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Australia's 2009 Defense White Paper: A Maritime Focus for Uncertain Times

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Australia's 2009 Defense White Paper: A Maritime Focus for Uncertain Times

Abstract

Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century represents Canberra's first concerted attempt to address the security challenges posed by a rising China and regional great-power dynamics. It presents a sober view of the future and an indication of Australia's determination to prepare for whatever that future may bring.

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AUSTRALIA'S 2009 DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

A Maritime Focus for Uncertain Times

Jack McCaffrie and Chris Rahman

As a significant medium power in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia inescapably is a participant in the most politically, economically, and strategically dynamic part of the world. The region is a vast and politically complex area, one that is increasingly prosperous, confident, volatile, and potentially dangerous in almost equal parts. Situated at the nexus of the Pacific and Indian oceans, Australia must share in both the opportunities and challenges thrown up by these two great maritime stages for geopolitical interaction.

As a maritime trading state highly dependent upon secure sea lines of communication stretching from the Middle East to North America, Australia is tied comprehensively and profitably to Asia's economic success. Yet Australia must also suffer the less positive implications of such dynamism, including growing

strategic competition among the region's major powers, an increasing competition for resources, active Islamist terrorist threats, unpredictable and unsatisfied states in combination with the related danger of weapons of mass destruction and missile proliferation, and the consequences of failing or troubled states unable to cope with political, economic, environmental, or demographic stresses.

The impact of such factors has been especially evident for the Australian Defence Force (ADF), which over the past decade has been operating at a constantly high tempo in response to strategic crises, disintegrating societies, or grave natural disasters—from East

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Timor to the Persian Gulf and the Solomon Islands, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sumatra, and Pakistan. Indeed, there have been many other, lesser ADF deployments over that time as well, along with the added importance of border security in the post-9/11 world.

THE 2009 WHITE PAPER IN BRIEF

Yet Australia's official defense policy and long-term planning to shape the ADF for the looming challenges in the decades ahead had, until this year, not changed for nine years. This situation was rectified in May 2009 with the release of a new defense white paper, after a prolonged gestation period. It is a significant document, with important implications for Australia's status as a regional medium power, its ability to respond to future threats and project influence in a fundamentally maritime region, and its future utility as a leading ally to the ultimate arbiter of regional order, the United States.

National Security and Defense Policy

Elected in November 2007 the Labor government, under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, issued its defense white paper *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*, to take account of the evolution in strategic circumstances and to differentiate its defense policy from that of the previous Liberal-National Coalition government. The paper was drafted by a team led by Mike Pezzullo, seconded from his position as Deputy Secretary Strategy in the Department of Defence. The writing process appears to have been more robust and inclusive than in previous such documents, with a notable use of war gaming, involvement of the individual services, and regular government oversight.¹

At the outset the white paper acknowledges the complexity of global affairs today and the consequent need to balance the demands on the ADF. These are generated by the need to be able to respond to interstate and intrastate conflict and the need to contribute to support operations against nonstate global forces. Essentially, the relatively small Australian Defence Force needs to be able to contribute significantly, even decisively, in operations ranging from humanitarian assistance to major interstate conflict.²

Thus the 2009 white paper aims for a balance between resources available for defense and desired strategic weight and reach.³ It highlights Australia's reliance on a continued U.S. willingness and capacity to provide stability in the Asia-Pacific and categorizes strategic risk as needing either a nondiscretionary response from Australia or allowing a more selective approach.⁴ Furthermore, the white paper establishes a strategic risk-based approach to defense planning, founded on the five-yearly production of white papers—each preceded by formal risk assessments and force structure reviews.⁵

The white paper's strategic outlook reflects Australia's continuing interest in seeing the United States retain global primacy but also notes the rise of both China and India as potential great powers, with particular emphasis on China's potential to challenge the United States economically.⁶ It further identifies the potential for violence or political instability in a range of countries from the Middle East to Northeast Asia and the probability that the United States will need greater support from allies and potential partners like Australia. Finally, there is recognition of "new security risks," including climate change (with its potential for major problems in the South Pacific) and the supply of energy, food, and water.

