



## **Submission No 17**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Maritime Strategy**

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**THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON  
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SUBMISSION BY  
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**AUSTRALIA'S MARITIME STRATEGY**

Notwithstanding the latter day prominence of terrorism and the now global extent of that form of warfare, the security of Australia remains the prime purpose of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Whilst the term Homeland Security is now in common use it refers essentially to a new dimension in security measures necessary to counter the heightened threat of transnational terrorism. As recently affirmed by the minister for Defence it does not alter the policy announced in Defence 2000 that "the primary role of the ADF is to maintain the capability to defend Australian territory from credible attack without relying on help from the combat forces of any other nation."

When considering this extant and authoritative proclamation of defence policy it is well to appreciate the distances involved in this commitment. It stretches from Cocos Island in the Indian ocean to Norfolk Island in the Pacific and from the Equator to the Antarctic if we consider Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands critical to the defence of Australia. It would be rather simplistic to include only the sea/air gap between the Archipelago, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

The purpose of drawing attention to the vastness of the area is to highlight the difficulty of meeting this task for a nation of only twenty million people. Difficulty in providing the physical defence and in raising the revenue to develop an adequate force structure. When this is recognised several issues become immediately apparent. These include:

- a. The necessity to avoid operational concepts that are manpower intensive.
- b. The need for highly mobile forces.
- c. The need for major weapon systems to be multi role
- d. To the greatest possible extent to use firepower and accuracy to minimise the disadvantage of limited manpower.
- e. The need to seize the strategic initiative and exploit offensive capability rather than to exhaust our limited resources on reactive defen

As stated in the White Paper the ADF should have forces able to make a major contribution to the security of our immediate neighbourhood. In regard to this secondary but important mission, it should be noted that, the neighbours to our immediate north have adequate manpower. The best contribution Australia could

make would be sophisticated, state-of-the-art weapon systems providing capabilities not otherwise available or certainly not adequate, in the immediate neighbourhood. This would point to naval and air elements and, from Army, Special Forces (SAS) instructors, medical services, communications etc.

There remains a requirement to contribute to United Nations sponsored operations – peacekeeping, peacemaking or, with coalition forces, in more combative operations such as the war on terror. Whilst not intending to minimise the importance of such operations, the fact is that the nature of Australia's contribution would not be a matter of critical importance to the success of the campaign. The United States has the military power and resources to undertake the whole combat role if necessary. However, it is not in character for Australia to shirk what may be seen as a fair contribution to a global responsibility. Structured to carry out a maritime strategy for the defence of Australia there would be a range of options available to Government to make a useful contribution.

Having commented in general terms on the several tasks the Government has specified for the ADF it is now necessary to be more specific in responding to the terms of reference set by the Committee.

Operations to assist our immediate neighbours in resisting armed aggression would not be dissimilar in nature, but reduced in scope, to those required for the defence of Australia. In the former case forces would have to be kept in reserve to meet any direct operation against mainland Australia or our off-shore territories. In both cases the primary call would be on naval and air elements. With tension or open warfare in the immediate vicinity it would be imprudent to deploy major Army formations away from the defence of the northern bases.

The first call on our maritime forces would be for surveillance of the operational area, essentially within the sea/air gap but extending to Cocos and Christmas Islands. Given the very substantial surveillance capability of the two P-3C squadrons the main effort would fall to those units. Naval elements, mainly frigates and submarines and, in shore, Patrol Boats would play an important role - probably specialised niche operations. For example, there may well be a task to guard Lombok and Sunda Strait and possibly, providing air defence for designated areas such as Cocos Island

However, when the question of practical capability is examined, the very significant deficiencies of the ADF emerge. Whilst the number of P-3C aircraft could probably provide surveillance of some three million square miles of ocean per day, the very limited manning of the two squadrons would provide only some 30% of that capability. The RAN does not have a surface ship that could go in harms way with adequate defence systems. Given the timescale planned for the air defence destroyers to come into service this state of affairs is likely to prevail for a decade or more. It should also be realised that the ability to raise the manning level of RAAF

squadrons, based on the present totally inadequate RAAF Reserve, would be a matter of several years.

