



The Australian Naval Institute  
PO Box 29  
RED HILL ACT 2603

25 October 2002

Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600

## INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S MARITIME STRATEGY

Dear Sir,

The Council of the Australian Naval Institute (ANI) has viewed with interest the Committee's intention to inquire into the role of maritime strategy in Australia's defence policy. The following general comments and a selection of articles from the *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute* are forwarded as this organisation's contribution to the debate.

### **What is a maritime strategy?**

Although not specifically addressed in the Inquiry's terms of reference one of the more fundamental issues that might profitably be addressed by the Committee is the meaning and understanding of the term 'maritime strategy'. Unfortunately, there is no single accepted definition and, as in many other areas of Australian Defence doctrine, terminology remains a stumbling block to the creation of an effective joint force capability. As elaborated in a recent article: '*Doctrinally, the ADF has a situation where joint, maritime land and aerospace concepts are expressed in four different languages, which are not necessarily well understood across the ADF*'.<sup>1</sup> This has led to a situation where policy papers, such as *Defence 2000*, use the term 'maritime strategy' in a manner which imposes quite severe and unnecessary constraints on what, in practice, should be a far more flexible and broadly based aspect of national strategy.

According to Professor John Hattendorf of the US Naval War College, a maritime strategy incorporates '*the direction of all aspects of national power that relate to a nation's interests at sea*'.<sup>2</sup> In a similar manner, the Royal Australian Navy defines a maritime strategy as '*The comprehensive direction of all aspects of national power to achieve national strategic goals by exercising some degree of control at sea*'.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, a maritime strategy is closely related to national security, however, it should not be seen as a purely naval, nor even military preserve. Instead, the concept involves the integration of a far wider range of national institutions and interests. In addition to purely military concerns, these interests should at least include the economic, cultural, industrial and environmental dimensions of Australia's maritime

environment. Hence a true maritime strategy must be a sub-set of national grand strategy and, from this perspective, Australia's military strategy should devolve from our maritime strategy rather than the other way around.

### **Does Australia have a maritime strategy?**

Because of its historic failure to harness the wealth of its surrounding oceans Australia has at times been described as an incomplete maritime power.<sup>4</sup> Most Australians still regard their coastline as little more than a convenient playground, while the vast expanse of water beyond is of only peripheral importance. As the late Professor Frank Broeze pointed out in his far too rare survey of maritime Australia: *'Images and perceptions of national identity have largely revolved around inward-looking and often racist concepts of "continental" Australia in which the sea was seen as a fence shutting out intrusions from the surrounding region'*.<sup>5</sup> The perception that the sea is a highway, one which makes every other coastal state in the world a neighbour, has achieved far less national prominence. Yet, it is this last point that highlights the security implications of the nation's broader maritime setting. Any possible military movement of persons and materiel, either by or against Australia, must travel either on, over, or under the sea. Hence, no matter whether the security problem is local, regional or global, and no matter whether viewed from our own perspective or from that of an adversary, the critical factor underlying success will always be the ability of forces to make use of the sea.

Although portrayed as the product of an unprecedented developmental process *Defence 2000* follows the pattern of previous White Papers in focusing only on a very limited range of Australia's national maritime affairs. There is little discussion of the vital role of maritime resources and communications, or even the problems of enforcing Australian jurisdiction over one of the largest combined maritime economic zones on the planet. There is certainly no attempt to integrate these aspects into a comprehensive national security strategy. Unsurprisingly, the maritime strategy portrayed in *Defence 2000* is one limited to 'control of the sea and air approaches'. The prime mission assigned to the ADF's maritime assets centres on the prevention of any incursions in force while supporting the ADF's freedom of operation in our approaches. In effect, Australia has continued to focus on using the sea for the creation of a barrier rather than exploiting it as a highway. Consequently, our endorsed military strategy places a premium on the denial capabilities of our naval and air forces. The danger inherent in this policy is that it too often leaves the initiative with an adversary, while barely acknowledging that our national interests extend well off our coast and involve far more than the defence of territory. More fundamentally, and notwithstanding the underlying importance of protecting Australian soil from a foreign lodgment, current policy needs to acknowledge that our sovereignty can never be seriously threatened while we maintain supremacy offshore.

Rather than impose constraints a true maritime strategy should make use of the flexibility provided by maritime forces (including naval, air and land elements) to concentrate on strategic end states rather than the defence of a particular territory. Australia must continuously seek to impose our choice about where and when to fight and, equally importantly, our level of involvement. Intelligently directed, the capabilities for mobility, power projection and sustainment inherent in maritime forces allow Australia to fine tune our defence obligations and shift focus with remarkable rapidity. Furthermore, and of vital importance in an era of instability and

uncertainty, a nation's maritime power can act as a significant presence anywhere in the world, demonstrating commitment to an alliance or coalition, while acting to both limit the development of problems and keep threats at a distance.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of its existing Defence strategy, Australia has already begun attempts to better integrate its national maritime activities. Indeed, at the release of *Australia's Oceans Policy* in 1998<sup>6</sup> we probably led the world in this area. The Australian Naval Institute believes that our nation must continue to proceed down this path. By moving closer to a truly national maritime strategy we can expect to make best use of all the attributes offered by our maritime forces and face the future with far greater confidence.

#### **Relevant Articles**

Attached are a number of articles from recent editions of the *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute* that might be of interest to the Committee. They cover some recent RAN operations, force structure issues and maritime/naval strategy.

Yours Sincerely,

**A.R. FORBES**  
Journal Editor

**D.M. STEVENS, PhD**  
Councillor

---

<sup>1</sup> P.D. Leschen, 'The Integration of Joint and Single-Service Doctrine-Ensuring Maritime, Land and Air Concepts are Understood and Applied' *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 152, January/February 2002, pp. 5-14.

<sup>2</sup> J.B. Hattendorf, 'What is a Maritime Strategy?' in D. Stevens (ed.), *In Search of a Maritime Strategy: the maritime element in Australian defence planning since 1901* (Canberra: SDSC, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Australian Navy, *Australian Maritime Doctrine*, RAN Sea Power Centre, 2000, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> D.J. Campbell, 'Maritime power and the Australian Defence Force' in D. Stevens (ed.), *Maritime Power in the Twentieth Century: The Australian Experience* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 249.

<sup>5</sup> F. Broeze, *Island Nation: A History of Australians and the Sea* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Environment Australia, *Australia's Oceans Policy*, Canberra, 1998.