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A Critical Analysis of the Australian Military Strategy

by

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

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The Australian military strategy has evolved since the Second World War to incorporate a maritime strategy that seeks to balance the primary requirement for the defense of Australia and wider national and global interests. The 2009 Defense White Paper outlines the extant Australian military strategy and seeks to articulate this strategy in the context of the contemporary and future strategic environment. The key failing of this strategy is the lack of clarity of what constitutes a maritime strategy in the Australian context. This paper contends that a more precise definition, including a stated priority to the concept of Sea denial, is required to enhance the quality of subsequent force structure and capability decisions and the overall deterrent effect.

A Critical Analysis of the Australian Military Strategy

The extant Australian military strategy states an unambiguous claim to being a maritime strategy. While this is to be expected given Australia's unique geographical and economic factors, the articulation of what constitutes a maritime strategy in the Australian context is less clear. The generic terms employed seek to preserve future freedom of action for decision makers, but fail to provide the quality of strategic direction demanded to ensure constrained resources are effectively linked to realistic and achievable strategic means. The consequences of this situation pose significant challenges to the promotion of Australian national security objectives. Apart from the potential for a diffused effect in determining the capability and force structure requirements that flows from an overly broad approach, the deterrent effect of a stated military strategy is reduced by generalities that seek to achieve unrealistic objectives. The maritime strategy that underpins the Australian military strategy is the right approach. It does, however, require critical review to ensure the maritime strategy is articulated in a sufficiently clear manner to provide unambiguous direction to guide decision makers and clear intent to the international community.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the assessed deficiencies of the extant Australian military strategy as articulated in the 2009 Defense White Paper, in order to identify the vulnerabilities associated in comprehensive strategic and capability planning and development. This paper proposes a more focused and clearly defined explanation of what should constitute the Australian military strategy, in keeping with the maritime strategy theme, based on an analysis of the unique geographic, demographic, economic and political factors that shape this strategy. The rationale for a maritime

strategy as the dominate theme within any future Australian military strategy is based on a combination of enduring national characteristics and the development of the contemporary Australian strategic situation. This is critical to understanding the centrality of the maritime strategy as the approach that best reflects the strategic environment factors. The overall aim is to propose enhancements to how the maritime strategy is articulated to better inform a longer term and more holistic view of the key elements of the Australian military strategy.

Development of contemporary Australian military strategy

Australian military strategy has undergone significant change since the end of the Second World War and has involved an evolution over time to reflect the strategic challenges and changing environment. The most significant development at the outset of this period was the formation of the Australia – New Zealand – United States Security Treaty, better known as ANZUS, that was signed in 1951. This treaty confirmed the parties' mutual commitment to 'act to meet the common danger'¹ and was born out of the experience of the Second World War, where Australia sought to secure a new long term security partnership with the United States as a result of the direct threat posed by Imperial Japan and the failure of the previous reliance on the United Kingdom for national security from external threats

In their assessment of the evolution of this relationship, Tow and Albinski highlight the enduring nature of the alliance over the course of significant changes in the strategic environment;

'A half century after its founding, the ANZUS alliance is an integral part of Australia's political landscape and a key component of US global strategy. Constituted

by Australia, New Zealand and the United States during the signing of the Japanese peace treaty in San Francisco in September 1951 as an American security guarantee to the other two signatories against Japanese remilitarization, ANZUS has remained critical to Australian and US defense planning well after its original purpose was superseded by Cold War developments. It has since survived a serious dispute over nuclear policy (which led to New Zealand's de facto exclusion from the alliance) in the mid-1970s, the end of US containment strategy against a Soviet bloc that disintegrated at the end of the 1980s and Australia's emphasis on a "self-reliance" defense posture that intensified throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. In the current framework of Asia-Pacific security, it remains a key component of the United States' ability to engage strategically in the region and to deter threats that could undermine mutual and critical Australian-American security interests.²

The signing of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951 coincided with the Australian involvement in the Korean War and the overall strategic objective of containing the threat of Communism and particularly the assessed objectives of the Soviet Union for global influence.³ This fear of Soviet inspired Communist expansion through-out the Asia-Pacific Region was to dominate the Australian strategic environment and responses until the 1970s. This directly resulted in a military strategy that supported the complementary strategic objectives of the United States in containing communist influence. The result of this strategy was a concept of forward defense⁴ that sought to deter and defeat this threat well beyond Australian territory within the Asia-Pacific Region.

Australian involvement in the direct use of military force to impose security within the region, in the 1950s and 1960s was a direct response of the military strategy of forward defense in partnership with the United States. The rationale for this strategy was that external threats could be defeated or deterred by a combination of military action well beyond Australian territory that additionally provided an investment in the United States alliance that would provide longer term security against unforeseen threats.

This strategy was to remain the dominate theme that shaped the employment of the Australian military and the development of associated expeditionary capabilities until the early 1970s. With the conclusion of the Vietnam War and the attendant social and political divisions caused by Australia's active participation in this conflict, a new strategy was developed in response to perceived weaknesses of a forward defense strategy. This approach was to become the Defence of Australia Policy. This policy sought to exploit Australia's unique geographical factors by developing a strategy based on a defense of Australia concept that focused on homeland defense and the active defense of the close maritime approaches to the north of Australia. This strategy also re-stated the critical importance of the United States alliance to the strategic environment. The cumulative effect of the strategic focus in the 1970s was more reflective of a continental military strategy⁵ rather than the previous expeditionary based strategy of forward defense.

