



Naval Studies Group Primer No. 3 Australia's Maritime Defence Security Tasks

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This primer describes maritime security tasks that must be undertaken by the Australian Defence Force (ADF). These tasks should inform policy, force structure and funding.

Introduction

The 2024 *National Defence Strategy* states that the ADF should be able to complete three tasks on its own;¹ to defend Australian territory, deter the projection of power through Australia's northern approaches, and protect the country's economic connections to the world.² All three are primarily maritime tasks.

The Australian continent is comparatively remote from any major power, with the possible future exception of Indonesia. In this respect, distance has acted as the country's great shield. Maritime strategists have long acknowledged the stopping power of water, and the combination of the distances involved, and necessary scale of any endeavour, still make an assault on Australian territory exceptionally challenging.³

Policy makers and the ADF can continue to exploit the extraordinary natural advantages conferred by geography to deter any such effort. Australian national interests, be they strategic, economic, diplomatic, cultural or political, do not, however, stop at the beach. Virtually all Australian governments have, for differing reasons, seen engagement with, and security of, the near region as essential. The language of being 'the partner of choice' for the Pacific may be new, but the sentiments are as old as Australia. The ADF is a critical part of the country's peacetime engagement with the region, helping to support it with the challenges it faces. From the Australian Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) to humanitarian aid

¹ Australian Government, '2024 National Defence Strategy'.

² Department of Defence, *National Defence Strategy*, (Canberra, 2024), 25.

³ Corbett, J *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (London: Longman, 1911), p. 79; Mearsheimer, J. *The Tragedy of the Great Powers*, (New York: Newton, 2001).

and disaster relief (HADR) in response to the growing threat of natural disasters, Australia's defence capabilities are leveraged in this fundamentally maritime region.

These actions, and Australia's engagement in the near region are, in part, driven by the natural desires to be a good actor and a good neighbour. However, as the tasks set out in the 2024 *National Defence Strategy* indicate, there is also a security component to these relationships. The framing of the security of the region as an ADF task in line with the defence of Australian territory and the protection of trade is misleading. It is, in reality, a precondition, important because it is essential to complete the other two tasks.

Australia's ability to support regional security and prevent malign actors from establishing themselves in the broad sweep of island chains running from Singapore to the Solomon Islands matters in and of itself to Australian security. However, it is the potential impact of such a development on the other two core missions of the ADF that makes it dangerous to Australian security. As the experience of 1942-43 clearly demonstrates, the basing of adversary forces in maritime Southeast Asia and Melanesia dramatically complicates the defence of Australian territory and the protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Therefore, to use the language of recent defence documents, Australia needs to be able to 'shape' the region in peacetime and potentially respond in the region in the event of war, to prevent and "deter" any action that would compromise Australian security.

Key Strategic Drivers

National security policy must be influenced by Australia's strategic environment, key alliance relationships and the ADF's approach to military operations. Australia has a large landmass, a substantial natural resource base and vast ocean surrounds. Its people, industries and infrastructure are concentrated on the coast, in our eastern, south-eastern and south-western fringes. Australia's direct approaches are dominated by the archipelago to our north, a maritime-littoral environment.

Australia's Geo-Strategic Environment

- Australia's sovereign rights are substantial, including a 200nm exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and a continental shelf, which can extend out to some 350nm from the coast.
- Our island territories and their EEZs extend from the Cocos and Christmas Islands in the Indian Ocean to Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands in the Pacific Ocean, through to Heard, Macdonald and Macquarie Islands and the Australian Antarctic Territory in the Southern Ocean.
- Australia is highly dependent on international trade, the vast majority of which is carried by sea.
- Most of Australia's international trade passes through our northern maritime approaches, most passing through the strategic choke points of Southeast Asia (e.g. Malacca, Singapore, Sunda, Lombok and Sumba Straits).
- The most important trade routes for Australia are those with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region, where the overwhelming bulk of our international trade occurs.
- Much of northern Australia, Tasmania and the offshore territories are heavily reliant on coastal shipping for their sustenance.
- Most of Australia's interstate bulk trade is carried by coastal shipping.

- Australia's offshore reserves of oil and gas are concentrated in the Gippsland, Carnarvon and Bonaparte basins and the Timor Gap.

Australia's Alliances and other Key Relationships

Australia is party to defence related agreements with several countries, some of which aim to provide security for Australia and some of which see Australia as the security provider. Virtually all of these agreements are maritime in nature or have strong maritime elements. The most important of them, in respect of Australia's security, have been those involving the United States (US).

The Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) Treaty, dating from 1951, has been the foundational security agreement for Australia since then. Originally a trilateral treaty with New Zealand, since 1985 it has become two bilateral agreements; Australia and the US and Australia and New Zealand. Australian reliance on ANZUS lacks the more formal commitment of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Treaty and is limited to the agreement to consult in the face of a threat to territorial integrity, political independence or security, as laid out in Article 3 of the ANZUS Treaty.⁴ Further, Article 4 specifies that in the event of an armed attack in the Pacific area on any of the parties, each would act against the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.⁵

At the other end of the spectrum, but in place also since 1951 is the Radford-Collins Agreement, originally involving the United States Navy (USN) and the Australia, New Zealand and Malaya (ANZAM) Agreement navies - the Royal Navy (RN), Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN).⁶ This informal arrangement specifies how the respective navies would cooperate in the Indian and Pacific Oceans in time of conflict, with a particular focus on ensuring the free flow of maritime trade. It remains in place and supports the ongoing efforts to coordinate merchant shipping in time of conflict, primarily through regular exercises and the associated Shipping Working Groups.⁷

