

From: Commodore Alan Robertson

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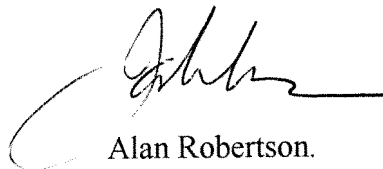
3 October '02.

The Secretary,
Joint Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee.

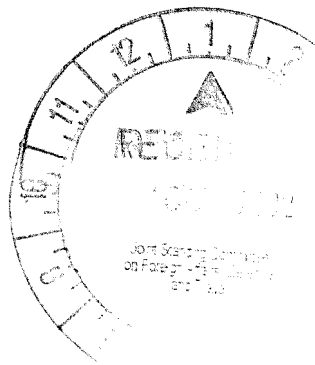
Sir,

I enclose with this note a submission to the Committee with reference to its inquiry into Australia's maritime strategy. I have also enclosed eleven copies of my book "Centre of the Ocean World. Australia and Maritime Strategy" for members of the Defence sub-committee.

Yours sincerely,



Alan Robertson.



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

Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy

- References: a. Centre of the Ocean World.
b. Australian Maritime Doctrine
c. WP No. 59. ANU Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

The terms of reference for this inquiry start with an assumption that the "maritime strategy outlined in Defence 2000" is, in fact, a maritime strategy. It is not. It is merely part of a continental strategy which owes its origins to the advice of Lord Kitchener of Khartoum.

It will be recalled that, in his advice to the Australian government of the day, Kitchener, in 1910, said that "It has recently been agreed that the Home Forces of the United Kingdom should be so organized as to compel an enemy contemplating an invasion to make the attempt on such a scale as to be unable to evade our naval forces. The same arguments apply to Australasia, and its land forces should be calculated and organized on this basis." Kitchener then proposed a land force of 80,000 troops should be made available.

In fact, Australia's so-called maritime strategy is 'sea denial', only one of the three seapower missions of a complete maritime strategy. Sea denial is the classic approach to maritime strategy by continental powers. See Theodore Ropp's essay, "Continental Doctrines of Sea Power".

A proper maritime strategy for Australia should also include the other two seapower missions of sea assertion (or sea control), and (maritime) power projection. As to the so-called "maritime strategy" outlined in Defence 2000, it would seem that the ADO is more than capable of sea denial. It is claimed that, in addition to six submarines armed with torpedoes and Harpoon anti-ship missiles, there are about 100 RAAF aircraft all capable of launching Harpoon. As well there are about 10 frigates armed with Harpoon and guns, and their helicopters will all be armed with Penguin anti-ship missiles. For a non-existent threat of invasion this is an overkill capability of immense proportions. Finally, and as a last ditch defence, it is possible to mine Australia's coastal waters, as we mined the Barrier Reef entrances in World War II, but I have not seen any published information on Australia's holding of mines.

If the Committee is serious about the importance of a maritime strategy for Australia then the following remarks may be helpful.

A Proper Maritime Strategy for Australia.

Given Australia's geography and its historical experience in World War II, it would be appropriate if Australia were to give less importance to continental strategy and to adopt a proper maritime strategy, with the ability to perform all three seapower missions of sea assertion (sea control) and (maritime) power projection, as well as sea denial.

Sea Control. As the late Dr. Tom Millar observed, "The first point to remember about the Australian island-continent is not that it is a continent, but that it is an island. Any invasion could be mounted only by a substantial maritime and air power. On the other hand, the protection that the ocean provides also means that our external lines of communication and trade are vulnerable to attack, and our own capacity to react to a defence threat near our borders, unless it were of the most modest size, would involve the slow and cumbersome sea transport of men, equipment and supplies." He also wrote that "An island does not have to be invaded to be defeated." In addition, General Fuller wrote in his book "The Conduct of War" about the three broad courses of strategic action open to a nation bent on attacking another, and he likened them to the choices open to a force attacking a walled city in the Middle Ages. The three broad choices were as follows, "A walled city can be attacked by battering down its walls; economically attacked by starving out its garrison, and morally attacked by subverting it from within." Given the generally accepted unlikelihood of direct attacks on Australia and despite the unwarranted optimism of some senior Defence Department officials about the security of our sea lines of communication, the fact is that they are vulnerable, and attacks on them would have a major strategic effect on Australia. Some 99% of Australia's exports go by sea, and in 99/00 that trade was worth \$97 billion. It is surely worth defending.