This significant adjustment in both national policy and military strategy was transitioned into action throughout the 1970s, albeit without significant consequent

impact on military capability and force structure. The 1976 Defense White Paper stated that;

‘A primary requirement emerging from our findings is for increased self reliance. In our contemporary circumstances we no longer base our policy on the expectation that Australia's Navy or Army or Air Force will be sent abroad to fight as part of some other nation's force, supported by it. We do not rule out an Australian contribution to operations elsewhere if the requirement arose and we felt that our presence would be effective, and if our forces could be spared from their national tasks. But we believe that any operations are much more likely to be in our own neighbourhood than in some distant or forward theatre, and that our Armed Services would be conducting joint operations together as the Australian Defence Force.’⁶

The most significant and subsequent adjustment in this military strategy was to occur following the release of the 1987 Defense White Paper that linked the Defense of Australia policy to military strategy and announced the consequent impacts on existing and future capabilities and force structure.

‘The fundamental importance of the sea and air gap to our security gives high priority to maritime (naval and air) forces capable of preventing an adversary from substantial operations in that area. There could be a need to be able to conduct operations against the bases that an adversary was using for his attacks on us, and against his infrastructure. As our maritime forces would not be able to prevent an adversary from at least limited use of the sea and air gap, a primary task for us would be the protection of the bases from which our maritime forces operated. Ground forces would also be needed to take offensive action against the forces the adversary had

landed, and, with other force elements, to protect other areas of the military and civil infrastructure and population.⁷

This strategy was to remain extant until changing strategic circumstances in the last months of the 20th Century unmasked the vulnerability of this isolationist themed policy and its attendant reduction in capacity for expeditionary operations of any significant scale that was to have significant strategic consequences.⁸ While a critique of the evolution of Australian national security policy is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the 1987 Defense White Paper did, however, provide a comprehensive military strategy with clarity for the roles of the Australian Defense Force, force development and capability planning that was consistent with the Defense of Australia policy.

National security policy had evolved over the previous twenty years to seek a more pragmatic balance between the fundamental requirement of the defense of Australia and national interests and the desire to make a credible contribution to wider security interests within the Asia-Pacific region and globally. In many ways, the extant military strategy is a combination of an earlier forward defense strategic approach, while retaining the primacy of the defense of Australia.

Analysis of the Australian military strategy

It is the contention of this paper that in seeking this balance, the strategic guidance provided by this central policy document has become too broad and diffused. The flexibility to meet unknown challenges brings with it the consequence that the strategic guidance can be subject to multiple interpretations. While it is acknowledged that the retention of strategic flexibility and the constraints of a publicly available

Government policy statement has inherent requirements to be broad in nature, it is also important that this document not be so broad as to lack utility in providing substantial guidance. The lack of a transparent statement of the military strategy required to enable national security policy has the potential to diffuse effort, confuse priorities and provide complex perceptions within the international community. This is particularly the case in the broad explanation provided in Chapter Seven of the 2009 Defense White Paper – Principal Tasks for the Australian Defense Force.

The primary failure of this critical section of the Defense White Paper is the requirement for a comprehensive explanation of what constitutes an Australian maritime strategy and the subsequent clarity in definition of roles for the Australian Defense Force. This has been primarily evidenced by a missing national strategic commentary and debate on what is expected of the Australian Defense Force. This has resulted in an overly simplistic focus on the type of capabilities presumed to be required, without clear reference to defined military roles in the context of a coherent military strategy. Within the public arena, the focus has remained since the release of the 2009 Defense White Paper on continued commitment to specific capabilities that are not directly linked to specific roles within a uniquely Australian maritime strategy.

Even in the most closed societies of North Korea and Iran, much is publically and internationally known of the broad military capabilities possessed by individual countries. While it is similarly widely accepted that the existence of military power is to protect the sovereignty of nations, the expansion or modernization of military capabilities without apparent rationale has often led to friction and conflict. If it accepted that military power is but one of four primary sources of national power⁹ it is equally

important that these efforts are coordinated and complementary in the promotion of national interests. In this sense, there is a strong inter-relationship between military and information elements of national power. The ability to adequately explain the rationale for specific aspects of military power provides the opportunity to both reinforce the deterrent effect of this power and to reduce the inadvertent friction that may be generated by uninformed perception.

This factor is also critical to the domestic audience to enable an informed understanding of the role of the military within society. While current and previous Australian Government initiatives have included public consultation in the development of national security strategy, the outcome as evidenced by Defense White Paper 2009 does not adequately reflect the appropriate level of detail to promote better understanding. In the Australian context, the Defense White Paper is central to understanding and developing potential opportunities for industry due to the capability implications. While subordinate plans (primarily the Defense Capability Plan¹⁰) provide additional definition, the systematic relationship between capabilities based on broad roles within a clear military strategy is currently not available.