More recently, Australia has become a member of the newly energised Quad, the quadrilateral diplomatic partnership of the US, Japan, India and Australia. This evolving group focuses on issues beyond traditional security, but has as its primary focus maintenance of an open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.⁸ With China's growing assertiveness in the region the Quad is becoming more security-focused, something which may present non-aligned India with some challenges.⁹ The most recent of Australia's multilateral security arrangements involving the US is the Australia, United States and United Kingdom AUKUS partnership. This agreement, dating from 2021, provides for the transfer of nuclear-power technology and materials to Australia to enable the purchase and later build of nuclear powered and

⁴ McIntyre, W.D., *Background to the ANZUS Pact: Policy-making, Strategy and Diplomacy, 1945-55*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 1995, 407.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Brown, A., 'The History of the Radford-Collins Agreement', *Naval Historical Association of Australia*, (accessed at <https://navyhistory.au/the-history-of-the-radford-collins-agreement/> on 5 April 2025).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and trade, 'The Quad', undated, (accessed at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad> 8 April 2025).

⁹ Deb, U., 'India in the Quad: insider or outlier?' 2 April 2024, *ASPI, The Strategist*, (accessed at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/india-in-the-quad-insider-or-outlier/> 11 April 2025).

conventionally armed submarines.¹⁰ Many challenges, financial, technical and political, await this audacious program on which the future of Australia's submarine force depends.

In December 2023, Australia signed the Australia-PNG Security Agreement as part of a Framework for Closer Relations.¹¹ Then in 2025 both countries signed the Pukpuk Defence Treaty with a purpose of protecting their sovereignty, securing their mutual defence and security interests and contributing to regional stability and security, by strengthening and expanding defence cooperation through enhanced capability, interoperability and integration.¹²

Among the other significant regional security agreements is the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) which emerged in 1967 and were formalised in 1971, in response to the anticipated British withdrawal from East of Suez and the recent experience with Indonesian Confrontation against Malaysia.¹³ While Australia was initially reluctant to join, it remains committed to the FPDA, provides the Integrated Area Defence Commander, and participates in the regular air and maritime defence exercises. Australia is also a party to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZ) and was a motivating force for its establishment in the early 1980s. One of its main broad aims is to prevent the South Pacific from becoming an arena for superpower rivalry. Signatories are expected, *inter alia*, to forego possession of or control over any nuclear explosive device and prevent the stationing of any nuclear explosive device in their territory.¹⁴ Recent Australian decisions to allow rotation of US bombers and de facto home porting of nuclear attack submarines may well complicate adherence to the Treaty and could at least allow questioning of our commitment to it. In a similar vein, the Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC) to which Australia is a party can generate security demands. These can emerge from the need to defend maritime zone boundaries or to contest claims which may not be in accordance with the LOSC. Australian military activity in the South China Sea can be seen to fit this need.

There is also a range of multilateral and bilateral agreements with southeast and east Asian countries with significant security implications. They include the Australia-Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement to enable greater defence co-operation,¹⁵ and the Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships with Singapore,¹⁶ and Malaysia which have defence elements.¹⁷

¹⁰ Australian Submarine Agency, 'AUKUS agreement for cooperation on naval nuclear propulsion', dated 1 October 2024, (accessed at: <https://www.asa.gov.au/aukus/aukus-agreement-cooperation-related-naval-nuclear-propulsion> 11 April 2025).

¹¹ Australian Government – Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 'Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement', undated, (accessed at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/papua-new-guinea/australia-papua-new-guinea-bilateral-security-agreement> 11 April 2025).

¹² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/png-australia-mutual-defence-treaty.pdf>

¹³ Edwards, P., *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW., 1997, 199-200.

¹⁴ Nuclear Threat Initiative, 'South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone (SPNFZ) Treaty of Rarotonga', undated, (accessed at: <https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/south-pacific-nuclear-free-zone-spnfz-treaty-rarotonga/> 8 April 2025).

¹⁵ Australian Government-Defence, 'Australia-Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement', undated, (accessed at: <https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/programs-initiatives/australia-japan-reciprocal-access-agreement> on 8 April 2025).

¹⁶ Australian Government – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Joint declaration by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Singapore on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership', undated, (accessed at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/singapore/Pages/joint-declaration-on-a-csp> 8 April 2025).

¹⁷ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 'Joint declaration by the Prime Ministers of Australia & Malaysia on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership', 27 January 2021, (accessed at:

Among the important bilateral agreements is that recently negotiated with Indonesia for defence cooperation. This is enabling cooperative military activities by the respective armed forces.¹⁸

In the South West Pacific, the PMSP provides twenty-four patrol craft to sixteen participating nations, in-country RAN advisors and contracted aerial surveillance, continuing a commitment begun some thirty years ago under the Pacific Patrol Boat Program, using memoranda of understanding with each of the then twelve participating countries.¹⁹ The PMSP remains Australia's most extensive defence cooperation program and is a foundation of security arrangements in the South West Pacific.

