

“Schools of Australian Strategy and the Challenge of Crafting National Security in the 21st Century”

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Since the end of the Cold War, Australian strategic policy has been forced to confront a series of challenges stemming from the processes of globalisation. Australia's response to the 1999 crisis in East Timor, to the attacks on the United States of September 11 2001 and to the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has been pragmatic and incremental. Although extant strategic guidance in the form of Defence 2000 upholds a geographical focus on 'Defence of Australia', the former Howard Government did not hesitate to adjust policy, where necessary, to meet new global requirements. In particular, the Australian Army has been refashioned from a force designed for continental defence towards a mobile expeditionary force capable of serving political interests rather than geographical environments.

Despite policy pragmatism, strategic doctrine has been slow in adjusting to the challenges of a new, globalised security environment. Indeed, the disjunction between strategic theory and military practice has become sharp creating a 'tyranny of dissonance'. Because the parameters of strategic practice no longer conform to the guidance laid down in Defence 2000, any consensus on future direction has disappeared. A sharp debate has developed around Australian defence strategy based on two contending schools of thought whose diverse origins can be traced back to the early days of Federation. The first school is that of the Creswellian 'defender-regionalists' whose main focus is the geographical logic of strategy, the traditional balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region and the impact of the rise of China. The second school is that of the Fosterite 'reformer-globalists' whose main focus is upon the political logic of strategy, balancing a global-regional nexus and blending the networked challenges of globalised security into a new policy calculus for the 21st century. These two schools of thought differ on the fundamental philosophical issue of the meaning of the 21st century security environment. From this disagreement flows division over strategic priorities, force structure, capability acquisitions and the role of land forces.

Despite, three Defence Updates in 2003, 2005 and 2007 it is unlikely that Australia's future national security needs can be met within a framework provided solely by the Department of Defence. The character of the globalised security environment is now too complex for mastery by any single government department. The combination of global networks, technological diffusion and social mobility challenge not simply the traditional defence of the state, but increasingly the security of society and its citizens.

This deeper reality has led to various calls for the creation of a 'whole-of-government' national security structure. For example, journalist Fred Brenchley has argued for the creation of a National Security Council located under the Prime Minister. Similarly, Allan Behm an experienced defence policy practitioner has argued that Australia now suffers from a 'national security deficit' caused by a decade of pragmatism. Other observers have called for improved security coordination in strategic planning and for new domestic security policy agencies such as a Homeland Security Department.

While there is obvious merit in creating a 'whole-of-government' structure, it is 'a cart before the horse' argument that avoids outlining the intellectual case for a national security strategy.

The first matter to be decided in any discussion about a national security strategy is a simple one: what is the conceptual rationale for such a policy approach? Accordingly, the aim of my presentation is not to debate the various organisational structures that might comprise a national security strategy but to focus on the conceptual challenge such an approach presents to policy practitioners. Unless a sound intellectual case can be made in favour of developing a national security strategy, it becomes premature to recommend new security structures and routines.

In 21st century conditions, any Australian concept of national security must be clearly designed to serve the ends of policy. While many policy practitioners often tend to disdain concepts and theories as meaningless, it remains the case that all strategy-making ultimately depends on a set of theoretical assumptions. Indeed, as the social scientist Kurt Lewin once put it, 'there is nothing more practical as a good theory'. Without the underpinning of relevant theory, strategy can easily become overly dependent on short-term incrementalism and crisis-management techniques at the expense of understanding long-term security dynamics.

I want to discuss four themes. First, in order to establish a context for analysis, I examine the main features of the new globalised security environment. Second, I analyze some of the main definitional challenges that surround an understanding of the concept of national security strategy. Third, I assess the role of theory and practice in national security strategy. Finally, I suggest that the national security of this country need to be investigated through means of a bipartisan Australian Commission of Inquiry into 21st Century National Security.