This premise of transparency is central to the contention that the Australian military strategy requires greater definition to achieve complementary effects between military power and the other elements of national power, particularly the diplomatic and information efforts. The primary driver for this transparency is the obvious nature of national geographic, economic and demographic factors that shape national security policy and subsequent military strategy. The 2009 Defense White Paper provides a comprehensive summary of these strategic factors that are accepted fact.¹¹ Central to

this summary is the recognition that Australia must proactively support the maintenance of security within the Asia-Pacific region to enable continued economic prosperity and to reduce the risk of consequences flowing from regional conflict that would directly impact Australian national interests. This summary further draws the conclusions that the pursuit of these interests is best served by the Australian Defense Force being capable of operating well beyond Australian territory across all physical domains, in partnership primarily with the United States and others within the region. The missing element in the extant Defense White Paper is the clear statement that this reality therefore demands a maritime strategy with the unambiguous roles of military power that reflect Australia's unique national geographic, economic and demographic characteristics¹².

The current military strategy as outlined in Chapter Seven (Principal Tasks for the ADF) and the consequent force structure requirements outlined in Chapter Eight (The Future Development of the ADF) of the Defense White Paper 2009, are most requiring revision due to the inadequate description of Australia's military strategy, key military roles and implications for major capability. This is primarily evidenced by the imprecise language and broad generalizations that do not adequately establish the rationale for an Australian maritime strategy. A particular example is contained in the section that seeks to describe the military strategy; 'The ADF will, as necessary, tailor its operations such that we do not fight in a manner that sees a high rate of attrition and mass casualties among our forces. We will seek to avoid battle on unfavourable terms, apply force in a precise manner, in a way that the adversary is not expecting, and seek to overmatch at decisive points in battle.'¹³ There is nothing of value in this statement in describing the national military strategy, that is arguably a basic premise of any military

in the world and therefore of limited utility in describing the unique nature of the Australian maritime strategy. Of greater value would be the statement of a uniquely Australian maritime strategy that implicitly states the priorities that underpin the strategy.

Prior to any examination of strategic policy, it is essential to summarize the salient geographical, demographic and political characteristics that shape and define the strategic environment and the previous developments that have formed the contemporary strategic response and approach. The most recent Australian National Security Statement summarizes this inter-relationship as; 'Australia's approach to national security reflects who we are and where we have come from – our values, our geography and our history. Our national security approach has been influenced by our allies, neighbours and international partners, as well as by those who threaten our peace, prosperity and sovereignty.'¹⁴

The maritime character of the Australian security environment

Australia's geography is arguably the most defining characteristic of the strategic environment involving both internal and external implications, with the maritime approaches central to these considerations. Depending on the geographical measure employed, Australia is either the smallest continent or the largest island in the world. Notwithstanding the measure, the central issue is that Australia does not share a land border with any other country and essentially isolated from neighbors through extensive maritime approaches. Australia's geographical factors have enabled the development of an extensive and intensive natural resources industry, primarily in raw materials for a variety of metal based production requirements and fossil fuels. This factor has been central to sustained economic growth that in turn is reliant upon secure maritime routes

to markets. The relative isolation of the Australian mainland is a constant theme within the development of Australian strategic thought, with this being seen as both; 'a driving imperative for the maintenance of a strong, capable and independent Australian Defense Force...has helped discourage attack (and) it has motivated us to maintain strong partnerships.'¹⁵ The strategic imperative of open and secure access to sea lines of communication for commercial trade and natural resource exploitation is therefore critical to Australian national prosperity.

While Australia's landmass is vast, including over 37,000 miles of mainland coast and sixth rank in size of the world's countries, the population is amongst the worlds smallest, particularly in relation to population density. Despite the abundance in natural resources and landmass area, paradoxically, Australia's population is constrained primarily to the coasts due to the inhospitable nature of much of the central landmass. In the context of future security challenges this is a defining factor as noted in the 2009 Defense White Paper as; 'the convergence of trends such as global demographic change and population movements, environmental and resource pressures (whether caused by climate change or other dynamics), global public health risks and even transnational crime will increase the risk of conflict over resources, political instability in fragile states and potentially destabilising mass migration flows.'¹⁶ It is therefore assessed that any one of these broad security challenges would directly impact on the ability of Australia to sustain significant increases to population, while maintaining a relatively high quality of life.

Australia's political factors and objectives are the third key element of the internal strategic environment. Australia maintains a credible record of regional and global

engagement in support of wider security interests and the promotion of humanitarian objectives and the centrality of the rule of law as highlighted in the most recent National Security Statement; 'The rule of law provides the framework in which government balances its responsibility to protect Australia, its people and its interests while preserving our civil liberties. These values influence our foreign and defence policy. Our values underpin our reputation as a responsible member of the international community, committed to a rules-based global order.'¹⁷ As a maritime country with extensive territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, Australia has significant international responsibilities in contributing to the maintenance of a secure and safe maritime environment. The fact that Australia conducts extensive operations and contingencies to meet these responsibilities further highlights the centrality of the rule of law to the Australian strategic environment.