Separately, Defence agreements have been established with several countries in the Southwest Pacific, including Tuvalu and Papua New Guinea (PNG). The Falepili Union Treaty between Australia and Tuvalu commits Australia to aid in a range of circumstances, including military threat.²⁰ Bilateral security agreements are also in place with Fiji (Vuvale Partnership) the Solomon Islands and Nauru.²¹

In summary, Australia's alliances, involvement in the FPDA, the Quad arrangement and its commitment to the United Nations (UN) are significant in Australia's ability to influence and to promote both regional and global interests. In recent decades Australia has supported broader interests, dealing with terrorism and weapons of mass destruction proliferation. Australia must continue to work closely with its major ally and principal strategic partner, the US, through the Alliance. Australia will also strengthen engagement with Indo-Pacific partners, particularly in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, to maintain peace, security and prosperity in the region. This includes working with key regional institutions, including the Pacific Islands Forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/malaysia/joint-statement-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-australia-and-malaysia> 11 April 2025).

¹⁸ Australian Government – Defence, 'Australia-Indonesia Defence Cooperation Agreement', 29 August 2024, (accessed at: <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2024-08-29/australia-indonesia-defence-cooperation-agreement-signed> 8 April 2025).

¹⁹ Australian Government – Defence, 'Pacific Maritime Security Program', undated, (accessed at: <https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/programs-initiatives/pacific-engagement/maritime-capability> 11 April 2015).

²⁰ Australian Government – Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, 'Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union treaty', undated, (accessed at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/tuvalu/australia-tuvalu-falepili-union-treaty> 11 April 2025).

²¹ Wallis, J. & Tagivakatini, S., 'Why Australia Should be Watching New Zealand and Cook Islands Closely', Australian Outlook, 16 February 2025, (accessed at: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/> 11 April 2025).

Defence's Approach to Operations

Warfighting must continue to be the central focus of ADF planning. However, the increasing complexity and diverse range of operations pose additional challenges. Major interstate conflict cannot be discounted. It can also arise with little or no warning. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a recent example. Whether a force-on-force engagement of superpowers in the case of confrontation over Taiwan would eventuate is unclear. Regardless, ADF planning should include considerations relevant to major interstate conflict, including both coalition operations, and the self-reliant defence of Australia. While generally a force prepared for warfighting can step down to respond to lower-level operations, the reverse is not the case. Lower-level operations also have the potential to escalate without notice. ADF elements deployed for low level operations should have sufficient capability and capacity to meet unforeseen escalation, should it occur.

The ADF will continue to place an emphasis on selective high technology systems, knowledge superiority and superior training to provide a capability edge. Australia's small population and resource base means it cannot afford to become engaged in a protracted campaign of attrition.

In recent years conflicts have evolved from the form it took for much of the twentieth century. Contemporary armed struggles are not always between states with clear political or military objectives. Often there are intra-state conflicts comprising uprisings, rebellion and terrorism underpinned by historical grievances, religious differences, factional and territorial disputes, resource competition and economic friction. Conflict may also involve paramilitary forces, militias, or terrorists, rather than professional defence forces.

Intra-state disputes have reinforced demands on armed forces for border protection, humanitarian relief, evacuations, peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations.

Global warming will likely result in increasing sea levels forcing occupied lands to be evacuated and forcing major migrations, particularly on the Indian sub-continent, other low-lying areas of Southeast Asia and many of the Pacific Island countries. Lower lying Australian coastal areas, and flood prone areas could also see localised population movements. Both could involve higher rates of ADF support for disaster relief and border protection operations.

In extending the flexibility of all three Services, to ensure they can contribute more decisively to an overall campaign, Australia's strategy will provide a more flexible force structure. Naval capability should not be seen as only being relevant to the naval component of a campaign. All five Defence domains should be seen as contributing to the overall ADF campaign. By providing greater flexibility, versatility and adaptability within specific areas of capability, preparedness and logistic support Australia can develop a force which is better able to respond effectively to a range of tasks.

The evolution of ongoing instability in the global environment means it is important for Australia to adopt a much more self-reliant posture, than in the past. This should include expanding Australia's capacity to manufacture, modify, sustain and repair selected capabilities. Transport infrastructure should be improved, including weather proofing vulnerable lines of communication, especially those that support and sustain operations from ADF bases in northern Australia. The nation should also improve its local capacity and holdings of strategically important materials, fuels, armaments and weapons, as well as products of an industrial, medical and food security nature.

Defending Australia

The core function of the ADF is the defence of Australia and the protection of its interests. The threat of direct conventional military threat to Australia remains remote. Global instability has increased, and the prospect of warning time has diminished, such that a threat to Australia and its national interests could arise with little or no warning. Further, the strategic advantage of Australia's geographic remoteness has reduced with the growth of regional defence capabilities, as our neighbours' economic development progresses. The risks of rogue states with weapons of mass destruction, or long-range weapons, and terrorism remain.

Defence planning needs to be based on a range of potential tasks and threats, including:

- **Peacetime national tasks.** These include protection of Australia's sovereignty, enforcing borders, disaster relief and counter terrorism when beyond the capacity of local law enforcement officials.
- **Minor attacks.** These are assessed as the most credible threat and could take the form of raids, harassment of trade, terrorist action, or attacks on Australia's information systems. With a terrorism campaign within Australia much of the burden of responding would fall on state and federal law enforcement agencies. The ADF would play a relatively less central, though nonetheless vital role.
- **Major attack.** A major attack could take the form of the use of weapons of mass destruction by a nation or terrorist group; attacks on Australia's population centres, infrastructure, SLOCs or seizure of parts of Australia's territory. In a major attack on Australia, the ADF would play a central role in projecting force to exercise strategic control of approaches and to defeat adversary initiatives.
- **Full scale invasion.** Australia's remoteness from centres of major power rivalry provides a measure of security from full scale invasion. However, participation in coalition operations in the Indo-Pacific region and basing of foreign forces on our shores might increase our vulnerability to attack, or in extreme circumstances, invasion.

