



**Submission No 22**

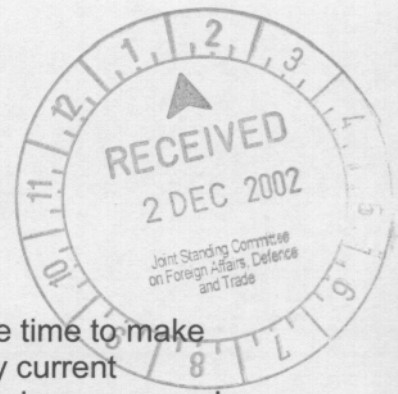
**Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy**

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Submission by Brigadier JJA Wallace AM (Retd)

## Australia's Maritime Strategy



I would like to thank the Committee for its consideration in allowing me time to make this submission. Unfortunately I have been distracted by a very heavy current workload and would therefore request to appear before the Committee in person, so I can better develop the points made below.

### Introduction

Australia's current strategic guidance is seriously flawed, not so much for its maritime strategy bias, but for its failure to reflect the realities of our strategic environment and the nature of future conflict. These errors in strategy have compounded over the last twenty years, during which time we have been in denial about these issues. Unfortunately the product of that period of denial, is a Defence Force without either the capacity for the much-vaunted "self reliant defence" of Australia, or the capacity to provide government options for the real contingencies for which it would want them.

The solution to this problem is not to attempt to force Australia's strategic needs within the convenient and often simplistic template of a classical strategy, but to analyse the realities of our strategic requirements over time and in the context of the changing nature of conflict.

### Maritime Strategy

A Maritime strategy aims at controlling the seas so that an enemy is denied the sea (and air) lines of communication by which he can sustain his war effort.

While its proponents drew on examples of ancient history for the use of naval power to support land campaigns, it was formulated to explain the success of England in its European wars. In this context it had particular relevance because of the dependence of the colonial European powers on the produce of their colonies.

While there will be a strong maritime element in operations of the ADF whether in defence of Australia or in lower level contingencies, it is doubtful that a Maritime strategy is appropriate to Australia for the following reasons:

- 1 **Capacity.** Maritime strategy was appropriate to countries with the capacity to dominate sea lines of communication. However Australia would ever be stretched to protect its own lines of communication let alone interdict others north of the archipelago. Australia might contribute to someone else's Maritime strategy which might directly or indirectly defend Australia, however it is impossible to conceive of it as a self-reliant strategy for the defence of Australia.
- 2 **Future Technology.** The term maritime strategy suggests the primary function of the Defence Force to be naval capability, with other capabilities supporting it. While this may be a confusion of ends and means, it is nonetheless a limiting intellectual construct in which to place national defence strategy, when it is already possible to surveil and target sea lines of communication and their

critical nodes from air and land based systems, including long range missiles and remotely piloted vehicles networked with satellite surveillance. As this technology proliferates and its cost falls, we could reasonably expect it to be much more used in dominating the sea, than traditional naval means. It therefore becomes important not to place consideration of our national strategy within the intellectual paradigm of a classical strategy that might limit it.

- 3 Duration of Conflict.** While unconventional or asymmetric conflicts may be waged over many years, the cost, weapon technology, domestic intolerance of long conflicts and the resultant imperative to apply natural advantage quickly, will all conspire to shorten future declared wars. Shorter conflicts will inevitably lessen the strength of the central logic of a maritime strategy – to weaken the enemy through denying supplies. Wars are more likely to be of short duration and therefore reliance on a strategy with this imperative less sound.

I will now address some of the points in the Terms of Reference, but emphasise that I am doing this under great pressure of time and would want the opportunity to elaborate personally before the Committee.

### **ADO Capability to Apply Maritime Strategy**

While the ADF would be able to control selected of its own maritime lines of communication very close to Australia, this would not stop an enemy interdicting them beyond our reach and therefore defeating the defensive element of our maritime strategy.

However as the real purpose of a maritime strategy is to interfere with the enemy's ability to wage operations, there is little likelihood of Australia employing it successfully unilaterally. This would require projecting force, or having the remote ability to interdict sea lines of communication, north of the archipelago at least. Security would demand that there be sufficient depth in the area of operations to prevent prediction of our activities and to defend our force locations. It would certainly require the seizure of Forward Operating Bases (FOB) in the archipelago. This all enlarges the scope of the task and puts it further beyond our means.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that a maritime strategy is not feasible for the self-reliant defence of Australia. Australia would only ever contribute to someone else's maritime strategy that either directly or indirectly defended Australia.

### **Impact of Maritime Strategy on the ADF's Ability to Mount More Likely Operations – Including Combined Operations**

The low percentage of GDP that Australia is prepared to allocate to Defence makes its efficient allocation all the more an imperative. The policy over the last twenty years of structuring for the least likely scenario of defence of Australia, while assuming the resultant force structure and capability mix could meet any more likely crisis has been both inefficient in expenditure of the Defence Budget and dangerous to both service personnel and the achievement of national objectives for the use of force. This is well illustrated by the fact that the inevitable high capital cost of committing to the purchase of major air and naval platforms, has resulted for much of that period in a policy of "fitted for but not with" weapons and other vital systems, leaving the nation

without real capability for the short notice contingencies in which it has been engaged.