This overview of the maritime character of the Australian security environment highlights the critical importance to Australian interests of secure and safe access to the global commons of the seas and positive control of the maritime environment. The isolation from world markets and high reliance on import and export markets, particularly the export of bulk natural resources, demands this access and is therefore a central strategic objective. The control of seas and maritime routes by a state actor that would be detrimental to Australian economic interests would therefore constitute a significant strategic threat by restricting the required access. Similarly, the emergence of regional instability that could reduce the security of maritime routes, particularly in geographical choke points, further threatens the desired strategic objectives.

2009 Defense White Paper

The primary counter to these assessed threats to Australian national interests is the military strategy that is periodically developed and released in the form of a Defense White Paper. The Australian Government is currently revising this document from the 2009 version, aiming to incorporate more recent strategic developments to define Australia's military strategy. It is anticipated that the concept of a maritime strategy will remain a central theme in the forthcoming strategy, however it is less clear that the new strategy will suitably define this theme anymore than previous strategic statements. The revised version that is planned for release in 2013 therefore presents an opportunity to address a significant deficiency in Australian military strategic thought, specifically in the definition of the nature of a maritime strategy in the Australian context.

The 2009 Defense White Paper¹⁸ provides a comprehensive description of the role of Australian military power in the promotion of national strategic objectives, but lacks the level of detail necessary to enable authoritative conclusions to be drawn on the strategic rationale and appropriate force structure and future capabilities. The risk associated with this assessment infers the potential for a diffusion of effort and resources that compromises a more targeted and effective method of ensuring the Australian Defense Force is focused on achievable, sustainable and realistic roles and attendant capabilities.

Central to this view is the lack of definition as to what should constitute a uniquely Australian maritime strategy and a clear statement of the associated primary military roles. The extant Defense White Paper seeks to provide this guidance however this version is currently too broad to provide the level of definition required for the full

spectrum of subsequent decisions and conclusions that will guide long term force structure and capability definition outcomes.

In addition to the extant military strategy articulated in the 2009 Defense White Paper, the Australian Government has recently released the National Security Statement of January 2013. This later document will be critical to the final development of the planned 2013 version of the Defense White Paper and highlights the opportunity to address current deficiencies in the quality of the explanation of the extant strategy. Together, both documents should provide a consistent and comprehensive explanation of the Australian strategic environment and contemporary and projected security challenges. The key elements of these assessments include the low likelihood of major power conflict, particularly of the level that that would directly threaten Australian sovereignty, but the expectation of increasingly numerous and shorter notice security challenges due to regional instability through broader global challenges such as resource scarcity, climate change and violent political groups.¹⁹ The 2009 Defense White Paper in particular, highlights the centrality of the internal strategic environment, particularly the impact of the maritime environment on both economic and security factors. What is less clear than in previous military strategic statements and particularly in comparison to the 1987 Defense White Paper, is the definition this assessment should provide to the military strategy required to defend and promote Australian national interests and in consequence, define the characteristics required for the appropriate force structure and capability objectives. This is the critical point of failure in the contemporary military strategy in framing the problem, but not adequately informing the required solution.

The Maritime Strategy

The earlier examination of the Australian strategic environment and the development of contemporary strategic thought, reinforces the centrality of the maritime environment to Australian national interests. The military strategic response to this enduring strategic environment and contemporary challenges are seen to be how the maritime environment is shaped and engaged to Australia's advantage. This inter-relationship between the physical environment and national security objectives is a dominant theme in contemporary Australian military strategic thought – 'our approach requires principally a maritime strategy...'²⁰ Notwithstanding this statement from the Defense White Paper 2009, there remains an inadequate statement of the parameters to better inform the implementation of this military strategy and the associated deductions to be drawn to inform force structure and capability definition requirements.

By comparison, it is important to note that a subordinate level of doctrine currently exists that provides much of the desired clarity and transparency in explaining the Australian maritime strategy. In March 2010, the Royal Australian Navy published a capstone document – 'Australian Maritime Doctrine'²¹ This document articulates the philosophical underpinning for a maritime strategy as the foundation for Australian military power. The doctrine draws on the analysis and conclusions of acknowledged maritime strategists, particularly Julian S. Corbett²² to identify the utility of this approach in meeting the unique Australian national characteristics and contemporary security challenges. Although the Australian Maritime Doctrine is a Service level document and therefore subordinate to the Defense White Paper in impact on national security policy, the document provides clear linkages between the national security characteristics and

challenges and the required response from military power to support national objectives. Despite being a Service level document, the description of the primary roles of military power are inherently joint in nature and therefore offers far more than a narrow examination of seapower in isolation.

The greatest utility of this description of the Australian maritime strategy is the conclusion drawn from analysis of maritime strategic thought that Australian military power should focus on three primary roles – sea control, sea denial and power projection.²³ A clear understanding of the requirements to achieve these roles is central to assessing the utility of graduated levels of maritime strategy as the central nature of an Australian military strategy. This is of particular relevance to the Australian application of a maritime strategy that seeks to achieve sea control as a central element of the military strategy in the defense of Australia and national interests. Sea control has traditionally been defined by the concepts espoused by theorists such as Alfred Thayer Mahan²⁴ that had by the twentieth century evolved to more pragmatic theories of sea control. This realization was primarily due to technological advances that negated the earlier advantages gained by reliance on powerful surface maritime capabilities. The adjustment was gradual, but irreversible. This was noted by Admiral Stansfield Turner at the conclusion of his distinguished naval career in a 1977 article on this evolution; ‘This change in terminology may seem minor but it is a deliberate attempt to acknowledge the limitations on ocean control brought about by the development of the submarine and the airplane... The new term sea control is intended to connote more realistic control in limited areas and for limited periods of time... it is no longer conceivable, except in the

most limited sense, to totally control the sea for one's own use or to totally deny them to an enemy.¹²⁵

This concept of sea control is of particular relevance to Australian military strategy given the national strategic characteristics, particularly geography, that demands the security of both territorial waters and maritime approaches as well as the ability to contribute to regional maritime security. In addition, the demographic and economic characteristics are likely to preclude the sustainment of a level of seapower that could impose effects greater than a limited level of sea control. It is insufficient to simply state that Australian maritime strategy reflects the requirement for sea control as a primary means for pursuing national security objectives. This requirement must be set within the context of the unique nature of this role for Australia to adequately explain the degree of sea control that is needed, in order to promote transparency and accurately inform subsequent force structure and military capabilities.

The United States Department of Defense defines sea control operations as; 'The employment of naval forces, supported by land and air forces as appropriate, in order to achieve military objectives in vital sea areas. Such operations include destruction of enemy naval forces, suppression of enemy sea commerce, protection of vital sea lanes, and establishment of local military superiority in areas of naval operations.'¹²⁶ In the context of the Australian maritime strategy, the consequences of employing this term are of particular importance. The Defense White Paper 2009, defines the geographical span of security responsibilities that covers a vast sub-region, titled the Primary Operational Environment as constituting; 'the eastern Indian Ocean to the island states of Polynesia, and from the equator to the Southern Oceans. That area

contains all Australian sovereign, offshore and economic territories, such as Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Christmas Island, Heard and McDonald Islands, Macquarie Island, Norfolk Island and also waters adjacent to the Australian Antarctic Territory.¹²⁷ The Defense White Paper 2009 also highlights the previously introduced constraint of demographic and economic factors that shape the aspirations for the size and scope of military power that Australia can reasonably expect to sustain that in turn, further defines the nature of sea control within the Australian context.²⁸ It is therefore assessed that sea control in the context of the described Primary Operational Environment is not practicable and requires more finite definition without the unlikely significant increase to seapower capabilities that cannot be adequately resourced due to demographic and economic factors.

A definition of sea control meant to assure Australian territorial integrity and to enable specific expeditionary effects limited in time and space is assessed to be both a critical and viable objective within an Australian maritime strategy. This definition enables focus on a more realistic objective that directly contributes to contemporary and likely future security challenges without the attendant need for unattainable levels of capability. This premise would specify the need for achieving sea control from known and reasonably anticipated geographical sub-regions, such as the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone²⁹ and regional areas that may require Australian military presence in support of regional partners such as major international shipping lanes. This definition accepts the extant and projected constraints to the capacity of the Australian Defense Force demands a similarly realistic expectation of the scope of military strategy to ensure the most appropriate force structure and capability conclusions are drawn. There

is little future expectation that these factors will alter significantly and therefore the concept of sea control should be re-defined to reflect the highly constrained circumstances under which the Australian maritime strategy considers this a viable concept, in order to better focus the intent and requirements of the strategy.

Based on this assessment of the limited nature of sea control within the Australian context, the concept of sea denial must be examined in priority to sea control within the maritime strategy framework. Sea denial is defined as ‘the aim of prevention of the use of the sea by another force against us. This is defined as the condition that exists when an adversary is denied the ability to use an area of sea for its own purposes for a period of time. Sea denial implies a more passive posture where the emphasis is on defense (although this does not preclude the employment of offensive capabilities), and where the initiative is likely to remain with the attacking power.’¹³⁰

Implicit within this definition is the assessment of the relative incapacity of the Australian Defense Force to realistically achieve the demands of sea control within the vastness of the Primary Operational Environment, due to the constraints of economic and demographic factors that preclude a significant increase in force structure and capabilities in the near term. A strategic approach based primarily on sea denial reflects these accepted constraints and limitations to the capacity of Australian military power and therefore demands greater adaptability within the available resources to achieve self-reliant defense of Australia and national interests. Any country’s ability to achieve sea control or sea denial is directly reflective of their respective military capacity due to specific national characteristics; ‘The balance that navies strike between sea denial and sea control is mainly a function of their strength relative to the putative opposition and

the geo-strategic conditions that apply in particular areas of concern. Broadly, the further away from the main source of their maritime power and the weaker they are compared to the threat, the more likely they are to veer towards sea denial.¹³¹

The strategic assessment contained in the 2009 Defense White Paper states there remains a low likelihood of direct threat to Australian territory by a future adversary. While this assessment is not challenged, it does not sufficiently describe the totality of the strategic environment. Australian national interests are just as reliant upon a secure and stable global commons, specifically to enable commerce by sea movement. Therefore while the overt military action of a future adversary in challenging Australian territorial sovereignty is unlikely, the potential for hostile control of the seas and therefore commercial routes is possible in the foreseeable future. The capacity for achieving sea control demands a significant investment in naval capabilities of a scale maintained by only by the United States or at a level approaching the current and projected size of the People's Liberation Army – Navy of China.

The greater likelihood of a threat to Australian national interests emerging from restricted access to the seas as opposed to the traditional direct threat to the Australian mainland requires greater emphasis in the military strategic objectives and the ways and means required. This assessment of likelihood is not based on an assessment of intent by a particular state actor with the capacity to realize this threat, but is seen as a more realistic and feasible manner in which a strategic threat could develop. The ability of Australia to oppose a threat of this scale could not be achieved by seeking to counter this threat by overwhelming mass of capability for the constraints outlined earlier. The military strategy required to defend and deter a threat of this scale therefore needs to be

more closely linked to the key national characteristics that bound the potential ways and means.

Sea denial provides a realistic and achievable asymmetric advantage over likely adversaries who have the capacity to impose sea control for their own purposes that could significantly impact on Australian national interests. This premise has a profound impact on how Australian military strategy can be refined and described as the Australian military strategy is themed as a maritime strategy to reflect the unique strategic environment. Therefore the utility of a sea denial concept as the primary way of promoting Australian strategic objectives has greater potential to focus effort and intent. This premise demands a subsequent examination of the means that would be required to achieve a maritime strategy that reflects a sea denial concept as central to the achievement of national security objectives. While a detailed examination of force structure and capabilities is beyond the scope of this paper, fundamental principles that shape these outcomes can be identified.

Sea denial does not demand mass, but does require the ability to accurately place capabilities that can frustrate a larger, even more capable opponent's capabilities attempting to dominate specific regions. The key characteristics that are assessed to be required to enable sea denial as both deterrent and response within the Australian strategic context are high technology capabilities and regional reach and persistence.

The Australian strategic characteristics outlined earlier point to a marked advantage in financial and technological capabilities, despite the relatively small population. These factors have been critical to the development of Australian society and the economy in adapting to the size and complexities in the physical environment

and relative isolation from the rest of the world. These characteristics are similarly important for the development of a military strategy that is based on sea denial at the core. A military strategy of deterrence and defeat of an adversary with the capacity to impose sea control effects and therefore directly threaten Australian national interests is likely to employ mass through seemingly overwhelming air, surface and sub-surface capabilities within the regional maritime environment. The complexities of this maritime environment characterized by geographical features of extensive littoral regions involving numerous island chains and relatively shallow waters, in themselves promote the utility of sea denial as a central method of limiting the power of a more powerful adversary, particularly one that seeks to impose persistent control by surface capabilities. The channeling and constraining effects of these features are critical to the effective employment of capabilities that by their presence or threat of presence can deny or at least constrain the adversary's application of greater quantities of capabilities. The application of stealth, strike and surveillance technologies, particularly for sub-surface capabilities, are likely to provide a marked advantage to smaller, more agile capabilities in denying the freedom of movement and maneuver that larger forces rely upon to achieve control.

The scale of the commercial access to the sea within the Asia-Pacific and Indian Oceans required to support Australian national interests is vast. This challenge can however be narrowed by an applied focus on specific sub-regions that provide wider access or act as focal points, such as the strategic locations of the Malacca and Sunda Straits and the close maritime approaches to Northern Australia. The capabilities required to counter a greater sized maritime adversary would therefore require sufficient

reach and persistence from the Australian mainland to effectively conduct operations to achieve sea denial effects. This aspect is of particular importance in the deterrent effect that is sought by this approach and is closely linked to the characteristic of high technology. The capabilities required for sea denial effects would need to operate proactively and persistently in a highly lethal and active operational environment, potentially for protracted periods to achieve a lasting effect to deter a potential adversary.

A complementary element to sea denial within the Australian maritime strategy is the concept of power projection. Most definitions are focused on the actual application of force either from the sea onto land or the maneuver of land combat forces from the sea onto land. This is however too narrow for contemporary context where the persistent presence of seapower is viewed as a routine element of maintaining security in the 'global commons'³², as well as promoting security through enhanced international partnerships by the conduct of a range of military to military engagement and humanitarian assistance roles. The scope of maritime power projection therefore requires a far more broad definition, more reflective of the one proposed by Till; 'Maritime power projection involves the use of seaborne military forces directly to influence events on land. It ranges from substantial invasions to conquer territory, at one end of the spectrum, to minor nuisance raids and naval bombardments, at the other. Indeed this less ambitious end of the spectrum merges almost imperceptibly with the more coercive forms of naval diplomacy.'³³ This definition more adequately views maritime power projection as a spectrum of operations in its own right as the fundamental tenets of strategic reach, mobility and sustainment remain constant

notwithstanding the specific purpose of the desired effect either at sea, on land or in combination of operations across all physical domains.