Clearly, the air defence of operating air bases in Australia or foreign bases if deployed overseas, would depend in the first place on effective early warning. As stated earlier in this paper that capability is not available and will not be available within the ADF until JORN is completed and until the AEW&C aircraft are in service and operational - about 2005. Even then the 4 aircraft currently planned could not meet the requirement for a defence of Australia situation. They could provide a limited capability at one or two bases and would be important if fighter aircraft were deployed to distant bases such as Butterworth or Cocos Island. The one positive factor of the tactical fighter force is that the F/A-18 aircraft, fitted with modern missiles will have a satisfactory capability against the opposition likely to be encountered in our region, over this decade and provided they have the support of AEW&C aircraft. The F-111C retains the capability to carry out effective anti shipping and land strike operations at long range. Again this is contingent upon the appropriate anti shipping and stand-off weapons being available. There remains some deficiencies in electronic warfare capability which would increase vulnerability in strike operations. In the Australian area of operations this could be an acceptable operational risk. Once again the capacity of the fighter and strike forces is very severely limited by manpower, particularly aircrew. The answer to this deficiency lies in an efficient reserve force. However a reserve of aircrew is of limited use if they do not receive a certain minimum of flying hours on a monthly basis. Whilst this would entail significant cost it could be a cost effective way of structuring a capable operational force.

In reality, it has never been established by a properly conducted study exactly what this Reserve flying requirement should be. It would depend on the type of aircraft and the role to be undertaken. Taking the F-111 as an example there is some evidence to support the contention that a trained F-111 pilot leaving the service, could be kept within one month's intensive flying, from being operational if he were to receive 50 hours flying per year. There would seem to be a requirement to establish a realistic assessment of the yearly training needs of both aircrew and technical personnel and then to establish an affordable and viable Air Force Reserve so that the optimum use could be made of the operational fleet when required.

Whilst not adequate for extended operations in the defence of Australia or even for the multitude of non warlike tasks now being accepted by Government, the Army Reserve provides a better basis for contingencies than either the Navy Reserve or the Air Force Reserve.

In regard to defence intelligence Australia does have some very efficient intelligence gathering capability. This serves the nation well particularly in gaining entrée to allied intelligence sharing arrangements. Given our long standing alliances with the United States and Great Britain it is unlikely that Australia would be deficient in intelligence knowledge even if those allies were not directly involved.

An effective Command and control system is essential to the successful prosecution of military operations. It is questionable that the command and control arrangements set down for the ADF provide for an efficient, direct and unambiguous line of command to and from Chief of the Defence Force to the operational Commander(s) in the field. Two aspects in particular bear serious consideration.

Until the relatively minor operation in East Timor, neither the Australian military forces nor the Australian Government had ever played a major part in determining the strategy to be pursued in an international military operation. Nor had Australia ever exercised command of an international force engaged in military operations. Lacking such experience it is surprising that the Australian command arrangements differ so fundamentally from those adopted by our two major allies. Whereas in Australia the CDF has command of the whole Australian Defence Force, the equivalent position in the United States and the United Kingdom has no command authority whatsoever. Notwithstanding the absence of command authority there is no doubt that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of Defence Staff are the principal and most influential military officers of their countries. Conferring command authority over the total military forces of the nation poses risks and indeed, removes what might be regarded as appropriate checks and balances retained in the US and UK. While it might be expected that the CDF would bring to the Minister the corporate views of the Chiefs of Staff or to convey dissenting views, the CDF has no actual requirement to even consult the Chiefs on strategic or operational matters if he chooses not to do so. Whilst it may be put forward in argument that no CDF would act so arrogantly, the command arrangements of a democratic nation should not depend on the whims of an individual. In any case the Minister should be given the best advice available - this surely would come from the joint chiefs, conveyed by the CDF. The last review of the ADF, Chaired by Malcolm McIntosh, went even further and removed the right of Service Chiefs of Staff to go direct to the Minister on a matter of single service concern - a further dilution of balance.