Making distinctions about the level and nature of threat against Australia and its interests enables force structure planning to:

- evaluate various force options and to assess how they might perform in a range of circumstances;
- determine the effectiveness and versatility of individual capabilities;
- determine whether certain capabilities are fundamental to our overall campaign or not; and
- assess the importance and priority of individual capabilities.

ADF operations against a conventional military threat to Australia will generally be similar across the types of situations envisaged. The same type of general operations would be undertaken, such as intelligence gathering, surveillance, forward patrol and response. However, variation in terms of force composition will occur in terms of:

- geographic location,
- intensity of conflict,

- concurrency of operations,
- duration, and
- nature of threat.

Strategic Control of Australia's Maritime Approaches

The concept of strategic control involves:

- A pro-active strategy to maximise Australia's freedom of manoeuvre in the air and sea approaches while denying freedom of action to a potential adversary.
- The ability to assert Australia's will over an adversary in time and space, and deny an adversary's ability to position for, or conduct offensive operations against Australia and its interests.
- The projection of power into the region to support Australia's national interests.

The ADF would obtain knowledge of an adversary through Australia's intelligence and surveillance activities. This data, complemented by military geospatial information, would provide the nation with the knowledge to attack hostile forces, including their forward operating bases and, if necessary, the adversary's national support base.

The ADF would aim to seize the initiative and dictate the pace, location and intensity of all operations. The ADF would conduct joint maritime operations to assert control over Australia's approaches beyond our sovereign territory.

Intelligence

The provision of accurate and timely intelligence and Military Geospatial Information (MGI) are vital enablers of ADF combat planning and operations. When provided in a timely and comprehensive form, they result in enhanced environmental awareness and battlespace knowledge. These data are critical to ADF operations and our ability to respond quickly and effectively to a broad range of operational tasks, as well as being able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and emerging threats. Intelligence and MGI support for ADF operations would provide timely data on:

- assessments of adversary military capability;
- assessments of adversary intentions;
- assessments of adversary activities and operations;
- environmental assessments of ADF and potential adversary areas of operation; and
- actual and forecast weather and oceanographic information.

The Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO), Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) and other intelligence organisations, including those at Joint Operations Command (JOC), and single Service MGI organisations are fundamental to the collection, analysis, compilation and timely dissemination of this data.

Command and Control

The ADF manages its contribution to national security through three levels of command – strategic, operational and tactical.

- The strategic level is responsible for the military aspects of planning and direction of conflict.
- The operational level is concerned with planning and conducting campaigns to attain military strategic objectives within a theatre of operations.
- The tactical level has commanders plan and conduct battles and engagements to support operational level campaign objectives. Tactical activities focus on integrating and applying combat power to defeat the adversary at a particular time and place, and to exploit their success.

Effective command, control, communications and computer systems are fundamental to the timely provision of intelligence, surveillance and other products to the various levels of command. The overall system facilitates the direction and management of our operations to achieve strategic control. It also extends to communications and liaison links with allies and other Commonwealth and State authorities. Operational performance is highly dependent on information management, a clear picture of what is occurring and a continual awareness of the commander's intent.

Surveillance and Reconnaissance

Surveillance and reconnaissance of Australia's approaches underpin timely and resource efficient operations. They would be undertaken at two broad levels:

- Continual broad area surveillance to complement intelligence, discern activity patterns and provide early warning of hostile activities; and
- Surveillance or reconnaissance of particular areas to permit rapid identification and interception of adversary force projection initiatives.

Australia's broad area operations could extend from the northern approaches of the archipelago, out into the Indian and Pacific Oceans and down into the Southern Ocean. Other surveillance activity would be more focussed. Broad area surveillance would be undertaken by strategic surveillance assets, such as Over the Horizon Radar (OHR), satellites, and long-range sonar arrays. Surveillance and reconnaissance of specific areas would be undertaken by surveillance aircraft, submarines and helicopter equipped surface combatants in archipelagic choke points and straits. These assets could also respond to any incursions.

Strike

Deterrence and the ability to erode an adversary's motivation and to attack their capacity to mount and sustain operations are fundamental to the ADF's ability to defeat attacks against Australia and its approaches. Australia's strike operations would be employed to:

- force a cessation of conflict;
- allow Australia to seize the initiative;
- increase the cost of conflict to an adversary;
- complicate an adversary's conflict management and planning;
- reduce an adversary's will to persist in conflict; and
- reduce an adversary's means of sustaining conflict.

The ADF's primary strike assets are strike, fighter and maritime patrol aircraft, submarines, surface combatants and other helicopter equipped warships, the Army's special and commando forces, and land-based elements equipped with long range maritime and land strike weapons.

Forward Patrol and Response

Forward patrol and response are essential for intercepting hostile forces in the sea and air approaches and provides the ADF with the ability to:

- protect offshore territory, resource extraction activities and other interests;
- influence the type, level and location of hostilities; and
- keep hostile forces away from the Australian mainland.