Notwithstanding the broad geographical reach of the outlook, the white paper geographically bounds Australia's main strategic interests: the defense of Australia and security in the immediate neighborhood—that is, Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and the South Pacific. This is based on the premise that Australia's capacity to influence events is greatest closer to home.⁷ The white paper does, however, confirm that Australia will deploy farther afield and continue to support U.S. efforts—but not unconditionally—in maintaining a rules-based global order.⁸ It reiterates the long-standing principle of defense self-reliance: Australia expects to meet most direct military threats without combat support from America but notes the significant advantage that accrues from access to U.S. intelligence and technology.⁹

Future Force Structure

Development of the white paper incorporated a force structure review, from which has emerged "Force 2030"—a future ADF optimized to deter and defeat attacks against Australia but capable of contributing to domestic security and emergency response as well as to regional stability and security.¹⁰ Force 2030 is expected to be more potent than the existing ADF, especially in all aspects of maritime warfare, air superiority, strike, and information operations. The planned improvements in maritime warfare capabilities are particularly significant. The intent is for the ADF to maintain a strategic capability edge in the region, by continuing to exploit and apply advanced technologies.¹¹

The ADF is expected to maintain a level of preparedness that will allow the government to respond to a broad range of contingencies. Among the specific government demands are the ability to establish and maintain sea control and air superiority in key places in the primary operational environment near region and the ability to project maritime and airpower beyond that if necessary.¹² Significantly, there is a stated need to be able to deploy and sustain a brigade group and, possibly simultaneously, an additional battalion group in a different location—both potentially for prolonged periods.¹³

Complicating Issues

Concluding the white paper is a brief exposition of the financial plan underpinning the force structure and other initiatives. There is no cost assessment for any individual initiative, simply commitments to funding levels to the year 2030: 3 percent real growth in the defense budget to 2017/18, 2.2 percent real growth from 2018/19 to 2030, and 2.5 percent fixed indexation to the defense budget from 2009/10 to 2030.¹⁴ The government has also stated that the planned force structure depends on the success of the A\$20 billion Defence Strategic Reform Program, which is intended to generate internal savings for reinvestment in capability over the next ten years. Emphasizing the importance of the Strategic Reform Program, the funding statement also points out that any funding shortfalls in the white paper plan will be found from within Defence.¹⁵

While the white paper promises much for the planned force, recent history is sobering. For example, the 1987 white paper indicated that the surface combatant force would be expanded to sixteen or seventeen ships.¹⁶ It remains at twelve. The 1987 white paper also acknowledged the need to allocate 2.6 to 2.9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to support the proposed program.¹⁷ From that point, defense spending as a proportion of GDP began a gradual decline until it reached a low of 1.9 percent just a few years ago. In all likelihood, a different government will enact or otherwise amend this program, in economic and strategic circumstances that no one can predict today.

Attention will also focus on the personnel demands of the future force structure. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is still critically short of some categories of officers and sailors, with particular problems in the submarine arm and with technical personnel overall. The Navy can crew at best only three of the current six *Collins*-class submarines. There is a plan to recover the submarine arm personnel situation;¹⁸ general recruiting and retention figures are showing some promise. The RAN should be able to generate the necessary personnel numbers over the next fifteen years or more. Nevertheless, a nationwide skills shortage that was experienced before the onset of the global economic crisis may again put pressure on personnel numbers when the anticipated economic recovery appears.

STRATEGIC DRIVERS

The strategic thinking informing the 2009 white paper is perhaps the most controversial element of the document. In particular, the role of China has dominated not only the public debates leading to the white paper's formulation and release but also reportedly the internal debate within Australia's national security establishment.¹⁹ Indeed the influence of China upon Australia's threat perceptions has been a difficult issue for Canberra's policy makers for over a decade,

as the potentially destabilizing growth of Chinese material strength and its political assertiveness throughout Australia's wider region have been balanced by an increasingly entangling economic embrace, one that matches Australian resources to China's insatiable demand and deep pockets. Chinese resource hunger, especially for Australian iron ore, played a major role in feeding Australia's economic boom until the onset of the global economic crisis, and continuing Chinese demand may yet prove sufficient to cushion the Australian economy from the worst of the global recession. These economic ties have driven a strong pro-China business lobby and bolstered bipartisan political support for deepening ties at all levels of engagement, including the political and strategic.

In the realm of public defense policy, the potential threat to Australia and Australian interests from an authoritarian, strategically ambitious, and geopolitically unsatisfied China has largely been downplayed, even rejected, as a matter of underlying principle for the last decade. A perception that Australia might attempt to balance its international relationships by drawing closer to China was exacerbated by the election in November 2007 of a new government led by the Mandarin-speaking, self-professed Sinophile former diplomat Kevin Rudd. However, Rudd has increasingly demonstrated himself to be rather more realistic and circumspect about China and a stronger supporter of the global role of American power and of the centrality of the U.S. alliance for Australian security than initially appeared to be the case.²⁰

Indeed, in statements made in the months leading up to the final drafting of the white paper he seemed to be establishing the case for a revision of Australia's stated defense policy. At the heart of his concerns were the risks to regional stability caused by the economic and strategic dynamism of the region's major powers. In particular, he noted in a landmark speech in September 2008 to the Returned Services League National Congress in Townsville, northern Queensland, that the rise of China is "driving much of the change in our region."²¹

Prime Minister Rudd further declared that the ADF will need to develop in response to changes in the regional security environment that include the rapid modernization of military capabilities, especially "significant improvements in air combat capability, and naval forces—including greater numbers and more advanced submarines."²² The modernization of regional maritime capabilities in turn presents "challenges in terms of Australia's ability long term to defend its own sea lines of communication."²³ Although several states in the Asia-Pacific are developing such capabilities, including India, South Korea, and Singapore, it seems clear that in the context of the speech, both in the singling out of China and its reiteration of Australia's commitment to the Australia/New Zealand/United States alliance as the first-named of "three pillars" of Australia's strategic policy, China represented the prime strategic concern.²⁴

The general China theme in driving the risk assessments for the white paper was continued by Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, Chief of the Defence Force, who publicly raised concerns over China's January 2008 antisatellite missile test and Beijing's alleged reticence to explain the rationale underpinning aspects of its strategic modernization.²⁵ This concern with China's military transparency, commonly raised by many states, should be viewed in euphemistic rather than literal terms: it is the capabilities being developed and the strategic objectives driving their development—many of which are in fact quite evident—that worry China's neighbors and its strategic rivals.

Further, two other factors contribute to the elevation of China's position in Australia's threat perceptions. The first comprises China's increased espionage activities and cyber-warfare attacks against the Australian government, allegedly including electronic spying against Prime Minister Rudd himself, in addition to targeting over the past several years expatriate Chinese within Australia, Australian businesses, and sources of both commercial and strategic technologies. This has led to heightened counterespionage activities by both the Australian Security Intelligence Organization and the Defence Signals Directorate.²⁶ Cyber attacks are acknowledged in the white paper to be more substantive and serious than previously assumed, with significant resources now allocated to cyber-warfare needs, including the establishment of a Cyber Security Operations Centre.²⁷ Although there are multiple sources of cyber attacks, it is well understood that the primary threat currently is posed by China.

Second, the white paper reiterates a long-standing policy that no major power "that could challenge our control of the air and sea approaches to Australia" should be able to access bases in the immediate neighborhood "from which to project force against us."²⁸ Realistically, there is only one major power that potentially could pose such a problem. China already has military outposts deep in the South China Sea and allegedly maintains listening posts and has designs on basing privileges elsewhere in Southeast Asia and throughout the Indian Ocean region. Nevertheless, the prospect of China establishing actual bases anywhere in Southeast Asia, let alone in the immediate neighborhood, must remain only the slimmest of possibilities. However, Chinese political and economic influence itself is increasingly problematic, particularly in the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea, where Chinese money, directed toward gaining access to resources and countering Taiwan's diplomatic presence, has fostered corruption, instability, and wider challenges to good governance.

In nominal terms at least, the white paper is understandably diplomatic when it comes to the China factor. However, China is the only regional power to receive extended treatment in the document. The white paper continues the theme set by Rudd's Townsville speech, noting China's rapidly growing power

and its central role in the future stability of the region. It projects that China will become the “strongest Asian military power, by a considerable margin,” but notes that the “pace, scope and structure” of Chinese strategic developments, including expanding power projection capabilities, may “give its neighbors cause for concern.”²⁹

In some parts of the Australian defense establishment, the attitude toward China is believed to be even more hawkish, with a draft internal Australian Army document reportedly identifying Chinese, and potentially also Indian, military ambitions as destabilizing and a challenge to the dominant U.S. role throughout the Asia-Pacific: “Of particular concern is an increased likelihood for dispute escalation as a result of changes to the perceived balance of power with the real potential for a return to major combat operations involving states.”³⁰

This prospect is consistent with the white paper’s acknowledgment that “shows of force by rising powers” over both political disputes and resources are increasingly likely and that interstate war, including between the major powers, cannot be ruled out in the future. As a direct result of such pessimistic, yet understandable, judgments, the white paper’s assessment of the contribution of Defence to Australia’s national security concludes that “*the main role of the ADF should continue to be an ability to engage in conventional combat against other armed forces.*”³¹

In fact, taken in context, other leading regional states are treated in stark contrast to China. For example, Japan’s continued role as the leading regional alliance partner to the United States is viewed as a fundamental aspect of regional stability. The white paper further describes Japan as a “critical strategic partner” and notes the deepening practical defense relationship between the ADF and the Japan Self-Defense Forces, underpinned by the 2008 Memorandum on Defence Cooperation.³² The white paper likewise acknowledges Australia’s shared democratic values with India and the two nations’ common security interests and growing practical defense cooperation, especially in maritime security.³³ This latter point also reflects the emphasis given by the prime minister in 2008 to the importance of Australia’s sea-lanes and the need for enhanced naval power to protect those maritime interests.

Indeed, the white paper rather belatedly elevates the importance of the Indian Ocean in Australia’s strategic thinking, noting its growing importance as a trade route, especially for energy supplies. *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century* recognizes the consequent growth in strategic competition among major naval powers and states clearly that “the Indian Ocean will join the Pacific Ocean in terms of its centrality to our maritime strategy and defence planning”;³⁴ strategy and planning, in turn, will have to “contemplate

operational concepts for operating in the Indian Ocean region, including with regional partners with whom we share similar strategic interests.”³⁵

Canberra’s usual statement on the continued importance of Indonesia’s internal stability to Australian security is repeated, but unlike in the 2000 white paper, which was promulgated in the diplomatically fractious wake of the Australian-led intervention in East Timor, the new document is able to strike a more positive note on Indonesia’s internal political development.³⁶ Consequently, the document reflects the strengthening of bilateral political and security ties exemplified by the Lombok Treaty on Security Cooperation and the January 2009 Joint Statement on Defence Cooperation.³⁷

If Indonesia’s democratic development has been a positive factor in Australia’s security environment, instability elsewhere in the near neighborhood continues to create headaches for Canberra policy makers. In particular, ongoing problems in East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea will require continuing attention.³⁸ The white paper also reiterates Australia’s commitment to assist in stabilizing the security situation in Afghanistan.³⁹

Islamist terrorism, including possible terrorist attacks involving weapons of mass destruction, is still viewed as a significant threat, although the white paper is more sanguine regarding the threat within Southeast Asia than in earlier security policy documents—post-9/11 and soon after the October 2002 terrorist bombing on Bali—suggesting that while the threat will remain extant, the spread of regional extremist networks will be constrained by ongoing counterterrorism efforts.⁴⁰ Lastly, the white paper notes—rather too briefly, given the issue’s domestic prominence in recent years—the ADF’s role in border protection and support for domestic security and its unique capabilities for responding to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions throughout the region.⁴¹

A BALANCED MARITIME FORCE

Taking into account the strategic drivers, regional geography, and Prime Minister Rudd’s stated emphasis in 2008 on naval power, it should come as no surprise that by far the most significant force-structure initiatives in the white paper relate to maritime capability. Nevertheless, land and air forces do receive due attention. No major size or structural changes will be made to the Army, but it will receive new troop-lift helicopters, artillery, and deployable protected vehicles;⁴² it will receive as well “enhanced communications, networking and battle management systems.”⁴³ Combined with the previously announced Abrams main battle tanks, C-17 airlifters, and big-deck amphibious ships (LHDs), these force-structure improvements will enable the ADF to deploy and sustain a substantial combat force in the future.

Air combat capability will be updated with the announced purchase of up to a hundred F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) aircraft in the next decade. While the Air Force's long-range strike capacity will be reduced with the 2010 withdrawal from service of the F-111, the capability gap will be filled to an extent by the previously approved purchase of twenty-four F/A-18F aircraft, twelve of which will be wired for conversion to EA-18G electronic attack configuration, should that be required at a later date.⁴⁴ Airlift capacity is to be further increased with an additional two C-130J and up to ten light tactical transport aircraft.

Almost certainly the most far-reaching force-structure decision is the commitment to long-range land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs), all of which will be sea based: on the already approved, Aegis-equipped air warfare destroyers, the new (*Anzac*-class replacement) frigates, and the next generation of submarines.⁴⁵ This represents a dramatic shift and will give the naval surface force, and the ADF jointly, an offensive role and capacity beyond anything previously imagined. It will also add more flexibility to the submarine's existing roles and will provide a range of strike options to any operational commander.

Although the introduction of LACMs may draw some criticism for introducing a new capability into the region (assuming that the missiles will be of up to 2,500-kilometer range, and thus presumably the Tomahawk), it is merely a different way of achieving the capability that will be lost with the retirement of the F-111 strike aircraft.⁴⁶ It is also consistent with the strategy enunciated in the 2000 white paper that "we would . . . seek to attack hostile forces as far from our shores as possible, including in their home bases, forward operating bases and in transit."⁴⁷ Unlike that document and its intellectual predecessor of 1987, however, the 2009 document actually provides for the force structure to accomplish those missions.

The decision to double the submarine force to at least twelve boats is almost as significant.⁴⁸ The new submarines will be conventionally powered and locally built, and they will have greater range and capability than the *Collins* class. They will, therefore, almost certainly be the largest conventionally powered submarines in service and will be a fresh design. The technical and personnel problems that have dogged the *Collins* class from introduction into service will ensure that the new submarine project receives unprecedented scrutiny during development. The close U.S.-Australian collaboration in undersea warfare is expected to be central to the development and sustainability of the new capability.

The new submarine force, which will begin to enter service late in the 2020s, will be capable of land attack, antisubmarine and antishipping warfare, support of special forces, and operations with unmanned underwater vehicles.⁴⁹ The white paper notes that for the new submarine, "long transits and potentially short-notice contingencies in our primary operational environment demand

high levels of mobility and endurance.” Those are demands ideally suited to a nuclear-powered submarine, which the government expressly rules out.⁵⁰ The limited submerged speed of conventionally powered submarines does restrict their mobility and capacity to respond to short-notice demands. Nevertheless, the force of new submarines will be a substantial deterrent and sea-denial asset for Australia.

One of the white paper’s real surprises is the prominence given to naval surface combatants. Many defense commentators in Australia, especially those who favor a continental strategy of sea and air denial, have long criticized surface combatants for their supposed limited utility and vulnerability in high-threat environments, albeit without providing realistic alternative capabilities or evidence to support their claims.⁵¹ The three Aegis destroyers, based on a Spanish-designed hull, will be joined by eight frigates (which will be larger than the *Anzac* class that they will replace) and by about twenty offshore combatant vessels, which in time will replace the current mix of patrol boats and hydrographic and mine warfare vessels.⁵²

In addition to their land-attack role, the air warfare destroyers will be armed with the SM-6 long-range surface-to-air missile and with the U.S. Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC), which, if fitted to the soon-to-be-fielded Wedgetail airborne early warning and control aircraft, will provide an over-land defensive capability against cruise missiles, as well as a very long-range (two hundred nautical miles or more) air defense capacity.⁵³ This combination will also produce the kind of sensor grid necessary to maximize the range of the SM-6.⁵⁴

The force of eight large frigates will be optimized for antisubmarine warfare. The first *Anzac* frigate entered service in 1996; the first of these new ships could appear as early as 2021. Although the white paper is not specific as to their size, they could share a common hull with the destroyers. This would make sense in several respects, not least the flexibility that that hull volume would provide for sensor and weapon fits.

The next-generation frigate’s antisubmarine warfare fit is to comprise an integrated sonar suite, incorporating a long-range active towed array, and a combination of helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).⁵⁵ Provision has been made in the white paper, “as a matter of urgency,” for twenty-four new helicopters that will be antisubmarine and antisurface capable. Their design will almost certainly be based on either the U.S. MH-60R or the European NH-90.

The Air Force operates Australia’s maritime patrol aircraft, currently two squadrons of AP-3C aircraft. These are to be replaced by a mixed force of eight new maritime patrol aircraft and up to seven high-altitude and long-endurance UAVs. Given that the UAVs will be able to contribute little to antisubmarine

warfare, the number of dedicated maritime patrol aircraft may not be consistent with the white paper's emphasis on undersea warfare.

A force of about twenty offshore combatant vessels—corvettes of up to two thousand tonnes—will complete the major maritime force initiatives.⁵⁶ The intent is to develop a single multirole hull that will incorporate modular (containerized and portable) combat suites suitable for constabulary, mine-warfare, and hydrographic roles.⁵⁷ Most of these corvettes will be employed in the peacetime constabulary role, but unlike any of their recent predecessors, they will be large enough and well enough equipped to undertake war-fighting tasks.

The maritime force structure will be rounded out with the acquisition of a replacement replenishment ship, a medium-size sealift ship, and six new and more capable heavy landing craft. Together with the already contracted LHDs and the other initiatives listed in the white paper, they point toward the RAN's being a well-balanced but vastly more capable and flexible regional naval force in the future.

Implications for Australia's Strategic Doctrine

The implications of defense policy, as articulated in the white paper, upon what may best be described as Australia's strategic doctrine—a subject of considerable debate over the past quarter century—are less avoided than politically fudged in *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century*. That debate, although seemingly interminable, has been central to the shape, capabilities, and strategic posture of the ADF since the Dibb Report of 1986 and subsequent 1987 white paper, which emphasized the "Defence of Australia" focus for ADF force structure.⁵⁸

Briefly, the "Defence of Australia" doctrine adopted a minimalist approach to defense strategy, with an emphasis on denial capabilities in the so-called sea-air gap to the immediate north to prevent any physical attack against the continent itself. This continentalist doctrine led to the development of a highly unbalanced and inflexible force structure. In fact, the inadequacies of the force of that era were quite debilitating to the strategic options available to the Australian government. It was dominated by the limited denial capabilities of the F-111 strike aircraft and submarine forces, supported by F/A-18 fighters; by a surface fleet that lacked area-defense capabilities and combat power; and by an army that was too small, too light, and almost undeployable in strength outside of Australia. The limitations of this force were demonstrated by the difficulties experienced in deploying even a relatively small peacekeeping force to neighboring East Timor in 1999.

Despite the reiteration of the continentalist doctrine in the 2000 white paper, the actual direction of defense policy, strategy, and eventually also force

structure changed quite significantly in practical terms, perhaps as the result of post-9/11 and IRAQI FREEDOM contingencies rather than genuine strategic insight.⁵⁹ The result, however, was a commitment to a more powerful and deployable force, including a larger army with greater protection and firepower, three new destroyers to assert sea control and provide air defense for deployed sea and land forces, enhanced combat capabilities for both classes of frigates, and four C-17 airlifters, and two large LHDs with new MRH-90 helicopters for mobility.

The 2009 white paper, perhaps in homage to the lore of the previous Labor government and its “Defence of Australia” doctrine, treats the continental-versus-expeditionary approaches as “a false distinction,” in part by misrepresenting the latter strategy.⁶⁰ “Defence of Australia” always was something of a conceit, in that the alternative model of a balanced, mobile, more “maritime” joint force in fact would have been both more capable generally and better able to defend Australia and its interests than the denial model. Nevertheless, despite rhetoric to the contrary, the new government in the 2009 white paper very much takes an evolutionary approach to force-structure development, accepting all the more “expeditionary” force additions made by its predecessor and further enhancing the overall combat power, reach, and deployability of the ADF.

Regional Reactions

Officials in several countries were briefed on the contents of the white paper prior to its release, and the reaction seems to have been muted, except in China. There the official response has been limited and “subdued”;⁶¹ however, media reports suggest that initial Chinese reactions were “incandescent,” implying an inability to see the need for the proposed ADF plans.⁶² Other reports suggest confusion at the apparent Australian hawkishness in relation to China.⁶³ Some Chinese academics were strident in their criticism of the white paper, but one, Rear Admiral Yang Yi of China’s National Defense University, may well have encapsulated the Chinese position best in claiming that China was less concerned by the scale of the “force build-up” than by the China-threat argument that underpinned it.⁶⁴

By contrast, the initial official Indonesian reaction was very positive. An Indonesian Defence Ministry spokesman, Brigadier General Slamet Heriyanto, saw the force-structure plans as perfectly normal for an economically successful nation.⁶⁵

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ALLIANCE

While the plans detailed in the white paper may have been influenced by rising powers in the Asia-Pacific, they have significant implications for the United

States, on whose strategic primacy Australia's strategic outlook and defense planning have depended since the Second World War.⁶⁶ Increasingly since the end of the Cold War, Washington has sought to deepen its relationships and share its international security burdens with partners like Australia. Over the last decade especially, Australian maritime forces have operated within U.S.-led coalitions during operations in and around the Persian Gulf, contributing primarily surface combatants, amphibious ships, and maritime patrol aircraft. Numerically, the contributions have been small, and the combatants in particular have had limited capability—both the *Anzac* and *Adelaide* classes, the latter of the U.S. *Oliver Hazard Perry* (FFG 7) design. Substantial ground force deployments have also contributed to these coalitions, in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

A possible challenge for the alliance lies in the discrepancy between the areas identified as the ADF's primary operational environment and those volatile parts of the world—such as Northeast or Southwest Asia—where the outbreak of conflict might require an American intervention, thus potentially also generating requests for Australian assistance as a close alliance partner. However, while the geographical areas for future potential ADF operations may be focused upon Australia's near neighborhood, this is likely to be a discrepancy on paper rather than in practice.

Recent, ongoing, and future (Force 2030) ADF capability developments will dramatically enhance the potential for Australian maritime forces to contribute to U.S.-led coalitions in future contingencies. The air warfare destroyers and, especially, the new frigates—with their LACMs, SM-6 missiles, CEC, possibly theater-ballistic-missile defense, and advanced antisubmarine warfare systems—would add measurably to any U.S. Navy-led maritime force.⁶⁷ The addition of new submarines (with the *Collins* class already arguably Australia's most valued maritime capability) would undoubtedly make Australian contributions to any maritime coalition even more attractive.

Australia's 2009 defense white paper is a wide-ranging document that reaffirms certain long-standing elements of Australian defense thinking and also breaks much new ground. In setting the scene for defense planning over the next twenty years, the white paper confirms reliance on the U.S. alliance while emphasizing the need for Australia to deal with most local security challenges without external combat assistance.

The white paper affirms that Australia will continue to contribute to U.S.-led coalitions but asserts that it may have to focus many of its defense efforts closer to home than has been the case in the recent past. Nevertheless, the white paper proposes a robust future defense force with a very strong maritime emphasis, including a sea-based strike capacity and the ability to deploy, protect, and sustain

a substantial land force. The increasingly potent and deployable ADF Force 2030 will thus likely be in high demand by future Australian governments, to enhance Australia's own regional influence, respond to crises, and when deemed appropriate, support the role of its alliance partner in maintaining international order.

Whether the proposed Force 2030 is affordable remains uncertain, and whether the government's assessment is valid that interstate conflict will continue to be the primary concern of the nation's military preparations also remains to be determined. Certainly, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century* is Canberra's first concerted attempt in defense policy and strategy terms to address the security challenges posed by a rising China and regional great-power dynamics. The Australian government has presented a sober view of the future and an indication of its determination to prepare for whatever that future may bring.

NOTES

1. Commonwealth of Australia, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: May 2009) [hereafter *Defending Australia*], p. 17, available at www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/.
2. The total uniformed strength of the three services (excluding reserves) is about 55,100 men and women. Commonwealth of Australia, *Budget: Portfolio Budget Statements—Defence Portfolio* (Canberra: May 2009), p. 33.
3. *Defending Australia*, p. 26.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 88. The ADF's "primary operational environment" is defined in the white paper (p. 51) as extending "from the eastern Indian Ocean to the island states of Polynesia, and from the equator to the Southern Ocean."
13. *Ibid.* An Australian army brigade comprises three battalions with attached supporting arms. Joan Beaumont, *The Australian Centenary History of Defence*, vol. 6, *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics* (South Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 99.
14. The fixed indexation is a means of compensating Defence for exchange-rate variation. According to Mark Thomson of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the white-paper commitment was deferred for four years in the budget brought down by the government just two weeks after release of the white paper. Mark Thomson, "Defence's Black Op: Keep the Public in the Dark," *Canberra Times: The Public Sector Informant* (June 2009), p. 16.
15. *Defending Australia*, p. 137.
16. Commonwealth of Australia, *The Defence of Australia 1987* (Canberra: 1987), p. 43.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
18. Royal Australian Navy, *Navy's Response to the Submarine Workforce Sustainability Review* (Canberra: 8 April 2009).
19. See "Planners Second-Guess Resurgent China," *Australian*, 16 March 2009; "Spy Chiefs Cross Swords over China as Kevin Rudd Backs Defence Hawks," *Australian*, 11

- April 2009; and “Watchdog Probes Hawks’ Defence Intelligence Organisation Push on China,” *Australian*, 14 April 2009.
20. See Greg Sheridan, “No Pandering to China in PM’s Asia Plan,” *Australian Literary Review*, 5 November 2008, pp. 6–8.
21. Kevin Rudd, “Address to the RSL National Congress,” (Townsville, 9 September 2008), available at www.pm.gov.au/.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Kevin Rudd, press conference held at the Entertainment and Convention Centre, Townsville, 10 September 2008, available at www.pm.gov.au/.
24. For “three pillars,” Rudd, “Address to the RSL National Congress.”
25. “China’s Secrecy ‘Could Affect Region,’ Angus Houston Warns,” *Australian*, 22 November 2008. See also *Defending Australia*, p. 95.
26. See “Chinese Spies Target PM’s Email,” *Australian*, 3 April 2009; and Greg Sheridan, “Cyber Warfare a Real-Time Threat,” *Australian*, 3 April 2009.
27. *Defending Australia*, pp. 29, 83.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
30. Australian Army, *Future Land Operating Concept* [draft 2009], cited in “China, India May Stir Up Regional War: Army Report,” *Australian*, 9 May 2009.
31. *Defending Australia*, p. 22 [emphasis added].
32. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 96. On recent developments in Australia-India maritime security cooperation see Chris Rahman, “Australia and Maritime Security in the North-East Indian Ocean,” in *ASEAN-India-Australia: Towards Closer Engagement in a New Asia*, ed. William T. Tow and Chin Kin Wah (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), pp. 195–96.
34. *Defending Australia*, p. 37.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24, 35, 37–38.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–78.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
46. Performance details are not included in the white paper, and the supposition on range comes from media speculation. See “PM’s Push for Missile Supremacy,” *Weekend Australian*, 2 May 2009, p. 1.
47. Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: 2000), p. 48, available at www.defence.gov.au/.
48. The white paper provides an option for additional boats in the 2030s and beyond. *Defending Australia*, p. 71.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
50. *Ibid.*
51. See, for example, Hugh White, “Muddled Report Leaves Gaps in Our Defence,” *Australian*, 4 May 2009, p. 8, and Hugh White, *A Focused Force: Australia’s Defence Priorities in the Asian Century*, Lowy Institute Paper 26 (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2009), esp. pp. 48–52.
52. The government has retained an option to build a fourth air-warfare destroyer; *Defending Australia*, p. 71. This option might be exercised in the lead-up to the next federal election, if at all.
53. For over-land capability, “SM-6: Extended Range Active Missile (ERAM),” available at www.globalsecurity.org/.
54. *Defending Australia*, p. 71.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Commonwealth of Australia, *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities*, Report to the Minister for Defence by Mr. Paul Dibb (Canberra: March 1986); *Defence of Australia 1987*.
59. For continentalism, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, chapter 6.

60. *Defending Australia*, pp. 46–47.
61. “China a ‘Peaceful Force’ in Beijing’s Response to Defence Paper,” *Australian*, 6 May 2009.
62. “Defence Blueprint Revealed: Maritime Power at Core of Massive Capability Upgrade,” *Canberra Times*, 2 May 2009, p. 1.
63. “Defence Plan Ruffles China: Beijing Confused over Rudd Military Strategy,” *The Age*, 1 May 2009, p. 1.
64. “Military Build-Up Risks New Asian Arms Race,” *The Age*, 4 May 2009, p. 2.
65. “Indonesia No Longer Seen as a Bogy for Australia,” *The Age*, 2 May 2009, p. 7.
66. *Defending Australia*, p. 30.
67. Even without an organic SM-3 ballistic missile–defense capability, the Aegis combat systems of RAN destroyers could contribute significantly to any requirement to counter a theater-ballistic-missile threat.