Had our force structure and capability mix been driven by more likely contingencies for the ADF, we would not have seen the force placed at such great risk in Timor. Here Army logistics was completely inadequate, despite the relatively simple nature of the operation, because it had for years been driven by the simplistic Dibb doctrine, that saw Army never projecting force over a sea air gap – a quantum increase in logistic complexity for any force. In the same way air and naval capabilities to maintain the force were totally inadequate, because the maritime strategy had placed priority on major fighting platforms, on an assumption that in a major conflict civilian ships and aircraft could be taken up from trade. However every bit as critical although not tested, was the inadequacy in our ability to provide real air defence of the land operations. Naval ships were inadequately fitted for even close in self-defence, let alone long-range defence of the force, and the RAAF had inadequate ability to provide early warning or combat air patrol cover. Any realistic analysis of our defence needs would have identified integral air defence as a critical requirement for any contingency force – without it both the Government and our Defence Forces stand to be severely embarrassed.

As a major characteristic of current operations has for a number of years now been their combined nature, the current strategy has left us woefully unprepared to participate usefully with the US in particular. The modern battlefield is a high technology networked environment, not at all like the simplistic, if convenient scenario painted by Dibb and his successors. Foreign forces without appropriate communication and IFF<sup>1</sup> systems are more of a liability to the US than an advantage. With our policy being proudly if naively trumpeted as “self reliant defence”, there has been inadequate priority for systems that would allow us to really operate with the US in an environment with conventional war characteristics. Any operation with a significant ground to air missile threat such as a war in Iraq, or even higher-level peacekeeping operations such as those in the Balkans, require this networked capability.

In summary the focus on a maritime strategy has had the effect of first limiting the Governments options in engaging in combined operations with the US in particular and then in transferring the strategic risk of real operations from the national strategic level where it should be taken in realistic budget decisions, to the operational and tactical levels, where it falls on the commanders and service personnel conducting the operation. This means that current strategic guidance has substantially failed the government, the taxpayer and the ADF.

## **A Stronger Framework For National and Defence Strategy**

The real shortcomings of current Defence strategy are:

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<sup>1</sup> IFF is the identification friend or foe system, a automatic system operated variously in different environments which interrogates forces, ships or planes with a coded signal which if not provided with the correct reply signal, can result in the automatic launch of weapons aimed at destroying the assumed hostile element. The automated nature of the system is required by the speed of operation of offensive weapons systems.

- The assumption that that Defence of Australia would ever be unilateral or self reliant
- The assumption that our priorities for Defence spending should be to platforms needed for the conventional Defence of Australia
- The assumption, founded in gross ignorance of the real imperatives of military operations, that the residual capabilities from a policy concentrating on conventional Defence of Australia are adequate to meet any short-term emergencies.

A government's first responsibility is of course to the security of the nation, but as our current security environment shows, threats are increasingly less likely to be of a conventional form. Given our inability to unilaterally defend Australia, a major objective of our national and defence strategy must be to maintain a close alliance with the US. This means that we need an approach to force structure that reverses the current philosophy, it must instead:

- Ensure that we have the ability to defeat significant short term threats to Australia, including those of terrorism,
- Ensure the ability to secure the safety of Australians in the region, principally against collapse of governments,
- For the conventional defence of Australia, develop niche capabilities that:
  - Cover essential requirements for short term contingencies,
  - Provide the "force multiplier"<sup>2</sup> expansion capabilities necessary for conventional defence of Australia in a coalition
- Identify and monitor the lines of development and time frames necessary to provide for a more independent defence of Australia, expanding the capability around the identified force multiplier capabilities.

The essential character of this philosophy is that it provides niche capabilities suitable to make a real contribution to coalition forces, while at the same time ensuring that those same capabilities are the most valuable as force multipliers for the conventional defence of Australia. It will provide the depth of capabilities necessary to sustain the war against terror and any contingency threat to Australians in the region, so protecting Australia's regional interests, the key to our national security. The type of capabilities that would be given priority in this philosophy is:

- Intelligence and Surveillance

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<sup>2</sup> "Force multiplier" capabilities are those that disproportionably increase the effectiveness of other dependent or related capabilities. For example the AWACS multiply the effectiveness of any aircraft mix they serve and have the added advantage of being always in short supply in the US inventory, and therefore being a very welcome contribution by a coalition partner.

- Ability to project and sustain a joint force of up to brigade size
- Special Forces
- Airborne Early Warning and Command and Control
- Airborne Refuelling
- Naval Area Air Defence

Importantly this philosophy would place more priority in air warfare on force multiplier capabilities than front line aircraft. It would allow Australia to monitor the inevitable move from manned to unmanned air combat systems and not leave us caught, as we seem now sure to be, with the last of the worlds manned systems in a future world of unmanned systems. This need to guard our entry into high technology, expensive platforms is important, as once one of these lines of development is chosen, the whole force structure and budget can become captive to it.

## **Conclusion**

Current defence strategy has proved woefully inadequate. The fact that we are now trying to make the most of an inappropriate force structure is testimony to its failure and that of its architects. What is most urgent is to look at the system which produced this failed strategy and ensure that it does not happen again. Strategy needs to be made the prime responsibility of those who have spent their lives studying and applying it, the uniformed side of Defence, not Defence bureaucrats as is currently the case. Placing strategy in the hands of the wrong people leads to their creating simplistic constructs that they can understand and explain, even to the point of trying to fit reality into classical strategic frameworks like maritime strategy.

Strategy is getting the better of an adversary. It must be formulated not within classical constructs, but in response to the realities of the total environment in which security exists. The successful derivation of defence strategy is also dependent on an intimate knowledge of the imperatives of tactics and operations. It has to take account of the complexity and sophistication of the modern battlefield. When the cost of defence capability is so high, it is all the more important that strategy be focussed on reality if due economies are to be achieved. Over the last 20years ours has not been.

Signed Jim Wallace

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