1. Features of the New Globalised Security Environment

The major strategic trend at work in the new millennium is the globalisation of security and the creation of a new conflict environment. Globalisation is best understood as a process of interdependence between the global and the local that transforms the operating environment but without eradicating traditional state-centric institutions. The change is well summed up by former British defence minister, John Reid:

From a relatively static [Cold War] world of inviolable national borders, iron curtains and concrete walls that prohibited and limited movement and controlled transport and communications networks, we now live with mass mobility of people and the knowledge that they produce and use on an unprecedented and growing scale. The consequences of this great change are both global and local.

What is occurring under the impact of globalisation is the bifurcation of security through the interaction of what US political scientist, James N. Roseau, calls 'the two worlds of world politics' – the symmetric, state-centric world and the asymmetric, multi-centric world. Complexity and unpredictability are caused by the reality that the new multi-centric environment has not abolished the traditional state-centric world order; rather it has superimposed itself upon that order creating a turbulent, bifurcated or two-tier, strategic environment.

What makes the 21st century strategic environment so difficult to manage is not the factor of change itself, but the rapid speed, compression and interconnectedness of change between the state-centric and multi-centric worlds because of the microelectronic revolution and economic interdependence. The global security system that is emerging has, in turn, brought with it four other important strategic features. The first feature is a shift in thinking away from

territoriality towards connectedness. The second aspect is a blurring of the distinctions between state and society and foreign and domestic policies. The third is the rise of risk as a major factor in strategic analysis. The fourth feature is a merging of conventional and unconventional modes of armed conflict into the phenomenon of full-spectrum strategies that embrace peace, crisis, war and post-war situations.

Territoriality, Connectedness and Security

The first change stemming from the globalisation of security, a shift in strategic thinking away from defending territory, reflects the problem of ensuring security for societies that are increasingly vulnerable to threats from networked non-state actors. Globalisation has created a new supraterritorial space that coexists with older territorial imperatives – what Philip Zelikow describes as ‘the new geography of national security’. In this sense, much of the developed world has transitioned from an age of deliberate threat monopolised by enemy states into a parallel era of distributed threats emanating from non-state adversaries. The rise of multi-centric adversaries does not, of course, mean that inter-state warfare has disappeared only that, given present political conditions, it is less likely to occur – largely because the traditional link between national sovereignty and national security has been severed.

Many contemporary threats to advanced countries are no longer direct but indirect; they are not about territory but projected across territory into permeable open societies. As Professor Lawrence Freedman suggests, the world may be witnessing a rise in complex irregular conflicts alongside a ‘demilitarisation of inter-state relations’. A major official concern, then, is the growing risk of societal vulnerability stemming from non-state and transnational threats that are facilitated by the diffusion and diversification of electronic communications and weapons technologies. Thus, while traditional inter-state security threats continue to remain important, there is an unmistakable parallel trend in strategic affairs towards multi-centric challenges and the risks these pose to democratic order.

The Rise of Strategic Risk-Analysis

If the 20th century was the age of predictable threat, the 21st century is the age of unpredictable risk. As US President Bill Clinton observed in December 1998, the evolving global era frees humanity from the local but brings with it ‘a world in which risk is endless’. The rise of delocalised risk is yet another outcome of the arrival of a bifurcated, yet interconnected world.

In the new millennium, both threat and risk must be considered by policy-makers in the formulation of strategy. Strategic threat tends to be measurable and is based on tangibles; it is about assessing the intentions and capabilities of the great military powers such as the US, China and Russia. Risk, on the other hand, is immeasurable and often involves intangibles; it is about the probabilities and consequences that may flow from unpredictable activities of non-state actors empowered by global interconnectedness.

In the 21st century a ‘new risk rationality of strategy’ is emerging. In many respects, the crisis over Iraq in 2003 was incomprehensible in terms of threat-analysis. However, when examined in terms of strategic risk-analysis the decision-making becomes more comprehensible. The Iraq crisis was shaped by the shock of the September 11 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks on the US and was driven by the possible risk – rather than the imminent threat – of technologies of mass destruction being transferred from Saddam’s Iraq to transnational terrorist groups.

A useful illustration of the rise of the phenomenon of risk-rationality is US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's now famous 'known unknowns' speech of February 2002. During this speech, Rumsfeld stated:

There are known, knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know.

Far from being 'Rumspeak', this statement represents a cogent recognition of the importance of risk management in contemporary strategy. In terms of assessing risk, it is not strong states, but rogue and failed states that often present serious challenges. Just as the international community cannot risk diseased humans spreading a deadly bacillus without quarantine, so too it cannot risk failed or dysfunctional states incubating non-state threats that can penetrate borders and threaten democratic societies via global mobility. In terms of conventional capabilities, a distant state such as Afghanistan was less a threat to the US than neighbouring Haiti. However, in terms of a strategic risk-calculus that concentrates on consequences, Afghanistan was a high risk danger indeed – just how dangerous was demonstrated on September 11 2001.

Unlike threat-analysis then, risk-analysis often emphasises consequences not capabilities. The interconnected processes of globalisation mean that strategy must now focus not only on inter-state threats but also on managing an array of non-state risks. The latter may range from unstable rogue states to refugee flows from crumbling nations and from viruses to nuclear devices – all of which may be dangerous, or even catastrophic, if left to fester and spread.

The Blurring of the Near and the Far and National Security

The third change arising from the phenomenon of globalised security is the blurring of distinctions between local and global and between state and society. Liberal democratic governments face the reality that many security challenges are seamless and transcend domestic, foreign and defence policies. Moreover, such challenges are characterised by complex interactions that link, rather than divide, streams of events from the local to the global – from Bali and Birmingham to Basra and Baghdad. Ours is an age which, in the words of James Sperling, security establishments must learn to deal 'the vertices of conflict and the interstices of cooperation'. This blurring of distinctions has led many advanced countries to begin a process of melding their foreign, defence, intelligence and domestic policies into more cohesive national security strategies in order to meet diverse threats and risks.

Because the security of post-industrial societies has become global as well as local, the 21st century security environment increasingly places a premium on Western liberal democracies possessing a mixture of joint expeditionary task forces and agile homeland security measures to secure their interests at home and abroad. Under globalised security conditions, the strategic equation that must increasingly be met by policy-planners is the need to reconcile 'the near and the far' through a 'networked approach' to national security. Such an approach is increasingly characterised by greater consultation and interdependence among the mosaic of official departments and agencies. The aim is to improve the possibilities for innovation and collaboration in the face of local and global, multi-centric and state-centric challenges.

The Conventional and the Unconventional: The Need for Full-Spectrum Strategy

The fourth change, stemming from the rise of globalised security conditions is the blurring of conventional and unconventional modes of armed conflict creating the need for full-spectrum strategy. As the 2005 US National Defense Strategy puts it: traditional inter-state conflicts, irregular conflicts, catastrophic WMD threats; and disruptive threats from adversaries who may possess break-through technologies are increasingly merging into a deadly cocktail.

For example, the global Islamist jihadist movement emanating from the Middle East may be cellular, non-state and irregular in its methods, but its objectives compel it not only to use roadside bombs but to seek to acquire catastrophic capabilities. Moreover, a state such as Iran has the future military potential to present a medley of traditional, irregular and catastrophic challenges simultaneously. Again, in the future, it is possible that reviving or emerging great powers such as Russia or China may develop into traditional or disruptive threats because of a conjunction of growing economic success and geopolitical ambition.

The new millennium is an age of deadly cocktails in which post-modern, modern and pre-modern modes of conflict may interact as they did in Afghanistan in 2001-02, when cavalry and cruise missiles co-existed and when the old battlefield met the new battle space. Increasingly, then, strategists must consider the interactive character of local and global conflict through a blend of multinational cooperation, multilateral effort and coalition burden-sharing.

2. Understanding the Concept of National Security: An Approach for Australia

For Australia, the type of globalised security environment outlined with its distributed threats and risks does not lend itself to the deductive, deliberate strategic planning approach of the Cold War 'Defence of Australia' paradigm. Under the latter, the main focus was on the military defence of the northern sea-air gap against a conventional adversary. In the 21st century, Australia requires an integrated concept of national security that encompasses the conventional and the unconventional and the direct and the indirect in both threat and risk.

Australia must consider an interactive global-regional nexus in its security calculation embracing commitments from Afghanistan to Iraq and from East Timor to the Solomons with possible future contingencies in Papua New Guinea and the Southern Philippines. To this already heady strategic brew, it is also necessary to add the demands of homeland security. Yet until recently, however, the subject of national security in Australia attracted little serious attention and has been marked by lack of clarity and understanding.

This situation is, of course, not peculiar to Australia. In the West, generally, the subject of national security has long been bedeviled by contending 'narrow' (traditional) and 'broad' (non-traditional) schools of thought. Those who advocate a narrow approach to national security tend to view the subject as being synonymous with military defence against a foreign attack. In contrast, those who advocate a broad approach to national security are often focused on an extraordinary array of diverse global threats – from economics through health to the environment – both internal and external – irrespective of the role of human agency and the demands of intellectual coherence.

In 21st century conditions, these unreconstructed narrow and broad approaches are both inadequate. A purely military-centric definition in the realist tradition of international relations excludes too many indirect societal threats. Yet viewing security through too broad a lens robs the subject of any practical conceptual parameters for policy-makers. What is required is a

reconceptualisation of national security to encompass a continuum of state, societal and systemic threats and risks that accurately reflect new 21st century conditions.

In order to accomplish such a reconceptualisation, I use the following definition of national security:

National security entails the pursuit of psychological and physical safety, which is largely the responsibility of national governments, to prevent both direct and indirect threats and risks primarily from abroad from endangering the survival of these governments, their citizenry, or their ways of life.

Central to this expanded definition are three ideas.

First, there is the idea of protecting the social contract between people and government alongside the pursuit of the safety and survival of both state and society.

Second, there is the idea that national security problems mainly stem from human, not natural agency, and this reality helps to define the subject's conceptual parameters.

Finally, the definition employed encompasses both direct and indirect and deliberate and distributed threats and risks in national security – irrespective of whether these emanate directly from nation-states or indirectly or from sub-national, trans-national or supra-national groups.

In 21st century conditions, threats and risks to state and society are increasingly multidimensional and embrace military, economic, political-cultural and resource-environmental sectors. Because of this complexity, any Australian concept of national security must seek to establish conceptual parameters that reflect linkages between the ideas of social contract, human agency and threats and risks. In an age of connectedness, linkages and interactions between the four key sectors of military, economic, political-cultural and resource-environmental security must be clearly identified in terms of both their traditional and non-traditional implications. For example, the role of military force in national security today embraces a series of traditional operations both conventional and unconventional. However, military establishments must also prepare for more non-traditional missions to meet a range of responsibilities in homeland security.

Similarly, in the economic dimension of national security, parameters should be defined by the need for officials to comprehend the interlocking processes of market interdependence and the consequences of a disruption of the domestic economy from a security crisis. In terms of the political-cultural dimensions of national security, societal interpenetration and increased migration flows require greater understanding by policy-makers of the principles of civic identity and liberal-democratic values in preserving the fabric of social cohesion.

It is the resource-environmental sector of the national security mosaic that is the arguably the most complex and speculative field for non-specialist policy-makers to master. While scientific research suggests that the world is facing a future of planetary warming caused by human agency, there is no scientific consensus over the time spans involved or about the exact security ramifications of climate change for individual countries and regions. Awareness of environmental problems amongst policy makers is not matched by any corresponding ability to differentiate between disaster relief and 'Green Helmet' NSS planning. The truth is a simple one: it is difficult for governments to place environmental issues into the mainstream of

national security planning when scenarios encompass everything from the chaos of the 'Coming Anarchy' of mass migrations to the rise of 'Mad Max' cities. Realistically, then, until the scientific community can provide more accuracy for the policy world, the Australian Government's capacity to deal with security challenges emanating from climate change is likely to be confined to consequence-management.

For Australia, the main lesson to be drawn from an examination of these 'vertices and interstices' is the need for clarity in conceptual analysis when dealing with the notion of national security. This means that when it comes to developing an Australian concept of national security, a greater not a lesser, theoretical context for policy analysis is required.

3. Theory and Practice in National Security Strategy: Some Implications for Australia

In the future, sophisticated policy research must provide the theoretical basis for a pragmatic Australian national security strategy. In national security development, the essential task of theoretical research is to support practice and to ameliorate any 'knowing-doing gap' – to ensure that long-term objectives can be blended with adaptive short-term decision-making.

However, in an environment that may be driven by media-fuelled events rather than ease of reflection, the role of theory in national security strategy is more easily stated than accomplished. Most national security professionals are practitioners not theorists. They possess a toolkit mentality and an 'in-box' outlook to their responsibilities in which 'learning and doing' are regarded as combined activities. Under the Howard Government, it was this pragmatic approach towards national security that was adopted through the activities of the National Security Division in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

While there is much to recommend pragmatism in national security affairs, by itself it is not enough. An essential unity between theory and practice is important in national security because of the volatile manner in which diffuse threats and risks can interact with a relentless twenty-four hour media cycle. In an era of saturation images, reflexive actions are never enough and carry with them the danger of a retreat into spin doctoring and faulty decision-making under the pressure cooker of events. A national security strategy approach requires a forward process of integrative reasoning in which theory must provide principles of clarity, vision and synthesis for security practitioners. Above all, theory must help in the process of innovative thinking to identify a range of strategic patterns and discontinuities in order to avoid the fallacies of orthodoxy, group think and spin methods. Good national security preparation can benefit from a range of theoretical approaches – notably the use of careful scenario-based planning to assist in mapping possible contingencies.

A theory of national security for security practitioners is not an abstract formulation. Rather it is akin to a lighthouse beam in the dark for seamen. Like the lighthouse which assists good seamanship, a theory of national security provides the 'visionary beam' for security practitioners. Sound security theory illuminates direction on objectives and outcomes, so providing the milieu in which practical planning and rational decision-making can occur.

4. Creating a Australian National Security Strategy: The Need for a Commission of Inquiry

Any future Australian national security strategy needs to reflect a seamless understanding of the interaction between foreign and domestic issues. An understanding of networked linkages between the four security sectors of the military, the economy, politics-culture and resources-environment is vital. Harold Lasswell's famous warning in his book *National Security and*

Individual Freedom on the need to develop a holistic approach to national security is as relevant today as it was when he first enunciated it in 1950:

Caution is needed against conceiving of national security in terms of foreign divorced from domestic policy; and so far as foreign policy is concerned, against confounding defense policy with armament. Our greatest security lies in the best balance of all instruments of foreign policy, and hence in the coordinated handling of arms, diplomacy, information and economics; and in the proper correlation of all measures of foreign and domestic policy.

The benefits of seeking to develop an Australian national security strategy are fourfold. First, a holistic security strategy can be seen as both as a mirror of the nation's liberal values and democratic beliefs and as a roadmap of its vital policy interests. Second, a unified vision of the strategic environment would facilitate a government-wide framework that promotes integration, synergy, strategic focus and anticipatory methods. Third, a national security strategy would allow the Australian Government to arrive at an accurate and informed political assessment of the threats and risks to which priority and resources must be afforded. Fourth, the publication of a declassified version of any future Australian national security strategy would represent, in 21st century conditions, an act of responsible government policy aimed at educating the electorate.