Denying an adversary operational freedom near Australian territory will be a major restraint on hostilities and will make the defence of Australia more manageable. The objectives of forward patrol and response would be to:

- counter adversary information gathering activities in Australia's maritime environment;
- intercept and inspect shipping in defined areas within the maritime approaches and if necessary, escort the shipping to another location;
- prevent an adversary's land, sea and air forces from entering defined areas within our maritime approaches, and if necessary, defeat that adversary;
- prevent, and if necessary, defeat adversary harassment in Australia's maritime environment;
- prevent, and if necessary, defeat adversary interdiction and strike operations in our maritime approaches; and
- prevent the insertion, extraction and resupply of adversary forces through the maritime approaches to Australian territory.

In the majority of situations, the focus of ADF patrol and response operations would be in the north and would be commensurate with the assessed level of threat. In the event of a full-scale invasion or major attack, we could employ submarines to patrol the more distant areas,

such as the major archipelagic straits and their northern approaches. More proximate approach routes would be patrolled by surveillance aircraft and major surface combatants, with strike, fighter and maritime patrol aircraft and major surface combatants forming the response elements. Operations would be supported by Tanker and Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft.

Air defence of ADF forces operating on the Australian mainland, offshore territories or those in the maritime environment, would be provided by an integrated system comprising air surveillance and control aircraft, air defence aircraft, major surface combatants and land-based air defence systems. Air defence aircraft would be employed in conjunction with in-flight refuelling and AEW&C aircraft.

ADF operations to counter adversary submarine activities, aside from striking at their operating bases, would be focussed on the approaches to submarine bases and major passages likely to be used by hostile forces to approach Australia. Forward anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations would be undertaken by submarines in adversary choke points and the approaches to their operating bases. To counter submarines in transit or that reach their patrol area, the RAN would employ capable towed arrays to cue maritime patrol aircraft, and major surface combatants equipped with ASW helicopters. These operations would focus attention on major choke points and port approaches.

In countering an adversary's initiatives, the ADF would likely seek to engage their shipping as far from Australia as possible. The preferred means of achieving this would be by utilising the ADF's maritime strike assets, especially strike, air defence and maritime patrol aircraft, submarines, major surface combatants and land based long range strike weapons. As with ASW, the ADF approach would be layered; that is, forces would be employed well forward and to cover the approaches to choke points and port infrastructure.

Mine countermeasures (MCM) forces would be employed in route surveillance operations to determine whether mining had occurred and to ensure the safe passage, through port approaches and choke points, of ships employed in exerting strategic control.

Offensive Manoeuvre

Offensive manoeuvre comprises a range of operations aimed at defeating an adversary's land, sea and air forces in the theatre of operations. This requires the ability to detect, isolate and defeat the adversary force. Operations may need to be sustained over an extended period and could include land and maritime strike as well as amphibious and airborne operations.

Amphibious and possibly airborne operations would seek to lodge ADF forces in areas where little or no opposition would be encountered. The protection of ADF forces would extend beyond direct escort during the transport phase, to include the protection of forces from adversary attack during the landing and consolidation phases, when the transport force and the units being landed are at their most vulnerable. Protection for the operation must be continuous and be able to counter any threat from the air, surface, land or sub-surface, at immediate notice. Assigned maritime forces will also contribute to air defence and offensive fire support for the land force ashore.

The maritime nature of Australia's approaches means that ADF operations in defending Australia are likely to place a heavy reliance on amphibious and strategic air and sea transport capabilities to deploy and sustain forces. If required, ADF assets could be supplemented by chartered commercial sealift and airlift assets.

Ship to shore movement, if not through an established port, would be achieved typically by Army and Navy helicopters embarked in the RAN's amphibious ships HMA Ships *Adelaide*, *Canberra* and *Choules* and in the future the Army's planned amphibious watercraft. Direct escort of the amphibious force would be provided by major surface combatants and the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF's) maritime patrol, strike and air defence aircraft, supported by in-flight refuelling and AEW&C aircraft.

MCM forces, including clearance divers, could play an important role in ensuring the landing area and its approaches were clear of mines and other underwater obstacles. Special forces could also be employed to undertake surveillance, reconnaissance or diversionary operations to assess the suitability of the proposed landing area and the potential level of adversary threat.

Maritime Geospatial Intelligence (MGI) forces could undertake rapid environmental assessment using aircraft and ship-based acoustic systems to provide environmental information to assist in planning approach routes and landing areas and evaluating environmental and other risks.

Protective and Security Operations

Securing strategic control has both offensive and defensive elements. To enable a range of operations to be mounted, defensive operations to protect ADF operating bases and strategically important infrastructure, assets and activities are necessary. Land forces are envisaged to take the lead in the following protective and security operations tasks:

- surveillance of the landward component of the littoral where ADF forces are deployed;
- contributing to the defeat of military incursions onto Australian territory;
- protection of ADF operating bases; and
- protection of population centres, industry and key infrastructure.

Maritime forces would likely take the lead in protecting maritime interests, including offshore territories, marine resources, shipping and seaward approaches to ports.

Offshore Resources

Australia's offshore oil and gas industry is important to the national defence effort and economic wellbeing. In a period of tension or minor attack, a protective presence may be necessary in the vicinity of our oil and gas extraction facilities, depending upon their relevance and proximity to the dispute. As circumstances deteriorated, Australia may need to consider direct protective measures by appropriate maritime and land force elements.

While Australian fisheries are increasing in value, both in domestic and export terms, it is unlikely, other than in peacetime, periods of tension, or minor attack, that ADF resources would be specifically dedicated to their protection.