This aspect of the constant nature of these fundamental tenets is central to the both the rationale for this aspect of the maritime strategy and for conclusions of the force structure and capability factors required to enable a comprehensive maritime power projection capacity. The broadest possible definition that reflects a spectral approach is essential in promoting transparency. The more commonly found narrow definitions of maritime power projection provide the perception that expeditionary capabilities inherent within this aspect of the maritime strategy exist only to threaten the territorial integrity of other countries. This approach precludes a description of the ability for this approach to promote the role of Australia as a key contributor to regional security through a responsible use of military power in the support of international law and 'good order at sea.'³⁴ In addition the ability to deploy and sustain land capabilities, potentially in concert with airpower, provides an additional dimension to the capacity of the Australian maritime strategy to promote regional security and retain the capacity for specified global responses.

This assessment has profound impact on the nature of the Australian military strategy and the consequent derivation of force structure and capability factors. Although an examination of these consequent factors is beyond the scope of this paper, an acceptance of sea denial as the dominant theme within this maritime strategy as opposed to the size, variety and sustainment of capabilities required to realistically achieve sea control within the Primary Operational Environment is assumed as significantly different in capability type and characteristics. Sea denial as the foundation

for the Australian maritime strategy is also more likely to maintain relevance into the longer term, given the widely accepted assumption of the relative limitations in capacity of Australia's military power due to economic and demographic factors.

There is a strong inter-relationship between the three aspects of the Australian maritime strategy – limited sea control, sea denial and maritime power projection. As proposed earlier, the extant and projected capacity of Australian military power due to inherent economic and demographic characteristics will preclude the self reliant capability for anything other than limited sea control and demand a greater reliance upon sea denial effects. This capacity for sea control may however be required to enable maritime power projection effects in a higher threat environment to promote Australian national security interests. Therefore the relative capacities of each element of the maritime strategy must be closely examined during subsequent force structure and capability analysis to ensure the complementary factors are balanced and sustainable.

Conclusion

This paper has not examined the consequent analysis required to determine the appropriate force structure and capabilities for an effective maritime strategy, as this is a secondary effect that has consumed the focus and effort that would have been more profitably expended in examining the nature of the Australian military strategy. The extant Defense White Paper 2009 is indicative of the vulnerabilities exposed by a continued failure to adequately articulate a military strategy that seeks to promote Australian national security interests. The current strategy is too broad in the explanation of the primary roles of Australian military power to have any real utility in

apportioning priorities for force structure and capability development. It further provides an inadequate rationale to the international community of the need for Australian to pursue the desired level of military power proposed in the same document. The cumulative effect of this situation is a lack of transparency that fails to provide the required level of guidance and assurance to this wide variety of audiences.

While this paper is critical of the lack of detail and context in explaining the Australian military strategy, specifically in the context of a maritime strategy, it acknowledges the quality and transparency of the analysis of the nature of Australia's strategic environment. The primary fault of the extant military strategy is the lack of clarity of what constitutes a maritime strategy within the Australian context. The imprecise and general nature of this approach fails to provide the clarity required to effectively harness investment targets and capability requirements to enable an effective military strategy. Of equal concern is the reduction of the deterrent effect by stating unrealistic objectives.

The current effort in revising the 2009 Defense White Paper is a timely opportunity to correct these assessed deficiencies to ensure greater clarity in the requirements for military power that are appropriately prioritized. Achieving this enhancement by a more precise rationale for the maritime strategy gives greater substance to how military power assures Australia's national security and contributes to the security of our regional partners.

Endnotes

¹ Security Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (ANZUS), <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/1952/2.html> (accessed December 14, 2012).

² William Tow and Henry Albinski, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 48, Number 2 (2002): 153.

³ As noted by Gaddis in his summary of the origins of the Cold War, this assessment was not without foundation; 'Stalin's goal, therefore, was not to restore a balance of power in Europe, but rather to dominate that continent as thoroughly as Hitler has sought to do.' From: John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005).

⁴ As highlighted by the Australian strategic analyst, Dr Stephan Fruehling 'The concept of forward defense, however, is distinct and arose out of the failure of this earlier strategy in 1941. Forward defense operations and planning focused on Australia's own region, and specifically on the main approaches to maritime South East Asia, especially the Malay peninsula. Again, Australia would support its allies in operations (eg. in the Malay emergency, Konfrontasi or SEATO operations in Thailand) but it would do so because these operations had a direct benefit to the security of Australia itself. Now declassified guidance documents from the late 1940s onwards make quite clear that Australian governments were consistently willing to engage (if necessary, with much larger forces than were actually deployed) should threats to Australia's vital interests make this necessary.' Stephan Fruehling, 'What is 'Forward defense' these days?' *The Interpreter* (blog), Lowy Institute of International Policy, July 21, 2010.

⁵ The early 1970s involved a military strategy that was more focused on territorial defense from within and around the mainland, as opposed to forward deployments within the region as seen in the 1950s-early 1970s. This adjustment in strategy is outlined in the following excerpt from the Australian Government Strategic Research Paper of 1973: 'Australia is remote from the principal centres of strategic interest of the major Powers, namely Western Europe and East Asia, and even those of secondary interest, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North West Pacific. Having ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty we are not a factor in the Powers' nuclear calculations and dealings. We are not a principal party in the shaping of any regional affairs relevant to their interests, not are we under present threat from our immediate neighbours. Because of its location and size Australia is a difficult country to invade, conquer and occupy. Moreover, we are a Power of sufficient substance to discourage any thought that we may be susceptible to low-level pressure. Our wealth and sparse population contrast with the large and poor populations of neighbouring countries. Access to the resources we can supply will be increasingly important to Western Europe, Japan and North America. This gives them a growing stake in Australia's security and undisturbed economic development. For the foregoing reasons, it can be said that Australia is at present one of the more secure countries in the world.' From: David Stevens, *In Search of a Maritime Strategy*, (Canberra: Australian National University, 1997), 213.

