate any amendments, although its conference mechanism does not open until 2048.

For many, the absence of armed conflict and the mere endurance of the treaty in Antarctica is proof of its 'success'. It would seem international scientific collaboration on climate research is another metric used to highlight the treaty's value. Of course, in today's geopolitical climate, having Washington, Moscow and Beijing engage through Antarctic treaty consultative party (ATCP) avenues

is further evidence of the treaty's utility – given renewed tensions in ties elsewhere. Indeed, having a forum in which Ukraine and Russia sit equally as consultative parties is significant.

The ATS facilitates the enduring potential of strategic interests (such as space, fisheries, energy and fresh water) by not designating them to any one stakeholder. As such, states can deny the total bounty of Antarctica's riches to a competitor and move within the boundaries of the treaty to bolster their own position should a post-treaty Antarctica ever exist. And the treaty allows for this – after all, any activity branded 'scientific' is generally permissible. Take, for example, resource exploitation. China now has an indigenous shipbuilding capability and is churning out super trawlers to enhance its global fisheries capability. While krill fisheries in the Southern Ocean are managed and protected fishery zones exist, China is nonetheless exploiting krill fisheries in the name of science. Beijing is blocking expanded fisheries zones by calling for further scientific research to be undertaken to correctly identify the need for said zones.

China's weaponisation of Antarctic science is no new feat. As witnessed in November 2021 at a Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) meeting in Beijing's veto of the establishment of enhanced maritime protected areas in Antarctica. As a consensus-based mechanism, CCAMLR requires blanket agreement from all parties to progress protectionist agendas. Here, ATS optimists would argue China is bolstering the system by working within the bounds of the treaty, indeed, any veto use is, but a right afforded by equally to all parties – which in turn protects Antarctica's status quo arrangement.

Of course, pessimists might say that China's pervasive environmental and scientific strategy in Antarctica is further evidence of the ATS existing merely as a holding pattern. States don't necessarily want to bring about Antarctic resource development, however, this is less about safeguarding against any environmental catastrophe which may result and more about delaying any potential resource 'race' in a currently rather unviable commercial frontier. Australia is but one CP that has no strategic interest in green lighting a competing resource economy in its backyard. Of course, interests do change. However, the Madrid Protocol's ban on mining cannot simply be removed – even by consensus – without being replaced by a legal regime regulating Antarctic mining. This, too, appears rather implausible, not least in the requirement for Ukraine and Russia, let alone the US and China, to agree.

While the ATS is an imperfect system, it does endure despite increased challenges exemplified by grey-zone activities. Grey-zone campaigns are those coercive moves by state or non-state actors that fall short of war. Such campaigns flourish in environments with cooperative facades, and Antarctica is no exception. Beyond reputable scientific research and a general commitment to monitoring climate behaviour, all states engage in so-called strategic science – research that rationalizes and facilitates state presence on the continent year-round. The US' strategic science hub – Amundsen-Scott Base – sits at the South Pole, straddling all seven existing territorial claims to the

continent. Here, up to 200 personnel bunker down to conduct and support scientific research. Of course, this is also 200 individuals in situ to signal Washington's Antarctic stake. Further south at the US' McMurdo Base, up to 1,300 individuals wave the American flag on the continent.

Strategic science also facilities the use of dual use technologies in Antarctica. Today, dual use of civil and military technologies is common on the continent. Although the Antarctic Treaty bans militarisation or military deployment south of 60 degrees of latitude (including all of the continent), military personnel and military hardware are permitted if they support scientific research objectives. Many of the CP rely on their militaries to run their Antarctic bases or to provide support for national programs on the continent. Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the US all deploy military assets and personnel to facilitate Antarctic research expeditions.

This practice is entirely within the bounds of the ATS given 'scientific' ends, yet this potential ambiguity creates evident military-security implications on the continent. Whether personnel are conducting civilian or military research is difficult to ascertain – thus, the system operates on trust, presenting a robust platform for grey-zone activity.

Satellites are one such example. Russia's GLONASS, China's BeiDou, the US' GPS and the EU's Galileo are some key global positioning satellites reliant on Antarctic ground receivers to function. These systems are also central to much of Antarctica's research and expedition. Yet these systems also have evident military-security applications as well. This is one area in which Beijing is bolstering its position in Antarctica. Since delivering its first domestically built icebreaker – *Xuelong 2* in 2019 – China has doubled down on its polar identity and strategic planning for Antarctica.

Chinese law now requires all civilian scientific technologies to have military dual-use capabilities, essentially codifying defence access to all research technology. Meanwhile, Beijing financially contributes and underwrites science partnerships – once with Australia, now with South American states like Argentina – to garner access to intellectual property, research labs and a foothold in Antarctic gateway cities to bolster its presence on the continent.

Deterring grey-zone activity in Antarctica is an important priority to bolster the ATS for the future but, paradoxically, countering grey-zone agendas is a rather difficult feat by its very own design. There is nothing new about grey-zone activity, merely the 'tools' used have become more complex with every iteration of technological advancement. Highlighting breaches or unfavourable activities while building enforcement mechanisms into the ATS (which will require consensus-based amendments) appears to be the most viable approach. But gaining any semblance of consensus from consultative parties elsewhere engaged in renewed strategic competition to (further) restrict their strategic options in Antarctica will be nearly impossible.