In rebutting this line of thinking there are those who say that, the nations whose ships were attacked would rise up and protect them; but there is no evidence of that having happened in this century. Or they say, Australia's sea lines of communication are so long in the Indian-Pacific basin that we could not, in any case, protect them. But there is no need to. As Sandison has pointed out (see Pacific Defence Reporter April 1986 P.4) there are only limited areas where ships must be coming or going to Australia, and it is within those limits that Australia must be able to protect merchant shipping and the vital trade which Australia needs to survive. There is also the need to be able to protect shipping which would be needed for the transport of the Army and Air Force and their supplies. War is, after all, about 90% logistics.

Power Projection. (See Ref. b. P.43) Before being able to project power from the sea it is first necessary to be able to assert your right to use it. This was demonstrated most recently in the Falklands War when Britain's naval forces defeated Argentine's attempts to deny them the use of the sea, and so enabled the RN to project power on to the islands and recover them from the Argentine army.

Power projection by Australia would see the need for the Australian Army to be reshaped on the lines of the US Marine Corps, trained in amphibious warfare, and organized into landing brigades each with its own dedicated amphibious warfare ships and landing craft. This makes good sense to some land warfare experts

such as Dr. Michael Evans of the Army's Land Warfare centre who has raised the issue in various articles.

In a larger sense it would be wise for the Australian Army to adopt such a role because, the fact is, with a population of only 19 million, Australia is never going to be able to raise a continental army of a size to be significant in regional terms. A relatively small Australian Army, structured into, say, three landing brigades could, however be significant in regional terms. As has been pointed out, the so-called sea-air gap is, in fact, a sea-air-land gap. And a sea-mobile army in our archipelagic region could be an important deterrent to would-be military adventurers.

With Australia exercising local sea control and having a sea-mobile Army, Australia could adopt the sort of maritime strategy which Britain employed so successfully for over three centuries. It was this type of strategy which led to such comments as "he that commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much and as little of the war as he will" and, "there are 50,000 men killed (in wars) in Europe this year, and not one Englishman".

As to Australia's ability to participate in coalition military operations, a sea-mobile Army with its vehicles, tanks and aircraft embarked, could be maintained in security off-shore while taking part in operations inland as necessary. And, if, for any reason, Australia's advice on the conduct of operations was disregarded Australia would have the option of withdrawing its forces at very short notice, rather than the six months it took to withdraw the 8000 Australian soldiers from Vietnam in 1972/3.

To implement the seapower missions of sea control and power projection it would be necessary to get back into the naval aviation business with some form of aircraft carrier flying STOVL fighters such as Sea Harriers/AV8B or the Joint Strike Fighter (STOVL version). As well, it would be wise to provide some form of carrier-borne AEW aircraft.

Of course there are those who will say that we cannot afford aircraft carriers. This is nonsense. If we develop a proper strategic plan for Australian force development it would show that the capital costs of, say, three support carriers (CVS), and their aircraft would amount to less than 2% of the probable outlay on Defence over twenty years. If our financial planning cannot cope with such a modest amount then it would seem that we should get out of the Defence business altogether.

The resumption of serious naval aviation would be bound to raise objections from some senior public servants in Defence who have a sort of Trade Union approach to the 'right' of the Air Force to do all the military flying, and the Air Force with its Trenchard doctrine of 'the unity of the Air'. If it does present a problem then let us invite the Air Force to fly the aircraft if they want to, though a number of naval aviators should be allowed to fly in order to develop some senior naval officers with enough background in military aviation to command carriers and task forces incorporating carriers. It is a kind of circular argument to stop naval officers from flying and then accusing the Navy of not having the expertise to command forces including military aircraft.

I am willing to go to Canberra to appear before the Committee if it wishes to question me directly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Robertson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alan Robertson
Commodore RAN (Rtd)