Shipping

Shipping is vital to Australia's economy. ADF operations in the northern Australian littoral will depend greatly upon support provided by both defence and commercial shipping resources. The employment of ADF maritime assets in the protection of shipping would be quite selective. The ADF's effort would likely be devoted to the protection of strategically important cargoes, both locally and internationally. The primary ADF elements employed in the direct escort of

shipping would be major surface combatants. Other ADF elements would complement these ships, including aircraft for integrated air defence operations, for mid and deep field support against submarine and surface threats, and for strike against surface ships. Other elements involved in the protection of shipping would include:

- MCM forces would be employed to ensure safe passage of shipping through or around potentially mined areas;
- clearance divers could also be employed in protection of shipping from underwater attack whilst in port;
- activation of the Naval Control and Protection of Shipping (NCAPS) organisation to provide a degree of active or passive protection and control of shipping;
- MGI forces could be employed to gather data to assist in evaluating risk on certain shipping routes and in defining areas where ships' sensor performance is enhanced or degraded; and
- land forces would be employed in the protection of wharves, cargo handling and storage facilities and associated shore-based port infrastructure, and as patrol and response forces in choke points.

Communications

Defence utilises a range of communication facilities, including satellites, international underwater cables, HF transmit and receiving networks, the National Broadband network (NBN) and secure facilities for transmission of sensitive communications and information. Recently, there has been a focus on the security of the international underwater cable system against accidental or deliberate damage. The ADF has established cyber security and space authorities to address issues of threats to communications infrastructure and to undertake offensive and security activities to handle and respond to such threats.

Contributing to the Security of the Immediate Neighbourhood

Australia's immediate neighbourhood includes the countries of Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, New Caledonia and the island states of the Southwest Pacific. By contributing to the security of the immediate neighbourhood we reduce the risk of a direct military threat emerging to Australia, or if it were to emerge, we would be better positioned to meet it well forward in the approaches to the archipelago.

In the event of unprovoked armed aggression against any of Australia's immediate neighbours, Australia would want to be in a position, if asked, to help its neighbours defend themselves. Australia might also be invited to help its neighbours in situations where their stability was challenged. These situations could arise at short notice, and our response would include a strong maritime element. ADF elements likely to be employed in such situations would need to be held at high states of readiness and sustainability.

Resisting or Defeating Aggression

Were a significant threat to emerge to one of Australia's neighbours, the Government would view such a circumstance with concern. Government might consider the commitment of ADF elements if asked. The nature and contribution of the ADF could vary significantly and be influenced by whether the contingency involved a nation in the eastern or western reaches of the archipelago. In the east, except for French Polynesia and New Caledonia, the ADF would

likely be the major military force in any coalition and hence would play a very significant role in deterring or defeating an adversary's initiatives. In the west, where there are large military forces, the ADF's role might be less dominant.

Expansion of Chinese influence in the region coupled with recent US withdrawal of aid could result in a more complex environment for Australian involvement. Chinese influence in the region is already widespread and only likely to grow with the reducing interest of the US.

The ADF's contribution could take several forms, ranging from non-warfighting options to direct combat assistance including strike and offensive manoeuvre operations. Some situations could arise with little warning, so selected forces would need to be at high states of readiness. The higher inherent mobility of air, naval and special forces and certain land force assets means that they may be selected for timelines, appropriateness and ease of response. Military airlift and sealift would be needed to deploy and sustain forces, as well as to evacuate civilian personnel, if required.

If Australia had warning of offensive operations by an adversary, it might seek to demonstrate commitment and to contribute directly to coalition efforts to deter, and if necessary to defeat an adversary. Maritime forces, especially major surface combatants, could be deployed, with maritime patrol, air defence and strike aircraft, to establish a presence and to support precautionary deployments of other ADF elements. These forces would be supported by ADF strategic surveillance assets.

In situations where an adversary has already militarily engaged the threatened nation, on the Australia government may direct the ADF to contribute to the successful defeat of the adversary. The aim would likely to be to make a decisive contribution to ensure that strategic interests were sustained and protected.

These situations could arise with little or no warning, but in each case, there would be a strong maritime element to our response. Consequently, the ADF should place emphasis on the readiness and sustainability of elements likely to be employed.

The complex terrain and environment of the archipelago to Australia's north mean that its force development process needs to consider:

- the littoral nature of the neighbourhood environment;
- the complex terrain and land clutter;²²
- the high shipping and aircraft density in the western archipelago;
- the confined shallow tropical waters;
- the complex land and SLOCs;
- the limited infrastructure to support military operations; and
- incomplete geospatial information.

Australia's contribution might be focussed on strengthening coalition defensive capability, although, selective offensive operations could be contemplated.

²² For the purpose of this paper land clutter refers to unwanted radar echoes from the Earth's surface and man-made objects, which interfere with the detection of desired targets like aircraft.

Australia cooperates with Southeast Asian nations and major external powers, such as the US, Japan and India, to preserve stability and cooperation in Southeast Asia. Some European countries, such as the UK, France, Germany and Italy are showing increasing interest in the region and have regular deployments of naval and air assets to participate in regional activities. However, they are unlikely to seek involvement in any regional conflict, unless important national interests were impacted.

The composition and nature of ADF contributions to future coalition operations in the region would vary according to the nature of the operation. The range of operations ADF elements could be involved in is extensive, from the protection of Australian nationals and designated foreigners, through the provision of non-combat assets, such as logistic and technical support, to participation in high intensity combat operations.