To arrive at a situation where the above benefits are available Australia needs to undertake a formal review the subject of national security through a bipartisan Commission of Inquiry on 21st Century National Security. One useful model for such an Australian commission might be the bipartisan United States Commission on National Security in the 21st Century set up by the Clinton Administration which operated between September 1999 and July 2001. The American Commission was co-chaired by former Democratic Senator, Gary Hart and former Republican Senator, Warren B. Rudman and undertook the most comprehensive and politically bipartisan review of American security since the Truman Presidency in 1947.

Ultimately, however, any Australian Commission of Inquiry on 21st Century National Security needs to be an indigenous effort that reflects Australia's own political culture and parliamentary system. Any investigation must also span the boundaries of political difference and operate in the national interest. A bipartisan Commission with members drawn from all political parties, the policy world, the armed forces, academe and the private sector, is the best way of trying to establish a degree of consensus on present and future challenges to Australia's security.

Any Australian Commission should be composed of commissioners nominated by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and be co-chaired by two retired political or judicial figures. The Commission's charter should be to identify the main elements of an appropriate Australian national security strategy that reflects national values. In terms of practical output, the Commission should be mandated to produce three reports: a global security assessment, a national security strategy plan and, finally, a roadmap for any recommended institutional redesign.

Creating an Australian national security strategy will be a daunting task but it represents a vital step forward in understanding how to respond to the complex threat and risk environment of the new millennium. Bringing clarity to the national security maze is an intimidating prospect because it involves thinking forward under uncertain circumstances. Like Theseus in the ancient Cretan Labyrinth we must be prepared to undertake the challenge because can be sure of one thing the assorted Minotaurs are out there and the bifurcated global strategic

environment of our age will not disappear in the future. For the latter reason alone, the quest for a coherent Australian national security strategy in the early 21st century cannot be deferred on the grounds it is too difficult to undertake. Indeed, from the perspectives of ‘knowing and doing’ in theory and practice, the very process of creating a strategy may be as important as the final product.

The continued absence of an integrated Australian national security approach risks a future of ad hoc institutional fragmentation, lack of coherent policy development and may contribute, over time, to deficient analysis and to insufficient resilience planning. An Australian national security approach needs to begin with conceptual analysis with organisational change subordinate to policy ideas. To employ a travel metaphor, the road to be identified is more important than the vehicle to be designed. In addition, any subsequent system of ‘joined-up government’ should not seek change through massive bureaucratic consolidation or gargantuan new agencies. Instead, an ‘open enterprise’ approach to problem-solving should be adopted – one that is nimble and which permits networks, ‘tiger teams’ dual-hatting, and cross-agency training to flourish throughout the national security architecture.

Conclusion

In 1997, the scholar David Baldwin wrote ‘no social science concept has been more abused and misused than national security’. While it is difficult to disagree with this judgment, it is a useful counterpoint to remember Harold Laswell’s view that ‘there are no experts in national security; there are only experts on aspects of the problem’. This is the beginning of wisdom in national security affairs. While ‘securocrats’ may provide specialised advice, no class of individuals possesses a monopoly on questions of security. Ultimately, the formulation of national security strategy is about political judgment rather than technical expertise and it is this reality makes security a field of endeavour that is subject to the intellectual discipline of policy analysis.

Despite the many difficulties that surround it, crafting an integrated national security approach represents the highest order task of Australian strategic evaluation. Without a clear comprehension of the bifurcated dynamics of the 21st century globalised security environment, Australia will face growing difficulty in defining its strategic priorities and in allocating resources for their pursuit in the years ahead. A national security strategy that expresses the country’s vision, values and aspirations remains a compelling objective for Australian policy in the early part of the new millennium. Possession of such a strategy is vital and would reinforce the capacity of the Australian Government of the day to fulfill its most fundamental responsibility – the safeguarding of the social contract between state, society and citizen.

Q and A.