When it comes to Antarctica, Canberra faces four key problems. First, Australia overlooks its southern flank. Not only does the continent regularly go missing from government publications – including our Defence and Foreign Policy white papers – but the region is also often relegated to a 'pop-out' table or box in any publication. This is despite our rather sizable (at least, by far the largest) territorial sovereign claim to 42% of the continent.

The second challenge Australia faces on the southern flank is that our strategic conception of the region is at odds with even our Indo-Pacific allies. We lack a common geographical definition of the Indo-Pacific to speak to – and boundaries and definitions do matter in geopolitics. For instance, US Indo-Pacific Command specifically includes Antarctica and the Southern Ocean in its Indo-Pacific vision and area of operation. Australia's Defence Strategic Update 2020 (DSU20) narrowed the Indo-Pacific framing to our north-east Asian approaches – with a dash of south-west Pacific.

Third, our Antarctic problem stems from the idea that cooperation reigns over the continent. Yet the mere continued functioning of the ATS is not an efficient way to measure Antarctic geopolitical health. Upholding the ATS continues be in Australia's national interest: it delivers a great return on investment—a nice territorial claim shelved into perpetuity.

Fourth, the reality is there are few palatable solutions for the consensus-based Antarctic governance system – which we know is imperfect, under strain, and yet in our national interest to protect. Perhaps, the window to build credible enforcement mechanisms into the ATS is gone; this is now incompatible with Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China coexisting in the Antarctic eco-system.

Of course, we can raise the stakes of system failure by looking at the areas of mutual interest in Antarctica. Climate research and science is at the heart of our solution. Antarctica is the sole and longest running global data set we have for weather patterns – autocracies and democracies alike recognise this value. Australia must turbocharge investment and support international links within the currency of science. Next, we show up and show up with credibility. Presence is influence and influence is power in the Antarctic context. Australia appears to be far behind on the southern front.

Nuclear Stewardship for Nuclear Submarines: Now and in the Future

Maria Rost Rublee

Australia's strategic identity and, indeed, naval capability will be transformed by the announced creation of an optimal pathway to become a nuclear-powered submarine operator. This has implications for the future of maritime strategic thought in Australia. Nuclear stewardship for nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarines (SSNs) entails a full suite of requirements, from safety and security to personnel and processes, to maintenance and independent oversight. Indeed, governments and experts agree that the task of responsible nuclear stewardship is substantial and extensive.

In this chapter, I outline some of most important components of nuclear stewardship for nuclear-powered submarines, grouped into three categories: the actual submarines and nuclear materials, personnel and processes, and external obligations. Next, I turn to nuclear stewardship responsibilities in the future: I argue that the demands of responsible nuclear stewardship are actually much larger than what is commonly acknowledged.

Past experience has shown that our understanding of what constitutes nuclear stewardship will broaden, triggered by new research into geological stability or global crises such as the terrorist attempts to acquire nuclear material. Therefore, states who want to exercise responsible nuclear stewardship must also continue research into its key components, as well as be willing to expand fiscal, regulatory and personnel responsibility as our understanding of the requirements of nuclear stewardship expands. Indeed, nuclear stewardship requires a weighty 'forever' commitment from states, given the long time horizon of nuclear waste.

Nuclear Stewardship Now: Key Components

Nuclear stewardship is a complex and multifaceted endeavour that requires a state's ongoing commitment, resources and international cooperation; it applies directly to SSNs because these vessels are powered by nuclear reactors. Nuclear stewardship principles are crucial for ensuring the safe, secure, and reliable operation of nuclear-powered submarines, minimising risks and promoting safety and security. Nuclear stewardship in the context of SSNs refers to the responsible

management, maintenance and oversight of the nuclear propulsion systems and associated technologies to ensure their safety, security and effectiveness. For example, Australian officials have indicated several key areas of focus of its nuclear stewardship through AUKUS Pillar I, including safety, design, construction, operation, maintenance, disposal, regulation, training, environmental protection, installations and infrastructure, industrial base capacity, workforce and force structure.[1]

The importance of nuclear stewardship is underscored by the AUKUS milestone of 'sovereign ready' – until Australia achieves this milestone, it cannot operate and own its own SSNs.[2] 'Sovereign ready' as a concept 'refers to the point at which Australia has the ability to safely own, operate, and maintain and regulate a sovereign conventionally-armed, nuclear powered submarine capability' so a country may 'steward these submarines over time'.[3]

While the larger academic literature on nuclear stewardship is sparse, analysts agree that it includes institutions, processes, and people with the goal of safety and security of the environment and human health. As Probst and McGovern argue, nuclear stewardship refers to 'institutions, information and strategies needed to ensure protection of people and the environment, both in the short and long term'.[4] In this chapter, I divide nuclear stewardship for SSNs into three key areas: the actual submarines and nuclear materials, personnel and processes, and responsibilities to external stakeholders. These are not exhaustive lists by any means, but rather are meant to highlight the breadth and depth of responsibilities included in nuclear stewardship.

1. Submarines and Nuclear Materials

This broad area of nuclear stewardship of SSNs can be broken down into three facets: the safety of nuclear reactors, the security of nuclear materials and maintenance.