The relative positions of the Head Strategic Command and the Commander, Australian Theatre can present a degree of overlap that is undesirable and which could lead to an adversarial attitudes between Headquarters ADF and Headquarters Australian Theatre. The latter headquarters is charged with the responsibility of commanding and providing support to operations as directed by the CDF. However it is evident from operations undertaken to date that the Head of Strategic command, working directly to the CDF, will insist on talking to the commander in the field, expressing CDF's views and eliciting information directly from the commander, thus bypassing the Command Headquarters responsible for the operation. Furthermore the CDF has the authority, if he so wishes, to direct the field commander on events at the operational level. Those familiar with Desert Storm will be aware that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell did not have the authority to command Schwarzkopf to take any particular

course of action, or to take action before he was ready to do so. These are important aspects of the ADF command arrangements that entail risk. There is good reason to review such arrangements before the nation becomes involved in difficult or complicated operations of war. It could well be that such a review would conclude that the concept of a major headquarters, such as HQ Australian Theatre is unwarranted for such a small defence force as the ADF. Certainly that small force contains a multitude of Headquarters.

The maritime strategy and the force structure it comprises fits the ADF ideally to participate in combined, multi-national regional and global, coalition military operations. Ideal because it would provide Government with a range of options to suit the military and political situation obtaining at the time

Integrating Australia's maritime strategy with other elements of national power is facilitated by the wide range of options offered by the force structure of the former. These range from intelligence gathering, protection of major power resources (off-shore oil & gas installations) diplomacy (ship visits) trade and protection of trade routes, environmental protection, protection of fishing zones.

The impact of the evolving strategic environment on Australia's maritime strategy is largely to confirm and to endorse it as appropriate to Australia's defence needs. In essence, little has changed in the last six decades. This is not surprising seeing that the geographic situation has not changed and that, from a defence point of view, there has been no significant change in the demographic situation or distribution of the population. To illustrate this point, appended to this submission is a copy of an address given to the National Press Club seventeen years ago. The underlying logic of structuring the defence force was essentially the same as espoused today. The new dimension that has emerged as a major threat is terrorism. This will require a significant upgrading of resources applying to homeland security. For the most part this requires non-military organisations such as ASIO, ASIS, DSD, State and Federal police, and other Departments of State. Nevertheless, there will be a range of activities calling for increased defence effort - border protection, special forces, and generally, a heightened state of readiness. Perhaps a major requirement is to promote the understanding and alertness of the community to the threat and the need for counter measures. There may be a need for the ADF to provide anti terrorist response at short notice across the nation which would call for an increase in the number and locations of Tactical Response Groups. Army may consider Reserve units for this purpose although it might be expected that such units would need more training time than other reservists.

Industry support is essential to the maintenance of the highly technical elements of a force structured for a maritime strategy. Much of the equipment will be at or near state-of-the-art level and will require industries with a skilled workforce equipped to provide this support. The ADF will also require efficient logistic support which, in the main will be outsourced to industry. Clearly, as the level and tempo of operational involvement of the ADF increases the greater will be the reliance on

Australian industry. Industry must be regarded and treated as an essential element of the defence equation.

A major difficulty that has inhibited the development of the full potential of Australian industry is the absence of any attempt at rationalisation. Every major defence company engages in expensive bidding for work across the wide range of ADF equipment requirements, for maintenance and for integration of systems and sub-systems. Ironically, there has been more written and more said by politicians on the rationalisation of Australian industry than on any other aspect of defence. Regrettably none of this has been converted into measures to bring about rationalisation or other efficiencies. The plethora of committees set up have been little more than talk fests.

Putting the need in the most simplistic terms, significant improvement in both cost and capability could be achieved if Government were to designate companies to be the prime contractors for specific industrial tasks on which they could concentrate resources and expertise. The fear that such pre-ordained selection would encourage companies to escalate costs could be overcome by Government, perhaps acting through the DMO, having the authority to oversee cost margins and to closely examine industry structure and overheads. This is a task carried out by the defence organisation in the United States. On the present basis of wide spread bidding, work is generally spread too thinly for any company to offer best practice in regard to efficiency and cost. It is extraordinary that no positive steps have been taken to resolve this situation in the last fifty years.

The views expressed in this submission are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Constituent Bodies of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia