

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE - DEFENCE SUB-COMMITTEE

THE ROLE OF MARITIME STRATEGY IN AUSTRALIA'S DEFENCE POLICY

Introduction

This submission to the inquiry into the role of maritime strategy in Australia's defence policy is from the Centre for Maritime Policy (CMP) at the University of Wollongong. The submission discusses principles of maritime strategy and then applies these to Australia's contemporary circumstances. It concentrates mainly on the following points in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry:

- Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) capability to apply the maritime strategy outlined in Defence 2000 in the current strategic environment;
- integration of maritime strategy with the other elements of Australian national power to achieve specified national strategic interests and objectives; and
- impact of the evolving strategic environment on Australia's maritime strategy.

Maritime Strategy

Maritime strategy concerns the ability to use the maritime environment to achieve strategic goals.¹ This may be in a purely military sense to achieve military strategic objectives, or maritime strategy may also be seen in a broader national context as the means of gaining economic, political and strategic objectives through use of the maritime environment and *maritime power*. Largely because we attach importance to the integration of maritime strategy with other elements of national power, we prefer the broader interpretation of maritime strategy, although in this submission, we focus on the implications for the ADO.

Maritime power includes national maritime interests, marine industry and relevant military and naval capabilities. It provides an ability to use *maritime influence* to build a favourable strategic environment in neighbouring regions. It is similar to the notion of *sea power* although *sea power* is often equated narrowly with *naval power*. *Naval power* or *sea power* is a subset of *maritime power*, which also includes commercial maritime interests: merchant shipping, seaborne trade, fishing interests, size of resources zones, shipbuilding capacity and so on. *Naval power* or *sea power* includes surface ships, submarines, maritime aircraft and army or marine units trained for amphibious warfare. An alternative view of these concepts is sometimes adopted in the United States with *sea power* as the core concept. It is comprised of two elements: *naval power* exercised by the United States Navy (USN) and *maritime power* demonstrated by civil maritime elements, including the United States Coast Guard (USCG).

¹ The British maritime strategist, Eric Grove, has defined *maritime strategy* as "the art of directing maritime assets (i.e. those that operate on, over, or under the sea) to achieve the required political objectives". Eric Grove, *The Future of Sea Power*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1990, p.11.

The importance of *maritime strategy* and *maritime power* to Australia is underpinned by our geography, the wide expanse of surrounding ocean and the importance and range of our national maritime interests. Geography determines the significance of different national interests, the nature of military strategy and the priority to be given to maritime elements of military power². An aim of geopolitics "is to emphasise that political predominance is a question not just of having power in the sense of human or material resources, but also of the geographical context within which that power is exercised"³. Our maritime strategy must fully comprehend the significance of Australia's geo-strategic environment.

Strategic Geography

The most common map of the world is the Mercator projection based on the Greenwich meridian. The large landmasses of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas are the main features of this map. The largest of the world's oceans, the Pacific Ocean, is split in two. The Western Pacific just appears on the right-hand of the map with little more of the Eastern Pacific on the left-hand. This map provides a *continental* view of the world. An alternative global map is the one based on the meridian of 180 degrees. This gives a very different perspective with the full extent of the world's oceans as the dominant feature. This is *maritime* view of the world with Australia at its center.

This strategic geography establishes several factors of significance to Australia's maritime strategy. The first is the great reliance of our region on sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Unlike in Europe and North America, very little international trade is carried in Asia-Pacific by road or rail, and seaborne trade has been the "engine" of regional economic growth. The safety and security of this trade is a vital common interest of all regional countries. Many regional countries also have a critical dependence on the import of essential commodities, particularly energy, much of which originates from Australia.

The archipelagic chain ringing Australia from the Northwest to the East is another major feature of our strategic geography. Over half the world's shipping by tonnage and value now passes through the major shipping "choke point" to the Northwest of Australia between Singapore and Darwin. Key approach routes to Australia for military threats, drugs, illegal immigrants, terrorist activities and the spread of regional insecurity lie through the archipelagic chain. Australia's maritime strategy should recognize the importance of our being able to extend our *maritime power* and *influence* into this chain.

With this strategic geography and regional economic growth, it is not surprising that new major maritime powers have emerged in the Asia Pacific, notably Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea and increasingly China. Maritime issues such as law and order at sea, marine safety and resources management, as well as the security of seaborne trade, are key issues for the region. They figure prominently in regional dialogue and offer potential for regional confidence

² Colin S. Gray, "Seapower and Landpower" in Colin S. Gray and Roger W. Barnett (eds), *Seapower and Strategy*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1989, p.4.

³ Geoffrey Sloan and Colin S. Gray, "Why Geopolitics?" *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.22, No.2/3, June/September 1999, p.2.

building. Australia is well placed to play a leading role in these activities as a basic part of our regional relations. In effect, there is a *maritime bridge* into the region that is not only geographical but functional as well⁴.

Distance is a significant factor of Australia's own strategic geography. The continent of Australia stretches some 3,000 kilometres from South to North and about 3,800 kilometres from East to West. The coastline of Australia is estimated to be 35,877 kilometres in length⁵. Some of our island territories lie up to 4,000 kilometres offshore and the area of ocean over which Australia exercises jurisdiction is roughly one and a half times the size of the continental land mass of Australia. Some towns in northern Australia, including mining centres and resource ports, can only be effectively re-supplied by sea. Australia lays claim to about 30 per cent of the Antarctic continent and is understood to be in the process of activating offshore claims that could have significant enforcement implications.

Considerations for Maritime Strategy

Sea Control

Maritime strategic thinking has several key themes. The first is that, in a period of conflict or tension, some degree of control of the sea is essential either because of its direct strategic importance or because of the access or protection provided by sea control. This includes *denying* the use of the sea to the enemy (e.g. to prevent an attack from the sea) and *asserting* the ability to make use of the sea for one's own purposes⁶. This ability might be required to conduct maritime operations in support of land forces or to protect shipping. *Sea assertion* is the more subtle and flexible facet of maritime strategy due largely to the consideration that it is the "impossibility of establishing a line of defence *across* the sea that constitutes the fundamental peculiarity of naval warfare, and confronts a commander at sea with problems and perplexities unknown to his colleague on the land."⁷ Opposing maritime forces may operate on or over the same water space with each having a *moving zone of sea control* that shifts from day to day, or even hour to hour, depending on the location of particular units (e.g. a naval task force or a convoy). This consideration is particularly important with the protection of shipping. Ships are defended rather than SLOCs across the sea.

There is often a tendency to focus on *sea denial* with sovereignty being protected by "dug in" defences in the same way as land territory is held. To some extent, this is evident in the concept of maritime strategy espoused in the White Paper *Defence 2000*. The White Paper states that "The key to defending Australia is to control the air and sea approaches to our continent, so as to

⁴ This relationship including the maritime strategic implications is explored extensively in papers included in Sam Bateman and Dick Sherwood (eds), *Australia's Maritime Bridge into Asia*, Allen & Unwin, 1995.

⁵ Geoscience Australia webpage <http://www.auslig.gov.au/facts/dimensions/coastlin.htm>

⁶ Roskill provides a classical statement: 'The function of maritime power is to win and keep control of the sea for one's own use, and to deny such control to one's adversaries'. Captain S.W. Roskill, *The Strategy of Sea Power*, Aylesbury, John Goodchild Publishers, 1986, p.15.

⁷ H.Rosinski, "Mahan and World War II" in Mitchell B. Simpson (ed), *The Development in Naval Thought: Essays by Herbert Rosinski*, Newport R.I., Naval War College Press, 1977, p.23.

deny them to hostile ships and aircraft, and provide maximum freedom of action for our own forces".⁸ It equates this principle with a maritime strategy but it is rather incomplete. Maritime strategy should go beyond the simple defence of the maritime approaches. The later acknowledgment in the White Paper that "the ability to operate freely in our surrounding oceans, and deny them to others is critical to the defence of Australia, and to our capacity to contribute effectively to the security of our immediate neighbourhood" gets more to the point⁹. The White Paper acknowledges that "our armed forces need to be able to do more than simply defend our coastline"¹⁰ but the implications and means of "doing more" are not evident in the document.

Projection of Power and Influence

Sea control is principally required to facilitate the application of maritime power against the land. This projection of power might include *naval presence* missions, amphibious operations and sea-based strike, including by cruise missiles such as Tomahawk. This idea underpins much of contemporary United States and United Kingdom maritime doctrine with the emphasis on littoral operations and expeditionary forces. It is also highly relevant to Australia's maritime strategy with our interests, particularly in the Pacific.

Australia's maritime strategy needs to give consideration to elements such as *reach* and *sustainability*, as well as the full range of Australia's maritime interests, including seaborne trade, the security of offshore territories and resources, and the more intangible consideration identified in *Defence 2000* of "maritime security in our wider region"¹¹. The White Paper acknowledges the utility of air and naval capabilities in this context¹² but then says little more about how we might contribute and the constraints that might be encountered in basing air and land forces overseas. Flexible sea-based capabilities are preferable due to their marked utility for operating within the region just as they have for operations elsewhere around Australia and our offshore territories. Drawing no doubt on the experience of war in Afghanistan, the latest version of United States maritime strategy, *Sea Power 21*, includes "Sea Basing" as one of its cornerstones. This means "transforming shore-based capabilities to sea-based systems whenever practical, and improving the reach, persistence, and sustainability of systems that are already afloat".¹³

Economic Issues

A primary purpose of maritime operations and *maritime strategy* is often economic rather than directly military. Key strategic objectives are to protect one's own economic vulnerabilities, or to attack those of an adversary. Because of the dependence of many countries on the sea both as a natural barrier to attack or as the medium for trade and communications, these objectives

⁸ White Paper, *Defence 2000*, para. 6.6.

⁹ *ibid.*, para. 8.51.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, para. 4.2.

¹¹ *ibid.*, para. 8.53.

¹² *ibid.*, para. 6.12.

¹³ Admiral Vern Clark USN, "Sea Power 21 – Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities", U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, October 2002, p.37.

encompass the protection of seaborne trade and the interdiction of an adversary SLOCs. Australia's maritime strategy needs to comprehend the significance of regional SLOCs and the possible need to protect Australia's strategic shipping or to interdict the adversary's. Australia's strategic shipping would certainly including coastal tankers with petroleum products moving around the Australian coast, larger tankers bringing in particular types of oils in which Australia is not self-sufficient, and military cargoes.

Integration with Oceans Policy

Although maritime strategy should be congruent with other elements of national policy, *Defence 2000* makes no reference to *Australia's Oceans Policy*¹⁴ that provides a policy framework for considering maritime issues in Australia. The objective of *Australia's Oceans Policy* is to provide a strategic framework for the planning, management and ecologically sustainable development of Australia's marine industries while ensuring the conservation of the marine environment and protecting Australia's sovereignty and sovereign rights in offshore areas. There are significant strategic implications of national oceans policy, particularly with regard to sovereignty protection and regional relations¹⁵. *Australia's Oceans Policy* notes that:

*Oceans define Australia's geography and are critical to our security, with our dependence on maritime trade and the maintenance of freedom of movement for all commercial shipping. Oceans link us with our trading partners, provide resources and wealth and offer a defence against possible aggression.*¹⁶

Australia's Oceans Policy is also significant for maritime strategy because it proposes a leadership role for Australia in helping to ensure that international ocean management regimes are effectively implemented in the oceans around Australia. The policy states that:

*Australia should provide leadership regionally and internationally in the management of our oceans, recognising the possibility that national activities may have effects on the marine jurisdictions of neighbouring countries.*¹⁷

And that:

*Oceans affairs are rightly a central part of our broader political and strategic relations in the regions in which our neighbours have extensive maritime interests, including exclusive economic zones. They also have an urgent need to build their capacity to manage these areas.*¹⁸

¹⁴ Senator Robert Hill, The Federal Minister for the Environment released *Australia's Oceans Policy* in December 1998. Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia's Oceans Policy*, Vols.1 and 2, Canberra, Environment Australia, 1998.

¹⁵ Sam Bateman and Dick Sherwood (eds), *Oceans Management Policy: The Strategic Dimension*, Wollongong Papers on Maritime Policy No.1, 1994.

¹⁶ *Australia's Oceans Policy*, Vol.2, p.37.

¹⁷ *Australia's Oceans Policy*, Vol.1, Appendix 2 – Policy Guidance for Oceans Planning and Management, p.40.

¹⁸ *Australia's Oceans Policy*, Vol.2, p.39.

These quotes from *Australia's Oceans Policy* suggest that our maritime strategy should specifically recognize the significance of maritime interests in the region and the potential for Australia both to play a leadership role, particularly in the South Pacific, and to assist regional countries with building their capacity to manage their own maritime interests. In this way, Australia will make a major contribution to regional stability and help prevent threats arising.

The Pacific Patrol Boat Program is an excellent example of what Australia can achieve with regional leadership and capacity building. However, there is scope for the approach to be taken further. The current program of occasional surveillance flights in the South Pacific by the RAAF, RNZAF, US Coast Guard and French military is a less than adequate response to the needs of Pacific island countries and the region generally for aerial surveillance. While P3C aircraft are an expensive option for maritime surveillance, we could explore the opportunity for Australia, perhaps in cooperation with New Zealand, to establish a regional air surveillance unit, possibly using Dash-8 aircraft similar to those operated under contract to Coastwatch. Similarly a regional "Oceanguard" could be considered using vessels with better seakeeping and endurance than the existing Pacific Patrol Boats.

Our Capability to apply Maritime Strategy

Surveillance and Patrol

Australia requires a broad range of capabilities (ships, submarines, aircraft, sea-based infantry, systems, institutional arrangements and procedures) to discharge maritime strategy effectively. These are not only capabilities within the ADO. A more holistic approach is required to national maritime requirements, particularly for surveillance, patrol and enforcement. We could think of a "national fleet" for these tasks. As well as RAN vessels and patrol boats belonging to the Marine Unit of the Australian Customs Service (ACS), there are also smaller fleets of patrol boats belonging to the Water Police, Fisheries and/or Transportation agencies of the separate States and Territories. The capabilities and organization of these fleets vary from State to State. This is not necessarily bad provided there is no duplication of resources, and responsibilities are clear with established procedures and protocols for coordination and cooperation.

Under current arrangements, "gaps" occur in the national capability simply because no one agency feels that it has the responsibility to fill it. Last year's experience with maritime border protection confirmed the major gap in *national* capabilities between RAN frigates on the one hand and patrol boats (RAN or ACS) on the other. We lack a capability to sustain maritime patrols over the extended distances required by maritime strategy and for tasks that do not require a frigate. Currently this is off Cocos/Christmas Islands, other northern areas and in the Southern Ocean, but perhaps it might be elsewhere in the future, including in Antarctic waters¹⁹. The vessel that would fill this gap would also have a capability for cooperative surveillance and enforcement in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The problem is that no agency wants to argue the case for such a vessel. The

¹⁹ Sam Bateman and Donald R. Rothwell (eds), *Southern Ocean Fishing: Policy Challenges for Australia*, Wollongong Papers on Maritime Policy No. 7, 1998.

current Defence project Sea 1444 suggests that Defence is not going to fill this gap and such a vessel is well beyond the aspirations of the ACS.

Organic Aviation

Our ability to sustain maritime operations (and military operations generally) at a long distance from main bases on the mainland establishes the importance of organic naval aviation assets in the ADO. At a lower level of capability, our ships undertaking patrol duties in remote areas require organic helicopters. At higher levels of capability, the limitations of land-based aircraft mean that desirably we should also have fixed-wing aircraft afloat, particularly for land strike and the close support of land operations. We understand that this was an important potential limitation on operations in East Timor.

Institutional Arrangements

We also believe that there is an institutional problem with the ability of the present ADO to apply maritime strategy. The present system of strategic development and operational command and control is a joint one and officers trained in one military environment (air, land or sea) can find themselves in command of operations in another environment. The main operational headquarters of the ADF, the Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQAST), is at present in Sydney but is to be relocated to outside of Queanbeyan. Thus the RAN's operational commander who has traditionally been based at Maritime Headquarters (previously Fleet Headquarters) at Garden Island in Sydney may be required in future to spend long periods away from the sea and his ships.

The maritime environment is extremely complex and the development and application of maritime strategy require people with appropriate skills and knowledge of that environment. We have taken "jointery" much further in the ADO than in the United States or United Kingdom and in so doing, we may have lost some of the necessary maritime culture and close connections between Defence and the civil maritime community. We suggest that the ADO direction that there should no single service submissions to this inquiry is indicative of the institutional limitation that may be encountered with developing and applying maritime strategy in Australia.