Safety of Nuclear Reactors: Nuclear-powered submarines rely on nuclear reactors to generate steam and provide propulsion, and ensuring the safety of these reactors is paramount. Rigorous safety protocols need to be in place to prevent accidents, such as reactor meltdowns and radiation leaks, which could have catastrophic consequences. SSNs have an outstanding safety record;[5] nuclear-powered submarines operated by the United States, the United Kingdom and France have never had a nuclear plant accident.[6] As the Australian Submarine Agency notes,

> For over 60 years, the United Kingdom and the United States have operated more than 500 naval nuclear reactors that have collectively travelled more than 240 million kilometres without a single radiological incident. UK and US SSNs … have never experienced a reactor accident, or release of radioactive material, that has had an adverse effect on human health or the quality of the environment.[7]

Security of Nuclear Materials: Because nuclear-powered submarines carry nuclear fuel and produce radioactive waste, nuclear stewardship involves implementing strict security measures to safeguard these materials from theft, sabotage, or unauthorized access, both when the submarine is in port and during its operations at sea. Because all nuclear-propelled submarines are run by navies, security is handled through governmental military agencies.

Submarine and Reactor Maintenance: Regular maintenance of all submarine components, particularly the propulsion system and the nuclear reactor, is critical for mission success and crew safety. Included in maintenance are testing and continuous monitoring, both of which are integral to nuclear stewardship to ensure that the vessel and its systems are in good working order. Another reason regular maintenance is crucial on nuclear-powered submarines is for crew morale;[8] submariner confidence in the reliability of maintenance is important for high-performing crews.[9]

2. Personnel and Processes

Hardware is only one part of the nuclear stewardship equation; people and processes are also critically important. Three areas in particular should be considered in responsible stewardship of SSNs: training and reliability, inspections and audits, and crisis and emergency preparedness.

Personnel Training and Reliability: The crew of a nuclear-powered submarine must be highly trained and reliable. Nuclear stewardship requires personnel reliability programs that assess the trustworthiness and fitness of individuals who have access to sensitive nuclear systems and materials, which helps prevent unauthorized access and maintains positive control over not only the nuclear reactor, but the technology and engineering that undergird it. These programs are not just for submariners, but for the entire workshop involved with a nuclear submarine program, from regulators to cleaners. In addition, training for this entire workforce is also critical for proper nuclear stewardship, from technical personnel to auditors, from submariners to command crew.[10]

Regular Inspections and Audits: Nuclear-powered submarines require inspections and audits to assess conditions, verify compliance with safety and security protocols, and identify areas for improvement. Responsibility for regulatory and technical audits must be separate from naval authority to ensure independence and confidence in safety and security. Inspections include not only routine inspections, but also surprise, multi-day 'examinations' that involve crew observations, written and oral tests, drills, and scenarios.[11]

Crisis and Emergency Response Preparedness: Another critical process in enabling nuclear stewardship is crisis and emergency response preparedness. Procedures and contingency plans enable the SSN workforce to train for a whole array of situations that may arise, from reactor malfunctions to natural disasters, and both onshore and offshore, to protect the crew, the environment and any nearby communities. Regularly practicing emergency response plans is critical,

including coordination with relevant federal, state and local authorities.[12] Of particular importance is the ability to monitor and contain radiation hazards that might result from damage to the reactor core.

3. Responsibilities to External Stakeholders

Particularly within democratic governance, nuclear stewardship includes accountability to both domestic and international stakeholders. In particular, three areas deserve highlighting: nuclear waste, international agreements, and transparency and accountability.

Nuclear Waste: Most nuclear-powered submarines use highly enriched uranium, resulting in high-level nuclear waste which must be safely transported to storage facilities and then stored for thousands of years. This topic is far too broad to cover in a short chapter, even just on the aspects solely related to nuclear stewardship. To summarise the main issues, responsible nuclear stewardship requires analysis and resolution of numerous risks ('technological, environmental, human health, political, security and financial') as well as uncertainties ('epistemic, semantic and normative').[13] Experts recommend the use of the REACT framework (regulatory, economic, advisory, community-based and technology) to examine, assess, design, and implement risk management practices for nuclear waste siting and implementation.[14] The required timelines, personnel and budget for such efforts should not be underestimated, but are necessary to responsibly steward nuclear waste.

International Agreements: Building and operating nuclear-powered submarines require adherence to international agreements related to nuclear safety and non-proliferation; countries need to demonstrate their commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship to the global community. For example, Australia's planned acquisition of SSNs through AUKUS requires negotiation with the International Atomic Energy Agency to ensure compliance with its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and Additional Protocol in connection with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In addition, the United States and the United Kingdom will also need to fulfil legal obligations, under their voluntary offer safeguards agreements and additional protocols, to report transfer of nuclear materials to a non-nuclear weapons state and export of certain equipment. Australia has additional international obligations in relation to SSN acquisition, including the Treaty of Rarotonga.

Transparency and Accountability: Maintaining transparency in nuclear stewardship activities and being accountable to regulatory bodies, the public, and international organisations for the safe and responsible use of nuclear technology. In fact, transparency and accountability are critical to gaining and maintaining the trust necessary for nuclear stewardship. Without them, trust erodes and risk perceptions heighten among the public and even politicians.[15] An important facet includes social license, the necessary community consent for the operation of nuclear-powered submarines and all aspects of nuclear waste. If governments do not take social license seriously – including genuine

community consultation at the start of projects, rather than just tacking it on at the end – they risk the negative outcome known as DADA: decide, announce, defend and abandon.

Future Obligations of Responsible Nuclear Stewardship

Despite the long list of requirements for responsible nuclear stewardship discussed above, the demands are actually much greater than what is commonly acknowledged, for two reasons. First, because of the long time horizon of nuclear waste, nuclear stewardship requires a weighty 'forever' commitment from states. Second, past experience has shown that our understanding of what constitutes nuclear stewardship will broaden, triggered by new research into geological stability or global crises such as the terrorist attempts to acquire nuclear material.[16] Therefore, states who want to exercise responsible nuclear stewardship must also continue research into its key components, as well as be willing to expand fiscal, regulatory and personnel responsibility as our understanding of the requirements of nuclear stewardship expand.

1. Nuclear Waste's Long Time Horizon

Nuclear stewardship requires a commitment to the development and continual maintenance and evaluation of long-term nuclear waste storage and, as needed, clean-up and remediation.[17] High-level nuclear waste, such as that created by naval nuclear propulsion, remains dangerously radioactive for tens of thousands of years; for example, plutonium-239 has a half-life of 24,000 years. If nuclear waste storage fails, isotopes from these high-level wastes can seep into groundwater, enter food chains, and harm both human health and the environment. In addition, failed nuclear waste storage can create enormous financial costs. Because of the long time horizon, experts are working on nuclear semiotics – ways to visually communicate the dangers of nuclear waste to humans in the future. In short, commitment to nuclear stewardship binds future generations for many thousands of years for the safety and security of toxic nuclear waste.

2. Continued Research and Development

Because of this long time horizon, responsible nuclear stewardship requires a commitment to continued research and development. As Kuppler and Hocke (2018) note,

> Several generations of professionals and citizens will have to deal with the waste and related risks. Scientific knowledge as well as preferences will change over time. Thus, a central question for responsible nuclear waste management is to think about how political decision-makers, public administration, industry and the interested public can co-design a governance process over such a long period of time.[18]

Experts have highlighted numerous areas in which enduring research and development will need to take place. The first – how to safely store high-level nuclear waste in ways that will not degrade over

thousands of years – is paramount. But required research and development involves much more than that. Long-term stewardship of nuclear waste can be divided by task: managerial tasks (such as facility maintenance), scientific tasks (such as handling waste), technical and engineering tasks (such as improved technology to maintain and repair waste storage systems), and decision-making tasks (such as the processes by which decisions about all of the above will take place, despite changes in government funding and types that might occur over thousands of years).[19] Even data management requires significant planning; as Jarvis argues, 'There is the dual problem: How do we move information into the future? And, what information do we move into the future?'[20]

Without a doubt, nuclear-powered submarines offer significant advantages for states. The responsibilities for responsible, long-term nuclear stewardship are also significant. Knowledge of the commitments that governments need to make on behalf of many future generations can assist with the responsible planning, funding and oversight required for successful outcomes.

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A Perspective on Australian Maritime Security Strategy

Rebecca Strating

This paper is based on a presentation made at the 2022 Goldrick Conference.

Julian Corbett made a significant contribution to understanding the importance of maritime power to individual state power and international order by examining Britain's grand strategy and the use of seapower to exert economic pressure.[1] Such an approach should continue to be of interest to a middle power occupying an island continent such as Australia, particularly given its reliance on seaborne trade.

In which case, does Australia need an integrated maritime security strategy that combines naval and civil dimensions? Or should its approach be primarily governed by concepts of naval strategy and warfare? There is no clear definition of maritime security used by Australia and, unlike states such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand, it does not have a standalone maritime security strategy document. The closest appears to be the Australian Government Civil Maritime Security Strategy produced by the Department of Home Affairs in 2021. This, however, is specific to civil (non-military) stakeholders in combating blue crimes and non-traditional security challenges. Defence white papers and strategic updates have recognised the importance of investing in Australia's naval capabilities yet tend to pay scant attention to outlining a comprehensive maritime security strategy.

Elsewhere I have argued that Australia should consider a comprehensive approach to national security strategy that articulates its interests and approaches in its own maritime jurisdictions beyond.[2] In this paper, I outline a way of categorising Australia's perception of state-based regional maritime security challenges into geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-legal dimensions.

The rise of China and its assertions both directly to Australia (via interference and economic coercion) and to other states and nations in the neighbourhood has necessitated new approaches to foreign and defence policy.

Australia has increasingly positioned itself as an 'Indo-Pacific' power. This highlights maritime importance for a country often accused of 'sea blindness' – that is, willing to see itself as a coastal

nation but not looking much further beyond into the sea. As part of its Indo-Pacific concept, Australia is developing even closer ties to Washington and so-called 'like-minded' states. It has played an instrumental role in the global adoption of the Indo-Pacific construct of regional order and its attendant narratives, such as the central pillar of sustaining, promoting and, if needed, defending an international 'rules-based order' especially in the maritime domain.

Broadly, the key elements of this maritime rules-based order include:

- the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- free and open seas
- peaceful resolution of maritime disputes
- 'right over might', or the rejection of strong states unilaterally imposing their will on other states.