⁶ Department of Defence, *Australian Defence*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, November 1976), Chapter 3, paragraph 6.

⁷ Department of Defence, *Defence of Australia – 1987*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, March 1987), para 3.46.

⁸ This statement refers to the acknowledged fact of the Australian Defense Force lack of preparedness and expeditionary capability that significantly complicated the Australian led intervention in East Timor from September 1999. As a direct result of this experience, the Defense Of Australia policy was largely abandoned by Government, a factor reinforced following the decision to support the US led Global War on Terror. This decision resulted in a significant increase in Defense funding, particularly for land combat and strategic mobility capabilities over the first decade of the 21st Century.

⁹ National power is generally defined as the combined and complementary application of diplomatic, informational, military and economic power. '...national power means the total capabilities of a state to gain desired ends vis-à-vis other states. This definition rests upon three basic concepts: (1) the tools and techniques of statecraft, (2) the intensity of effort that can be brought to bear in support of particular tools and techniques employed, and (3) the relativity of all political power.' From: Harold and Margaret Sprout, *Foundations of National Power*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1952), 40.

¹⁰ The Defence Capability Plan (DCP) is the Unapproved Major Capital Investment Program (UMCIP). It is managed as a portfolio of projects and outlines the capability acquisition plan approved by the Australian Government. Further details are available at: Capability Development Group, *Defence Capability Development Handbook 2012*, (Canberra: Department of Defense, 2012).

¹¹ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 2009), Chapter 5.

¹² A detailed description of these characteristics is beyond the scope of this paper however the primary elements of geography, economy and demography need to be referenced from DWP 09 and AMS 10 for explanation.

¹³ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, (paragraph 7.5), 53.

¹⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *National Security Statement*, (Canberra: Australian Government, January 2013), 7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, (paragraph 4.5), 30.

¹⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *National Security Statement*, 7.

¹⁸ 'The Defence White Paper explains how the Government plans to strengthen the foundations of Australia's defence so that we are ready to meet the challenges of an uncertain strategic future. It sets out the Government's future plans for Defence, and how it will achieve those plans. In particular, this new Defense White Paper lays out the Government's future plans for the development of Force 2030, including the major capability investments that will need to be made in the coming years. Most importantly, it explains the level of resources that the Government is planning to invest in Defence over coming years and what the Government,

on behalf of the Australian people, expects in return from Defence.’ From: Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, (paragraph 1.1-1.2), 15.

¹⁹ Detailed summaries of the contemporary Australian security environment are available in the 2009 Defense White Paper and the 2013 National Security Statement.

²⁰ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, (paragraph 7.6), 54.

²¹ Sea Power Centre, *Australian Maritime Doctrine*, (Canberra: Royal Australian Navy, 2010), 48.

²² Sir Julian Stafford Corbett (1854 – 1922) remains an influential figure within military strategic theory, primarily for his analysis of maritime strategy. His classic work, ‘Some Principles of Maritime Strategy’ was published in 1911 and has since been republished as: Julian S. Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004).

²³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 8.

²⁴ Allan Westcott (ed), *Mahan on Naval Warfare – Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred T. Mahan*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999), 98-99.

²⁵ Admiral Stansfield Turner, Missions of the US Navy, *Naval War College Review*, (March/April 1974), 7.

²⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington DC: Department of Defense, April 2001).

²⁷ Department of Defence, *Defending Australia*, (paragraph 6.38), 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, (paragraph 3.2), 26.

²⁹ ‘A maritime zone adjacent to the territorial sea that may not extend beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured.’ From: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 104.

³⁰ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Australia’s Maritime Strategy*, Canberra: The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, June 2004), paragraph 2.6.

³¹ Geoffrey Till, *Seapower*, (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2009), 154.

³² A concept developed in the 1960s to promote the ideal that ‘sovereign control over the common goods of water, air, and natural resources was unsustainable’. The concept is based on all nations having access to these resources and working collectively to their sustainability and security. The most common application is access to commercial routes on the seas, noting the parallel development of Exclusive Economic Zones and similar restrictions constrain the ideal of the Global Commons. From: Peter Hough, *Understanding Global Security*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 137-8.

³³ Till, *Seapower*, 184.

³⁴ 'Good order at sea permits the free flow of seaborne trade and ensures that nations can pursue their maritime interests and develop their marine resources in an ecologically sustainable and peaceful manner in accordance with international law. It provides for the preservation and protection of the marine environment, including the conservation of species, and ensures that all nations and peoples, including future generations, benefit equitably from the marine environment and the exploitation of its resources.' From: Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Memorandum 5 – Cooperation for law and order at sea, www.cscap.org/.../CSCAP%20Memorandum (accessed January 7, 2012).