Forces employed in higher intensity operations would typically be drawn from elements of the strike, special forces, tactical fighter, maritime patrol and response, AEW&C, air-to-air refuellers, submarine, surface combatant, mine warfare, afloat support, and strategic airlift and sealift forces. Australia could, depending upon composition of the coalition, seek to provide intelligence and command and control elements of a combined headquarters.

Land forces could be employed in coalition operations. Key functions of land forces would be:

- contributing to the defeat of adversary military incursions;
- protection of forward operating bases;
- contributing to strike and offensive operations and offensive manoeuvre operations; and
- gathering of intelligence.

In all coalition operations, major considerations of compatibility and interoperability will exist. Australia's regular exercise program across all three services means that these issues are likely to be less of an issue than in the past. For example, Exercises *Talisman Sabre*, *Kakadu* and *Pitch Black* see a broad range of participants from the region, as well as from NATO on occasion.

Low Level Operations

In the event of instability or a natural disaster within a neighbouring country, Australia may be invited by the host Government to assist in re-establishing law and order, evacuation of personnel, or disaster relief.

Australia has practical limits to its ability to influence and help in a crisis. Such situations can require very high levels of resources to manage and control. The ADF's involvement in East Timor, to restore peace and security, could not have been undertaken without assistance from a large number of coalition partners, and cooperation of the Indonesian Government.

This type of operation is likely to involve primarily land force presence, with its associated mobility, deployment, protection and support requirements. The extent of support will be influenced by the location of the operation. Operations in Pacific Island countries could involve more extended lines of communication, into areas with limited infrastructure, than would be the case for operations in the northern and western areas of the archipelago.

The police and military forces in Indonesia have significantly better capacity to deal with crises than those forces in the Pacific Island countries. Disturbances in the western and northern

areas of the archipelago could be on a significantly larger scale and be more complex to manage.

Success in pacifying an unstable situation often depends on a demonstrated ability and willingness to use preponderant force swiftly in response to any violence, so forces need to have ample firepower to remain safe and credible.

Such operations typically involve lightly armed adversaries, but there is the potential for escalation by intervention of well-armed conventional forces. Capabilities to deter or respond to such escalation would provide insurance against unplanned escalation – this would often involve both land force capabilities as well as air and naval forces to protect force elements during deployment, lodgement and operations.

ADF air and naval forces employed in support of restoring stability and order in a neighbouring country would comprise mainly airlift and sealift assets, to deploy and sustain land force elements. Major surface combatants could be employed to provide a proactive presence or direct escort to sealift operations where a threat existed. In addition, major surface combatants, patrol boats, offshore patrol vessels and maritime patrol aircraft could be employed in patrol and response operations to counter infiltration by adversary forces.

Supporting Wider Interests

The strategic reach and effect of terrorism and the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, for example, are global issues with profound direct implications for Australia's security and that of our region. Supporting wider interests is not an alternative to defending Australia or contributing to regional security, but is fundamental to our ability to meet those other strategic tasks. Australia's alliance with the US and our involvement in FPDA, as well as our commitment to the UN, are significant in our ability to influence and shape our wider interests.

The ADF needs to be structured with sufficient flexibility to make selected niche capabilities available to international coalitions of forces to meet crises beyond Australia's immediate neighbourhood, where the nation's wider interests are engaged. Such coalitions might involve peacekeeping, disaster relief, countering piracy and drug smuggling, through to relatively high intensity conflict. This calls for an increased emphasis on readiness, mobility and interoperability.

Australia contributes to maintaining strategic stability in the wider Asia-Pacific region. Australia has significant strategic interests in North Asia, including extensive trade relations with China, Japan and South Korea. The potential for state- on-state conflict in this area is higher than in our immediate neighbourhood or Southeast Asia.

Australia supports the central role the US plays in maintaining stability in the Asia-Pacific region. We also seek to preserve a security environment in which the region's economic development can proceed unhindered by threats to trade and which preserves our access to our major trading partners.

Defeating Military Aggression Globally

Australia contributes to the efforts of the international community, especially the UN, to uphold global security. It also generally supports the US in the major role it plays in maintaining and strengthening the global world order.

Australia's contribution to military operations globally would be strongly influenced by the diverse geo-strategic environments in which the ADF might be called upon to operate. Operations would not be confined to conventional military options. Australia's wider interests include ADF operations aimed at countering international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The ADF needs to retain capabilities that will enable it to operate effectively with the US and other coalition partners. The scale and composition of an ADF contribution to operations, outside of our immediate neighbourhood, would be shaped by Australia's national interests and would usually be limited to the provision of specialised high value niche capabilities.

The range of operating environments likely to be encountered in supporting global security means that Australia will not be able to foresee, or independently be able to provide for, every circumstance specifically from within the existing force structure. Nor could such diverse capabilities be justified within Australia's finite Defence resource base.

The ADF might need to be provided with supplementary equipment, or capabilities, if they are to operate in environments that differ significantly from those found in Australia and its immediate neighbourhood. These considerations apply to both operations in time of conflict and peacekeeping operations. Since the Gulf War, Defence has demonstrated an ability to modify ADF platforms rapidly to allow them to more effectively perform in specific operations. Recent operations in support of wider interests have made interoperability and compatibility more complex for the ADF. This flows from the wider range of forces we are operating with, as well as the more diverse range of environments being encountered.

Peacetime National Tasks

The ADF contributes to several regular or occasional tasks in support of national interests and contributes within a 'whole of Government approach' towards the efforts of other Government departments and agencies to accomplish these tasks. This broad range of tasks includes regular surveillance, patrol and response of Australia's coastal and offshore zones; hydrographic survey, search and rescue (SAR), disaster relief, humanitarian assistance operations and providing Defence aid to the civil authority and community.

The ADF conducts surveillance, patrol and response operations in support of Australia's border and sovereignty protection. These patrols are conducted to support Border Force and its client agencies. The main ADF elements comprise patrol boats and maritime patrol aircraft, or when tasks are beyond the capacity of patrol boats, larger warships are employed because of their better seakeeping, range, endurance or capacity.

The Navy contributes to the development of Australia's National Marine Data Base, through the activities of the Hydrographic Service and the Australian Oceanographic Data Centre. The Hydrographer of Australia has both defence and national responsibilities for the provision of maritime charts for Australia's area of charting responsibility.

Defence assistance to the civil community involves the provision of assistance to the states and territories to protect the lives and property of their citizens in an emergency. The ADF may

be called upon to assist with relief operations and support to events of major national significance.

When natural disasters occur, either in Australia or overseas, consideration may be given to involving the ADF in relief operations. In Australia the ADF is most likely to respond to Emergency Management Australia's support to state government authorities.

Australia is a signatory to the UN Safety of Life at Sea Convention and the ADF has specific responsibilities in relation to SAR for military vehicles in the Australian SAR region. The ADF is also called upon in circumstances where SAR operations are beyond the resources of civil authorities. Distance from mainland Australia and the extent of the emergency are often dominant factors in seeking ADF assistance. The ability of naval and air force assets to cover extended distances and remain on task, in possibly extreme environmental conditions, is often fundamental to successful SAR operations. The main ADF assets employed in these circumstances are naval units, such as major surface combatants, amphibious ships and afloat support tankers. RAAF assets would usually comprise maritime patrol aircraft or long-range air transport aircraft.

Shaping the Strategic Environment

The ADF is employed extensively to serve Australia's national policies in shaping and stabilising the strategic environment. The traditional focus has been on Defence engaging the US and supporting its commitment to providing a stabilising influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Other initiatives are directed at engaging New Zealand, our FPDA partners, Southeast Asian countries, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Island countries. We are also progressively expanding our contacts with China, Japan, South Korea and India.

Much of the ADF's diplomatic activity is focussed on developing bilateral relationships and creating a sense of strategic community and dialogue between partners. Several multi-lateral initiatives have been progressed, including the Kakadu series of maritime exercises, the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and the Pitch-Black series of Air Force exercises. The latter includes several European participants as well as regional players.

The ADF's shaping initiatives include:

- patrol boat programs for Pacific Island Forum nations and Timor Leste,
- senior officer visits,
- official talks,
- exercises,
- ship visits and passage exercises,
- aircraft visits,
- personnel exchanges,
- provision of training,
- cooperative research and development projects,
- information exchanges, and
- cooperative patrols or other cooperative ventures.

Conclusion

The primary functions of the ADF are the defence of Australia and the protection of its interests. The threat of direct conventional military attack on Australia remains remote. Global instability has increased and the prospect of warning time has greatly diminished, such that a threat to Australia and its national interests could arise with little or no warning. Australia's strategic advantage of geographic remoteness has reduced with the growth of regional defence capabilities as our neighbours' economic development progresses. The risks of rogue states with weapons of mass destruction, or long-range weapons, and terrorism remains.

Australia's military strategy seeks to achieve and maintain the initiative and to engage an adversary as far away from its territory as possible. Being able to exert strategic control over the maritime approaches is fundamental to Australia's defence and that of its immediate neighbourhood. The proposed strategy for defending Australia and Contributing to the Security of the Immediate Neighbourhood envisages the employment of ADF maritime forces, mostly air and naval as well as strike elements of the land forces, to achieve strategic control of the maritime approaches. Other land forces would secure Australia's power projection bases and respond to and defeat any incursions.

Australian contributions to operations further afield will also have a strong maritime dimension. The nation will need to project, protect and sustain ADF forces through the maritime environment to participate in any overseas campaign. The outcome of Indo-Pacific regional military operations is also likely to be determined by forces able to achieve strategic control of the maritime environment, as evidenced by the Allied campaign in the Indo-Pacific region in World War II.

The ADF's peacetime national tasks also have a strong maritime focus, especially border protection, fisheries surveillance and enforcement, or humanitarian assistance operations.

An increase in commitments in the immediate neighbourhood and supporting of wider regional and global interests have broadened the range of circumstances for deployment of ADF elements. However, Australia would not acquire specialist capabilities to meet these situations: rather they would be met from the capabilities acquired for the direct Defence of Australia.

The evolution of ongoing instability in the global environment means it is important for Australia to adopt a much more self-reliant posture, than in the past. This should include expanding Australia's capacity to manufacture, modify, sustain and repair selected capabilities. Transport infrastructure should be improved, including weather proofing vulnerable lines of communication, especially those that support and sustain operations from ADF bases in northern Australia. The nation should also improve its local capacity to produce and store strategically important materials, fuels, armaments and weapons, as well as products of an industrial, medical and food security nature.

About the Author

John Mortimer had a long career in the Department of Defence as a public servant. John had considerable experience in the Force Development and Analysis Division before managing the RAN's international relations with other navies, and strategic policy formulation in Navy and Defence.

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