Australia has shifted its international role conception and dropped its preoccupation with pragmatism, or the belief that Australia does not have to choose between its security guarantor and its major trade partner.[3] Australia has traditionally conceived of itself as a middle power in a global context, whereas this shifted under the previous government to an Indo-Pacific power – a regional power in a regional context.[4] Australia's Indo-Pacific power ambitions are most notable through the shift towards 'minilateralism', particularly its membership of the 'Quad' and AUKUS.

As part of this Indo-Pacific power role conception, Australia has doubled down on its commitment to the US alliance. In response to challenges facing the maritime Indo-Pacific region, the US is developing the concept of 'integrated deterrence' by building collective capacity to counter, deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression. While the concept is not always well defined, among regional allies and partners, Australia is arguably the most enthusiastic about contributing to a US-led integrated deterrence strategy in maritime Asia. AUKUS is a testament to this commitment. There have been few official statements about AUKUS but a large amount of commentary and speculation. Officials seem to want the focus to be on AUKUS as an information and technology sharing agreement, rather than its simply being viewed in terms of Australia's procurement of nuclear-powered submarines, which is the first initiative of AUKUS.

Richard Dunley points out that it is not clear what the strategy is that informs the AUKUS partnership.[5] Corbett emphasised the strategical defensive at sea – the prevention of others commanding the sea. This is a role for which the new submarines appear well suited. As Corbett argued, one may see the sea as a barrier, a way to 'prevent the exertion of direct pressure upon ourselves'.[6] The most common justification is that AUKUS will help 'sustain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region'. Certainly the media reporting has presented AUKUS largely as a response to

geopolitical challenges presented by China, particularly in the South and East China seas and the Taiwan Strait.

The submarines themselves are presented in official narratives as necessary for maintaining 'regional superiority'. This includes upholding values as maritime democracies, resisting unilateral assertiveness, and defending the rules-based order. But the underlying assumptions about what they want the capability to do are less clear. Recent debates in Australia seem to hinge on the balance between 'forward defence' capabilities (focused on projecting power and deploying forces into the region) and adopting an echidna strategy (focusing on our own territorial defence and deterrence in and around the continent). It seems the latter predominates, as AUKUS is justified by Australian leaders in terms of deterrence. To what extent are the submarines going to be focused on the defence of Australia's own vast maritime domain – with the world's third-largest exclusive economic zone – versus forward defence, operating in faraway maritime theatres to deter threats in the Indo-Pacific and keep them as far from Australia's territory as possible? Do we know what the submarines will be doing, where and why? As Richard Dunley notes, while Defence minister Richard Marles has suggested Australia adopt a 'porcupine strategy', this is 'entirely at odds with the idea of spending nearly AU $200 billion on SSNs'.[7] According to Hugh White, a maritime security strategy should be guided by the concept of 'sea denial' focused primarily on the oceans surrounding Australia. He argues that a larger number of nuclear-powered attack submarines would be more suitable for this goal.[8] AUKUS and the justification for nuclear submarines, however, suggest that Australia prioritises a different approach, focused on alliances and preventing adversaries from commanding the seas in maritime areas far from home.

Corbett emphasised the role of economic pressure in warfare: 'wars are not decided exclusively by military and naval force. Finance is scarcely less important. When other things are equal, it is the longer purse that wins'.[9] Securing sea lines of communication has obvious importance to a state with Australia's geography. The vast surrounding seas and oceans have long provided the communication channels that connect Australia with the rest of the world via trade, travel, and the exchange of ideas and services. While Corbett talked about control of maritime communications – 'passage of both public and private property upon the sea' – we can also include communications in a more literal sense: in an increasingly globalised world, underwater sea cables are essential to the workings of Australia's economy and society. About 99 per cent of Australia's international digital connectivity comes through underwater subsea cables. Recently, the head of the UK's armed forces, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, warned that Russian submarine activity was threatening underwater cables – and a thorough report by Anthony Bergin and Samuel Bashfield highlights this as an emerging policy area that needs new options for safeguarding critical undersea infrastructure.[10]

Australia is the fifth-largest user of shipping services in the world: over 99 per cent of Australia's imports and exports by volume and over 79 per cent by value are dependent on shipping.[11] Australia's

trade with East Asian countries relies upon open seaways through the South-East Asian archipelago, including the 12 straits to the north of the Australian continent.[12] These chokepoints are also strategically significant as they can disrupt or cut off vital supply chains if controlled by an inimical state, particularly in a wartime context.

Douglas Guilfoyle, Steve Ratuva, Joanne Wallis and I have proposed 'maritime geo-economics' as an analytical frame for understanding China's efforts to exert influence in the Indo-Pacific.[13] In the post-Cold War era, geo-economics has gained currency as a way to describe the use of economic statecraft to pursue strategic interests.[14] Blackwill and Harris define geo-economics as 'the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations' economic actions on a country's geopolitical goals'.[15]

Maritime geo-economics is the application of economic instruments in the maritime domain to achieve strategic and political objectives. Contemporary examples include China's Maritime Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has pledged to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure funding to states of Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, including in port construction, shipping, and island building. It is widely argued that this significant geo-economic policy will have political and strategic implications for the region, although there are signs that it is slowing down. Grey-zone tactics also belong here, including the harassment of ships to deter states from accessing fishing or oil and gas entitlements. Concern about the potential to stop commercial transit in the South China Sea resonates with Corbett's writings, as he writes that (in wartime scenarios) 'the most effective means we can employ to this end against a maritime State is to deny him the resources of seaborne trade'.[16] In peacetime, however, maintaining free and open seas is the central aim of those who advocate the Indo-Pacific 'rules-based order', such as Australia.

