

Submission to the  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy

The writings on maritime strategy are voluminous. This submission by contrast will be short, as the basic issues are simple, in conception at least if not in practice.

The key to understanding the potential for Australia's Maritime Strategy lies in an appreciation of the difference between the defence of Australian territory and the defence of Australia's interests (including territory). If the Committee chooses to investigate an Australian Maritime Strategy purely in terms of the *Defence 2000* White Paper (looking at maritime strategy in the air/sea gap) then it will effectively decide the outcome prior to considering the matter. *It is the contention of this paper that Australian Maritime Strategy should be understood in terms of the defence of Australia's interests.*

If the air/sea gap around Australia is considered only to be a barrier to threats, then options to implement a maritime strategy are limited, becoming reactive and short term. Moreover it encourages consideration of only two scenarios: a high level threat of invasion and low level erosion of Australian sovereignty through acts against the environment, resources, immigration and customs. While action to deal with these in the air/sea gap must be part of a maritime strategy, these acts do not occur solely in that gap. They are conceived and often implemented much further afield and do not affect Australia alone, illustrating the connections Australia has to the rest of the world. And these connections pass through the air/sea gap.

Australia's maritime environment is a resource and a medium which allows Australia to interact with and influence the region, a region in which we have many interests. For example Australia's prospective LNG trade with China requires secure sea lanes between north-western Australia and China. A large proportion of Australian containerised trade passes through the port of Singapore. Our maritime strategy should therefore look to identifying all the ways in which we can benefit from those connections.

### Means and Ends

A simpler way of presenting a maritime strategy at high level is to discuss it in terms of means and ends. The 'Ends' are a broad continuum of contingencies which include:

1. Defence of Australian territory against hostile attack
2. Defence of Australian maritime trade against hostile attack while it is within the region (bounded by the Eastern basin of the Indian Ocean, through the

- Malacca Straits, the southern and eastern coasts of China, Japan and the western rim of the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand).
3. Support of Australian allies in and from the maritime environment.
  4. Protection of Australian resources within all sections of the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone (AEEZ).
  5. Comprehensive surveillance of the AEEZ.

The 'Means' must include the following:

1. Diplomatic effort to garner support for Australian interests.
2. Maritime forces which can provide Government with a range of options to give effect to its decisions, both in the air/sea gap and further into the region.
3. Co-ordination between the numerous government departments and organisation which have some interest in the maritime environment. This paper submits that it would be beneficial for one Federal Government department to have a lead-house role for maritime affairs. Some budgetary influence would be necessary to assist the process of co-ordination.

The capacity of the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO)

The ADO capacity to achieve the ends identified above within a short distance of Australia (i.e. the near side of the air/sea gap) is reasonable and likely to remain so for at least the short-medium term. However, concentration on only those capabilities which support this will limit the ADO's capacity to contribute to alliance operations: not many armed forces plan to operate on or near Australian territory. Moreover, if Australia's armed forces do not have the capability to deploy into our region, and do not have credible capabilities over the spectrum of conflict, our utility will be limited.

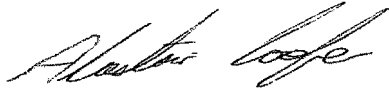
The capacity of the ADO to defend Australia's interests outside the narrow range of the air/sea gap is tenuous at present and does not show prospects of improving relative to the forces which are in our region. The breadth and value of Australian interests, from fish stocks in the Antarctic to LNG shipping in the South China Sea, is not matched by the capability of the ADO. Australia's interests in the maritime environment and their economic value are only likely to increase. This will generate a commensurate interest in them, and it is likely that not all will be benign.

It is the contention of this submission that the ADO's maritime forces will require expansion over the next 5-10 years, with particular respect to two areas:

1. Platforms capable of deploying throughout the region to represent and defend Australian interests against hostile attack.
2. Platforms capable of surveilling the AEEZ and enforcing Australian sovereignty.

If members of the committee wish to read more on maritime strategy in a general sense I would recommend *Navies and Foreign Policy* by K. Booth, published by Croom Helm, London, 1977. It is 25 years old, but it remains a standard text to which many more recent writers owe much.

I would be happy to amplify my brief comments if it will assist the Committee's understanding of maritime strategy for Australia.



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