Impact of Evolving Strategic Environment

The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) extended coastal State jurisdiction, particularly through the introduction of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). While coastal States have greater rights in their littoral waters under UNCLOS, they also have increased responsibilities to manage marine living resources, maintain safety, protect the marine environment, and generally maintain good order in their offshore zones²⁰. Greater use of the sea, increased illegal activity at sea and concern for the marine environment have increased the number of international regimes that are applicable and made the business of maritime policing

²⁰ Strategic issues associated with the rights and responsibilities of coastal States in their offshore areas are discussed in several papers in Martin Tsamenyi and Max Herriman (eds), *Rights and Responsibilities in the Maritime Environment: National and International Dilemmas*, Wollongong Papers on Maritime Policy No.5, 1996.

more complex. Maritime terrorism, including possible threats to ships, ports, offshore installations, undersea cables and pipelines, has added to the complexity of maritime policing. This is now a highly professional activity in its own right requiring people with the necessary training, skills and experience.

More and more distance is opening up between the requirements of naval war fighting and those of maritime policing. Navies and coast guards are “driven by the beats of different drummers”.²¹ Navies are concerned with high technology weapon systems and are attracted to larger vessels that can carry more weapons and sensors and are less vulnerable. Even smaller navies such as those of Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei are building larger vessels. Maritime strategists advise that due primarily to the benefits of networking, “big is beautiful” and smaller numbers of larger vessels have advantages over larger numbers of smaller vessels²². This does not apply to patrol and enforcement tasks where numbers are still important.

Part of this conundrum is associated with the changing concepts of security. Navies and warships are designed to fight wars and combat military threats while coast guards and their patrol vessels are primarily concerned with social, resources and environmental threats to national well-being and a comprehensive view of security. These patrol vessels will potentially play the leading role in the fight against terrorism rather than conventional warships with their expensive systems. Apart from the contribution of surveillance and intelligence information, the ADO remains focused on conventional security against military threats while our approach to comprehensive security is rather *ad hoc*. Our maritime strategy should serve both comprehensive and conventional security.

Summary

Australia’s maritime strategy should comprehend:

- the significance of our geo-strategic environment;
- that the safety and security of seaborne trade is a vital common interest of Australia and our regional neighbours;
- the need for the ability to extend maritime power and influence into the archipelagic chain and the South Pacific;
- the need for the capability to exercise sea control on a limited basis in these areas;
- the importance of maritime issues in Asia-Pacific region and the potential for regional confidence-building;
- the links between maritime strategy and national oceans policy;
- a lead role for Australia in relevant areas of regional maritime affairs; and
- the importance of reach and sustainability in our maritime operations that can only be provided by flexible sea-based capabilities.

²¹ Colin S.Gray, “The Coast Guard and Navy – It’s time for a “National Fleet””, *Naval War College Review*, Summer 2001, Vol.LIV, No.3, p. 116.

²² Norman Friedman, *Seapower as Strategy – Navies and National Interests*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2001, p.242.

Our ability to apply maritime strategy is limited with regard to:

- our capabilities for maritime patrol and enforcement over extended distances;
- the capabilities to exercise sea control and sustain military operations over the extended distances that might be involved in remote areas of Australia, our offshore territories, the archipelagic chain and the Pacific; and
- the lack of a maritime culture in the ADO, which remains focused on purely military operations.

The evolving strategic environment, particularly the terrorist threat, is opening up gaps between the requirements of naval war fighting and those of maritime patrol and enforcement. If the ADO is to fully contribute to the latter task then it must be properly resourced and organized to fulfill the role rather than regarding it as a distraction from its core military role.

Conclusion

This inquiry provides a timely opportunity to focus on the role of maritime strategy in Australia's defence policy. Our evolving strategic environment makes maritime strategy even more important to Australia. The significance of this strategy is dictated by our geography, our extensive maritime interests and an appreciation of the capabilities required by the ADO to help build a more secure region that will prevent threats arising to Australia.

Who prepared this submission

The following CMP staff prepared this submission:

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Fisheries Agency in Honiara as specialist legal adviser on the introduction of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) in the South Pacific. More recently, he has conducted extensive consulting work for Environment Australia and the National Oceans Office on the development of a regional oceans policy for the Pacific Ocean and the implementation of Australia's Oceans Policy.

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