As it transcends territorial and maritime domains, Li suggests the Belt and Road Initiative points to China's ambitions to 'transform itself into a continental-cum-maritime power', a grand strategy that combines the use of financial and military power.[17] This has implications for Australia, including the importance of Australia's relationships with smaller states in the region, the need for more integrated approaches in defence, diplomacy and development, the importance of bespoke maritime capacity building to support smaller powers in protecting against economic coercion in the maritime domain, and the need for a stronger Indo-Pacific economic framework that provides economic incentives to deny China's capacity to render smaller states dependent.

I have described this elsewhere as 'normative contestation'.[18] As Douglas Guilfoyle has analysed, China's use of legal argumentation – or 'lawfare' – is part of a maritime strategy to consolidate control over the South China Sea.[19] For middle and smaller sized states, a key interest is ensuring that legal claims reflect and adhere to principles set out in UNCLOS and in international law more broadly. For Australia, defending the maritime rules-based order and preventing great power

exceptionalism – or, more precisely, 'exemptionalism', wherein great powers exempt themselves from the international legal frameworks they've signed up to – is central to its Indo-Pacific approach to maritime disputes.

Corbett's discussion on the role of naval blockades as one of two fundamental methods of obtaining sea control made me think of peacetime processes of maritime territorialisation, in which states seek to exert sovereign control over the seas as one might over land.[20] Maritime territorialisation is one part of excessive claim-making in the maritime domain. This territorialisation is physical, such as through artificial island building and land reclamation to change the strategic picture. It is legal, through the use of domestic laws and administrative zones and other 'lawfare' strategies to sideline international law in maritime domains. And it is discursive, through the use of maps such as the nine-dash line, and sovereign narratives around ownership and possession of seas. As Corbett notes, land is not analogous to sea. Command of the sea is:

> different from the … idea of occupying territory, for the sea cannot be the subject of political dominion or ownership. We cannot subsist upon it (like an army on conquered territory), nor can we exclude neutrals from it.

For trading states such as Australia, the importance of maintaining open lines of maritime communication in peacetime is obvious, and Australia has engaged in a collective defence of norms of free seas through routine operations, increased presence, and naval and legal diplomacy.[21] These efforts may be considered an effort to resist creeping territorialisation of Asia's maritime domains. The legal and political argumentation strategies used by rising powers suggest that regional states need to advance their cooperation to better harmonise their interpretation and implementation of international rules, build capacity and training in knowledge areas such as law of the sea, and ensure the ongoing legitimacy of UNCLOS.

Here, I have analysed primarily state-based threats through a framework of geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-legal challenges. Yet if maritime security threats are more likely to stem from intersecting economic, environmental, political and health crises than from an invading military force, Australia should be thinking more holistically about statecraft and seapower, and beyond purely naval conceptions of seapower.

I'll end where Corbett's *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* starts: with Clausewitz and the primacy of politics. Australia needs to invest in maritime nation-building and develop a whole-of-government approach to maritime security.

Initial public opinion in Australia on AUKUS and nuclear-powered submarines has been positive. An Essential poll right after the deal was announced found that 62 per cent believed Australia was correct to pursue the nuclear submarine deal with the US and the UK, while 54 per cent agreed with

the statement that 'the AUKUS partnership is in Australia's best security and economic interests'. Fifty-five per cent thought the arrangement would further inflame relations with China.

The Lowy poll also showed relatively positive views toward AUKUS: 52 per cent of those polled said the arrangement, which is set to equip Australia with a nuclear-powered submarine fleet, would make Australia more safe. Australia's alliance with the United States touched record high approval, with 86 per cent of respondents saying that the alliance was either 'very important' (60 per cent) or 'somewhat important' (26 per cent). Public mood on China has also changed rapidly: trust in China sat at just 12 per cent – it was 52 per cent in 2018. This highlights the failure of China's wolf warrior public diplomacy and economic coercion tactics in Australia, as they have led to even more support of Australia's alliance with the US.

Nevertheless, there is a need for greater public transparency and explanation around AUKUS, especially when the submarines and their cost move from the abstract to the tangible and as risks of conflict increase and sacrifices may be asked of the Australian population. Explaining the importance of the maritime domain to Australia's national interests is therefore an essential project. Further, in pursuit of its maritime security interests, Australia needs to ensure that it does not rely too heavily on big-ticket capabilities but invests in regional diplomacy and development.

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Part IV: Conclusion

Where to Now for an Australian Maritime School of Strategic Thought?

