

**SUBMISSION**

on

**AUSTRALIA'S MARITIME STRATEGY**

by

**THE AUSTRALIA DEFENCE ASSOCIATION**

to

**The Defence Sub-Committee  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade  
of the Australian Parliament**

Melbourne  
October 2002

## INTRODUCTION

1. This submission to the Defence Sub-Committee, Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade on its reference on *Australia's Maritime Strategy* is made by the Board of directors of the Australia Defence Association on behalf of the Association.
2. The Australia Defence Association is a non-partisan citizens group structured as a corporation established by guarantee under the Australian Securities legislation with the object to promote, foster and encourage the best form of defence for Australia. The Board of seven directors is appointed by the guarantors who are drawn from a wide cross-section of the Australian community.
3. The Association is funded by private subscription and such other revenue as can be raised from various functions as well as consultancy work for industry and others. With the exception of some subscriptions to publications, all funds are derived from non-government and Australian sources.
4. The Association has correspondence relations with strategic studies institutes and individuals in 11 overseas countries, all in the Pacific Basin. It provides the Australian representation on the international committee which organises the Western Pacific sea lanes security conferences. The sixth conference in the series was hosted by the Association in Melbourne in October, 1988.
5. The Association publishes a quarterly journal *Defender* which enjoys a circulation of approximately 1000 in Australia and overseas. It also publishes a monthly digest entitled *Defence Brief* and a site on the Internet's World Wide Web at [www.ada.asn.au](http://www.ada.asn.au).

## BACKGROUND

6. The White Paper *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* suggests that "Australia needs to be able to control the air and sea approaches to our continent - a maritime strategy."<sup>1</sup> This is not a maritime strategy in the accepted sense of the term, merely one very incomplete element of a true maritime strategy. Elsewhere, the White Paper compounds its misunderstanding of the term by referring to "maritime capabilities" as "mostly air and naval forces."<sup>2</sup> This canard is repeated on a number of occasions throughout the document. Where the document refers to land forces in the context of a maritime strategy, they are given "a vital and central role" to assist naval and air forces, defeat incursions on to Australian territory and secure air and naval bases.<sup>3</sup>
7. What the White Paper is describing is one limited element of a strategy of sea denial, not a maritime strategy. A true maritime strategy is one which uses all forces - land, sea and air - to further national objectives in a maritime context as distinct from a territorial context. The White Paper's concept of strategy is in fact a territorial or continental strategy rather than

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<sup>1</sup> White Paper *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (hereafter White Paper) p XI and paras 6.6 and 6.7.

<sup>2</sup> White Paper p. XII.

<sup>3</sup> White Paper para 6.7

a maritime strategy with operations on or over the sea limited to protecting the approaches to the continent.

### THE ELEMENTS OF MARITIME STRATEGY

8. There are three fundamental elements to a maritime strategy.<sup>4</sup> These are Sea Denial, Sea Assertion and Power Projection.
9. The object of Sea Denial is:
  - a. the detection and destruction of an adversary's naval forces and seaborne commerce;
  - b. offensive operations against hostile naval forces; and
  - c. the seaward defence of ports and anchorages.

Clearly, the White Paper strategy does not envisage offensive operations against an adversary's seaborne commerce and limits operations against hostile naval forces to those operating in the seaward approaches to Australian territory.

10. Sea Assertion is an element of maritime strategy that includes:
  - a. the establishment and maintenance of superiority in areas necessary for naval operations including protection of sea lines of communication;
  - b. naval reconnaissance and surveillance, anti-submarine operations, protection of shipping; and
  - c. military sea transport support for the ADF.

Of considerable importance in this context is the protection of merchant shipping, both coastal and international. This is discussed further below.

11. Power Projection involves the use of maritime capabilities to:
  - a. conduct offensive operations against enemy installations; and
  - b. provide naval support for land operations.

In the context of a national defence strategy which envisages a need to go to the aid of allied nations either in our region or further afield<sup>5</sup>, the White Paper accepts the need for this element of a maritime strategy without actually recognising its significance.

12. Thus the commitment of Interfet to East Timor actually involved those elements of a maritime strategy set out in paras. 9c, 10 and 11b above. All other elements of maritime strategy (9a and b, and 11a) were implicit and applied to the lodgement and protection of Interfet had Indonesian forces attempted to interfere with the operation.

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<sup>4</sup> In this discussion, we are drawing heavily on Alan Robertson *Centre of the Ocean World: Australia and Maritime Strategy* 2001, Seaview Press, Adelaide.

<sup>5</sup> White Paper p. XI

## A FLAWED MILITARY STRATEGY

13. Apart from the misunderstanding of the nature of maritime strategy, the White Paper demonstrates additional flaws. For example, the section entitled 'An Attack on Australia'<sup>6</sup> is sensibly dismissive of the potential for significant direct attacks on Australia but insists that "Australia's most important long term strategic objective is to be able to defend our territory from direct military attack".<sup>7</sup> That strategic objective is in itself unexceptionable although it neglects potential threats to important Australian interests. Where the White Paper falls down is in its failure to distinguish between a strategic objective and a strategy. Thus a strategy is the means by which the objective is achieved.
14. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between the strategic objective priorities set out in chapter 4 and the strategies described in chapter 6. While the protection of Australian territory is the highest strategic objective, the strategic priority should be to maximise Australia's military operational capabilities for tasks at a distance from Australia. The overall strategy should be the same as it always was at least until the 1980s - to keep potential adversaries at arm's length. Pursuing a strategy which allows an adversary to develop bases in the region for an assault on Australia is a faulty strategy that increases the risk to the primary strategic objective.
15. In this sense, the Association suggests that meeting the primary strategic objective is better achieved by pursuing the White Paper's second strategic priority, that of contributing to the security of our immediate neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup> Focussing on that strategic priority not only actually ensures that the primary strategic objective is attained but also that our forces are prioritised for a more likely contingency than a direct attack on Australian territory. In any event, the capabilities developed for and the experience gaining in pursuing the former priority would support the strategy of defence of the mainland. The opposite is not necessarily true.

## PROTECTION OF MERCHANT SHIPPING

16. The White Paper's focus on protecting Australian territory has inherent flaws because it fails to recognise that Australia has vital interests that extend beyond the national territory. As one example, Australia's economic and therefore its political health depends heavily upon foreign, mainly seaborne trade.
17. In 2001, Australia's total overseas trade was valued at \$240.3 billion of which exports accounted for \$122.5 billion. The total value of overseas trade represented 34.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>9</sup> According to the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, this overseas trade was represented in 1999-2000 by exports of 518 million tonnes and imports of 56 million tonnes. Domestic (coastal) shipping, much of it in vital commodities

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<sup>6</sup> White Paper 3.37-3.40

<sup>7</sup> White Paper para 4.7

<sup>8</sup> White Paper paras. 6.10-6.13

<sup>9</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade *Australia: Economic & Trade Statistics* June 2002

accounted for a further 101 million tonnes. This export/import cargo was carried in 9,619 voyages originating overseas. Port calls in Australia by overseas and coastal vessels in 2000-01 totalled 21,538. Although these figures are relatively small compared with some of the northern hemisphere shipping routes, the greater distance factor of most voyages adds substantially to the security task with an annual figure of 4,904 billion tonnes/kilometre.<sup>10</sup>

18. As far as we can determine, there is no mention in the White Paper of the need to protect merchant shipping as an Australian strategic interest and one that would require maritime strategic capabilities. Indeed, academic and departmental responses have tended to be dismissive, suggesting that the need does not exist or, alternatively, that Australia has no need for a capability of its own.<sup>11</sup> In most cases, those responses have been couched in terms of a conflict between Australia and some other country but have ignored the reality that a conflict between one of Australia's major trading partners such as Japan and another country could involve attacks on merchant shipping ranging from low level harassment to a sustained attempt at interdiction.
19. Depending upon the scale of such contingencies, their emergence would necessarily generate a multi-national response in which Australia would be required to play a part.
20. Similarly, neither terrorism nor piracy can be excluded as potential albeit limited threats to a substantial Australian maritime interest that would demand a maritime response probably in concert with allies but possibly depending upon the circumstances on our own.
21. Australia has been involved in sanctions enforcement against Iraq virtually continuously since 1990. Such sanctions enforcement is clearly an element of maritime strategy supporting Australia's strategic interests. While it may not constitute a strategic priority, it has nevertheless demanded a substantial contribution by a small force which, in the process, denies that force the ability to further other elements of maritime strategy.

#### **THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND MARITIME SAFETY CHALLENGES**

22. Offshore law enforcement in Australia's very large<sup>12</sup> Exclusive Economic Zone plus the obligations undertaken under Safety of Life at Sea conventions involve provision of maritime forces over very extensive ocean areas. The Australian laws applicable to the EEZ cover customs, fisheries, environment, quarantine and migration. While the area to be covered is large and the laws extensive, the enforcement capabilities are very limited. The Australia Defence Association has argued since 1977 for the provision of a properly resourced and equipped Coastguard service not only to provide professional law enforcement capabilities but also to free the ADF for the range of military tasks that seem to be increasing.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dotars.gov.au/btre/docs/trnstats02/trnstats.htm#sea> (Downloaded 21 Oct 02)

<sup>11</sup> See for example Paul Dibb *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* 1986, AGPS, Canberra p. 68

<sup>12</sup> Some 11 million square kilometres (excluding those parts arising from Antarctic claims)

## THE ABILITY OF THE ADF TO IMPLEMENT A MARITIME STRATEGY

23. In the Association's view, the defence of Australia as defined by both its territory and offshore interests can only be assured by the adoption of a true maritime strategy that provides for the ability to deploy and support Australian naval, air and land forces within our region and normally in association with allies.
24. As indicated in para 12 above, the deployment and support of Interfet in East Timor from September 1999 until February 2000 represented a classic maritime strategy in operation albeit on a small scale, in the immediate neighbourhood and in a low threat environment. A small ground force was deployed and supplied by sea and air - principally the former - throughout the five month deployment.
25. This low threat assessment depends to a large extent on hindsight. If the Indonesian government or renegade elements of their armed forces had responded forcefully, the challenge to Interfet would have multiplied substantially. Recognising the risk, the ADF very properly deployed significant and capable naval and air forces to deter any adventurism. In the Association's view, these deployments were probably influential in their deterrent task and would probably have been effective operationally if deterrence had failed.
26. What must be emphasised, however, is that the Interfet operation was a small military operation by almost any measure. Moreover, it took place in a relatively benign operational environment close to its logistics base but was still not sustainable beyond five months. If the operation had resulted in hard fighting or had to be extended beyond five months, Australia could not have continued the commitment on the ground without calling out reserves. Even then, as the Association pointed out at the time<sup>13</sup>, the lack of legislative authority (at that time) and the low level of readiness of reserve units would have required both rapid legislative action and the call out to have occurred as Interfet was deployed.
27. In the context of defending Australia against a serious military attack on its territory (highly unlikely) or its interests (much more likely), There is some capacity in the ADF to implement a maritime strategy. The basic capabilities required are:
  - a. Sea denial: Submarines; surface combatants (configured for anti-shiping, anti-air and anti-submarine warfare); offensive mine warfare vessels; logistic support ships; anti-shiping strike aircraft; maritime patrol aircraft; aerial tankers; airborne early warning and control aircraft.
  - b. Sea assertion: All of the above plus defensive mine warfare, personnel transport ships; access to regional air bases or an aircraft carrier with fighter aircraft, well-equipped ground forces.
  - c. Power projection: aircraft carrier with strike capabilities; amphibious ships plus substantially increased seaborne logistic support.<sup>14</sup>
28. Clearly significant gaps exist especially in terms of air capabilities at extended distances from Australian air bases. Absent the ability to deploy from regional air bases, the RAAF

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<sup>13</sup> Australia Defence Association *Defence Brief 69*, October 1999

<sup>14</sup> Robertson *op cit* p 71

is not able to support surface operations in a timely fashion. The lack of logistic support forces for naval and air forces also means that any ground forces deployed risk being left unsupported unless allied support is available.

29. The Association has two further concerns. The first relates to the current demands upon the ADF for a wide range of small but persistent tasks such as Operation Relex, the continuing commitment to East Timor and Afghanistan, the diversion of much of the navy to law enforcement and the Persian Gulf sanctions enforcement task. While none of these is of itself demanding, the cumulative effect on training, maintenance and modernisation programs threatens the ability of the ADF both to sustain the commitments themselves or to be available for more significant commitments that might be required by government.
30. Thus, the ability of the ADF to contribute in any meaningful way to combat operations against Iraq while maintaining existing commitments is negligible.
31. Related to this question is whether the ADF is of a sufficient size to meet a significant threat to Australia's overall security even in the absence of the existing level of commitments. Given the analysis above of the stress applied by the Interfet commitment, the Association considers it is not. As examples, we note that overall personnel numbers have been cut by some 28 per cent over the past 12 years, and the proposed level of 16 surface combatants for the RAN<sup>15</sup> has been reduced to 14 with only ten in service at the date of this submission.
32. In terms of ground forces, the Association notes that the recommendations of this Committee in its report on the Australian Army<sup>16</sup> not only have not been implemented but do not appear to have been accepted by the government. As one result, the Army is likely to continue to be dogged with insufficient personnel, hollow units, inappropriate equipment<sup>17</sup> and inadequate logistic support for the offshore deployments that are not only implicit in a true maritime strategy but are also the likely outcomes of government's operational decisions or the emergence of as yet unforeseen threats.
33. For its part, the RAAF lacks sufficient tanker support<sup>18</sup> while the airborne early warning and control capability that has been discussed for almost 30 years is still at least four years from service. More seriously, it now seems likely that the F/A-18 and F-111 fleets are likely to be retired by 2010 while the probable F-35 replacement is unlikely to be in service before 2017 at the earliest.

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Defence *Force Structure Review* 1991, AGPS, Canberra, para 2.32

<sup>16</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade *From Phantom to Force: Towards a More Efficient and Effective Army* August 2000

<sup>17</sup> For example, wheeled armoured vehicles are substantially less useful for off-road operations in the regional environment while the White Paper's failure to discuss the future of main battle tanks in the Army's inventory suggests that these are slated for retirement without replacement.

<sup>18</sup> At best, the existing force of three obsolete tankers provides no more than a training capability for the F/A-18 force. They are incapable of refuelling F-111 aircraft.

## CONCLUSION

34. The Association considers that the use of the term 'maritime strategy' in the 2000 defence White Paper bespeaks a lack of understanding of the meaning of the term. This compounds a confusion between the concepts of strategic objective and strategy. The White Paper's concept of a maritime strategy is the very primitive one of denying the sea and air approaches to the Australian continent to an adversary. This is not only an inadequate defence strategy but is inconsistent with the strategic priorities set out in the White Paper.
35. Even with the limited and inaccurate definition of 'maritime strategy', the capacity of the ADF to provide the forces required to implement and sustain over time such a strategy, especially in the context of a significant threat to Australia or its interests, is simply inadequate. The force structure shows significant and growing gaps, the numbers of platforms and personnel are inadequate and the list of overage items<sup>19</sup> is growing.
36. The defence of Australia and its interests demands the adoption of a true maritime strategy but there seems little evidence that defence policy makers understand what is implied. Nor is there much evidence that approved capability programs can deliver the ability to pursue such a maritime strategy.

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<sup>19</sup> 40-year old armoured personnel carriers and tactical transport aircraft are just two examples.