Alastair Cooper

The original proposal for a Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia was born of the then chief of Navy Vice Admiral Ray Griggs's assessment that the nation's strategic vision was too land-centric – that the binary discussion between continentalist and expeditionary approaches to Australian defence thinking was inadequate because it did not take into account the growing value of the maritime domain. Both continental and expeditionary approaches made assumptions about Australia's ability to use the sea. The expeditionary approach assumed Australia would always be able to use the sea by virtue of a working alliance with the world's predominant seapower, first the United Kingdom and then the United States. The continental approach assumed Australia would not be able, or need, to use the sea in its defence. As a consequence, neither approach looked to understand and plan for Australia's maritime interests, challenges and opportunities. The Maritime School effectively takes Australia as it is – an island continent dependent on the ability to trade, with enormous marine resources – and engages with that complexity.

Significantly, the Maritime School was conceived of as inclusive, in which all arms of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Australian Government have a role to play. In doing so, it aimed to be appropriate for a modern joint and integrated military and also to avoid the bitter and counterproductive inter-service debates that characterised much of the inter-service relationships in the twentieth century. Furthermore, by acknowledging the role the ADF has in contributing to the prosperity of the nation, as well as its security, the Maritime School positioned discussion of Australian defence needs where they could be assessed against the range of other services and responsibilities of government. This has, and will have, two important outcomes. First, it enables a logical link between defence activities (good order at sea to enable efficient trade and communication, and protection of maritime resources and environment) and their contribution to the practical desires and aspirations of Australian people (well-paid, satisfying jobs and access to goods and services at reasonable prices). Second, it provides tools for the Australian Government in a broader range of circumstances, particularly for those extended periods of competition and contest.

As the Maritime School enters its second decade, many of the original authors for the Sea Power Centre's *A Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia: Perspectives*, edited by then Captain Justin

Jones, have provided reflections on their original perspectives and the merits of the Maritime School. While ten years is not a long time in strategic terms, an initial assessment is worthwhile. A summative assessment from the authors in this volume is that the logic for a Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia remains and, if anything, has been strengthened. The supply chain disruptions caused by government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated what could happen if governments chose to disrupt supply chains for other reasons. Australia's reliance on maritime trade remains: the income from exports makes a large contribution to national prosperity; and the dependence on imports of liquid fuels and manufactured goods is essential for the standard of living Australians enjoy. The trend towards greater dependence on critical infrastructure in and adjacent to the maritime domain continues, with submarine communication cables playing essential roles and offshore wind farms growing in importance. These observations hold true for almost all nations, not just Australia.

The strategic environment and the course of international affairs in the last decade has encouraged a more maritime approach. Many authors have pointed towards the Australian Government's declared policies for increased capabilities in the maritime environment (nuclear-powered submarines and continuous naval shipbuilding), alliances and partnerships (AUKUS, the QUAD and several European Indo-Pacific strategies) which are being taken forward most prominently between maritime forces, and the growing strategic competition and contestation at sea between nations. The more active consideration of the possible course of a conflict between the United States and China has further contributed to consideration of maritime security and strategy, underpinned by the assumption that such a conflict would be primarily maritime in nature. The proposal for a Maritime School did not cause any of these developments, but it was certainly prescient in anticipating their potential or at least the need to be able to incorporate them into Australian strategic thought. Even the Russia–Ukraine war, with its global impact on food supplies and attacks on critical infrastructure at sea, has demonstrated the need for the type of broad thinking the Maritime School espouses.

Yet the progress toward a Maritime School thus far is not seen as sufficient. A number of authors see specific gaps, such as the lack of a national maritime or maritime security strategy: the 2021 Civil Maritime Security Strategy and declarations that Australian defence is by definition maritime in nature are insufficient. While the choice to adopt such a policy is a choice for an Australian Government, the Maritime School approach would certainly assist in its drafting by bringing a whole-of-government approach and a focus on activities associated with civil maritime affairs and prosperity as much as security matters. In this sense, the Maritime School follows the intellectual tradition of Mahan and Corbett, and in Australia of Sam Bateman and James Goldrick, who conceived of sea power, maritime power, as much more than simply naval or military power. It is also consistent with the concept of National Defence set out in the Defence Strategic Review 2023. Vice Admiral Mark Hammond's speech to the Royal United Services Institute sets this out.

> National defence is not, and cannot simply be, a military endeavour. Proficient statecraft and diplomacy to build relationships and partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and beyond, working with economic, strategic and military domains under national leadership is key to deterring violence. Australia's reliance on the oceans to connect us to the world has always meant that the Australian Navy and our people are active across our region, and indeed across the globe, for over a hundred years.

Some authors question whether the Maritime School has made much progress in encouraging greater national maritime consciousness, that we remain girt more by beach than by sea. Such a test for the success or impact is unreasonable. It is unlikely that a Maritime School based on public servants and academics interested in maritime affairs will have the broad impact required to shift national consciousness in this way. Moreover, barring some large conflict or COVID-19-like event, national consciousness shifts slowly. Much of the recent discussion has revolved around the term sea-blindness. However, sea-blindness has often been used in a very narrow sense, advocating for greater appreciation for and funding of military and naval capabilities. In that sense, it is possible to categorise it as akin to special pleading. While a Maritime School keenly appreciates and advocates the role naval and maritime forces play as part of a broader national and international maritime systems, it is not focussed on the military aspects alone.

Looking at the merits of the sea-blindness discussion over the longer term, it is possible to suggest that the general diminution in general knowledge of and interest in maritime affairs is actually a function of technological developments making access to and use of the maritime environment unremarkable. There are numerous examples of technological advances becoming commonplace and hence making the extraordinary become routine. The ability for instantaneous global communication was impossible two centuries ago, expensive one century ago and, in 2023, only worthy of comment if not possible for a sizeable proportion of humanity. The ability to provide food for a family is, for, again, sizeable portions of the global population, something that is taken for granted. The end result is still important, but the means by which it occurs is no longer something that is or must be a common skill or common knowledge. Looking at more specifically military thought, the number of people who are truly familiar with Clausewitz, Jomini or Sun Tzu is a very small proportion of any nation's population. Their thinking and its contemporary application remains important, even though that knowledge is not widely spread or acknowledged. There is no reason why maritime affairs should be any different.

One consequence of this is that a Maritime School may never reasonably aspire to national consciousness. Space travel or integration of cyber and machine learning capabilities are more likely to be remarkable for coming decades until they too becomes commonplace. A Maritime School must therefore focus on ensuring that the place of maritime affairs is understood by those people who must know for the effective conduct of their roles, be they for public administration, commerce or

military affairs. Put simply, the maritime consciousness advocated by Mahan and Corbett may no longer be necessary in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth century and before. Instead, a Maritime School would support the need for public awareness. Such awareness is and will be important for recruiting people into naval and military service in the absence of a broad and deep maritime consciousness. It will also be an important contributor to public information in support transparency efforts and for social licence.

So where to now for a Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia?

The first observation is that a Maritime School will have need to incorporate some specific subjects for Australia. The nuclear stewardship principles set out by Professor Maria Rost Rublee will have to be incorporated into the way Australia operates and manages its nuclear-powered submarines. The submarine capability must be understood as consisting of much more than the submarines themselves, which is consistent with the thinking of the Maritime School.

The incorporation of all arms of the Australian Defence Force will also be crucial. The continental and expeditionary schools of thought were sub-optimal because they excluded options available to Australia in the maritime domain. The Maritime School cannot repeat that error by failing to adopt an all-domain approach and, in particular, the use of land forces for the capabilities they bring on and from the land. Ian Langford's insightful characterisation of epochs in the way the Australian Army is conceived is a very good start. Stand-in strike forces will undoubtedly be necessary, although they are unlikely to be the only way in which land-based forces must be conceived. Defence of critical infrastructure, civilian and military, which is akin to rear-area security on a strategic scale, will inevitably involve land-based forces as the range of weaponry available to potential adversaries means Australia's 'tyranny of distance' is no longer always sufficient to provide security.

The future for the Maritime School cannot simply be Australian in nature. The maritime domain has been described as the global commons, where all nations interact, cooperate, compete, contest and sometimes conflict. As such, the Maritime School will need to focus on the partnerships and subjects of common interest. Rule of law generally and the Law of the Sea Convention in particular will be crucial areas of study. Choices to reinforce these institutions and to encourage strategic thought which is not based on zero-sum games will be important elements. A Maritime School will also need to demonstrate how it incorporates other areas where cooperation is important, such as for the Antarctic Treaty System.

Looking forward, the Maritime School must also be robust. While adopting a positive, cooperative outlook, the potential for conflict cannot be excluded. As Geoffrey Till observes, Australian planners are 'looking through the glass darkly'. Until recently, conflict between large and capable states has not occurred at scale since the Second World War. As a consequence, the course and conduct of war at and from the sea is difficult to predict. Certainly the ability to understand and surveil much larger

portions of the maritime environment, coupled with the greater capability of weaponry, means there is much greater ability to cause significant damage to maritime trade and supply.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for an Australian Maritime School of Strategic Thought will be to most closely match and represent Australian national interest, and be appreciated for doing so. It will need to acknowledge and respect Australia's history, especially its Anzac awareness and the reasons for it. And in appreciating why the twentieth-century Anzac consciousness was entirely appropriate for Australia, it will be able to frame for Australian Government decisionmakers the all-domain, whole-of-government understanding of Australia's interests in the twenty-first century. Whether that leads to a maritime evolution of the Anzac tradition will be dependent on circumstances; given the scale of conflict and loss that drove the creation of the Anzac tradition, its evolution into a maritime version is not desirable.

Reflecting on the need for a Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia, Vice Admiral Griggs observed:

> The fundamentals and the need for a third way, remains. There is no doubt that the changing geo-strategic circumstances have pushed us away, to an extent, from the old binary discussions. However, a bit like as in international law, if you don't use it you lose it, so the need to keep articulating the case for and the practice of a maritime school of strategic thought remains constant.

The evidence for progress and the ongoing development of a Maritime School is seen in several forms. The enduring interest of the authors of this volume is one. The advent of the Indo-Pacific Endeavour regional engagement activities, which bring an integrated-force approach to the long history of naval regional deployments, is another. The strategic thought demonstrated by subsequent chiefs of Navy, and by ministers and other senior defence leaders, will be a prominent marker of the Maritime School. Vice Admiral Hammond's conception of the role of maritime forces for diplomacy, deterrence and defence is a concise example. Ultimately, it will be the utility of a Maritime School of Strategic Thought for Australia that will drive its continued use and development. On the evidence in this volume, it has been a good start but with an enduring requirement if the Maritime School is to remain current and develop further.