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Name: Norman Ashworth

Submission: One strategic concept missing from contemporary defence thinking is that it is far better to prevent a war than to have to fight one. In other words, the first priority of Australia's defence policy should be to prevent threats to national security from coming to fruition, and, if prevention should fail to have available the means needed to counter, and defeat, these threat.

Threat prevention has two strands. The first is, by political and diplomatic action, to build and maintain friendly relations and mutual trust with and between Australia's neighbours. Nations that are on friendly terms do not go to war with each other, or commit warlike acts. Nor do they aid and abet non-state groups in their midst who might wish to commit hostile acts against neighbouring states.

The second is to build a defensive deterrent in the form of a clear and demonstrable ability to counter and defeat the threat. No nation or group is likely to launch an attack unless they believe that they have a reasonable prospect of success.

In the particular case of a military attack, Australia has a strong natural defence in the form of oceans on three sides and a large sea/air gap to the north of the Continent. Bridging this gap would be a major military undertaking. This is the thinking that lies behind the much maligned, and oft misunderstood Defence of Australia strategy.

In the Defence Policy Discussion Paper the Defence of Australia strategy is misrepresented, in particular in relation to the role of land forces (Army). The concept of having "land forces that could operate as part of a joint force to control the approaches to Australia" is meaningless (there is no land in the sea/air gap), while the role of "responding effectively to any armed incursion on Australian territory" is definitely secondary to that of the maritime forces (Navy and Air Force). All of this ignores the vital role of the land forces (Army) in contributing to the deterrent value of the ADF in the defence of Australia. It is the size and capability of Australia's land forces that will determine for the enemy the size and complexity of the force that he needs to transport across the sea/air gap. The larger this force the more difficult the enemy's task, and the easier the task of the maritime forces to be able to inflict unacceptable damage on the "invasion" force.

In the strategic lexicon the term "deterrent" is often misunderstood. It first came to prominence in the Cold War to denote the concept of deterring a nuclear attack by threatening massive nuclear retaliation against the attacker. From this has come the general idea of deterring a military attack (nuclear or conventional) by threatening retaliation, normally in the form of air strikes against the attacker's home base. Deterrence in this form is offensive in nature. However, defence deterrence can also be used. This takes the form of deterring an attacker by having a defence capability that is beyond the attacker's ability to overcome, except at prohibitive cost.

The Defence of Australia strategy is a defensive strategy which does not threaten our neighbours. While it may not be in line with the military ethos that attack is the best form of defence, it does support the concept of war prevention, both by providing a defensive deterrent and contributing to mutual trust. While we in Australia may know that Australia has no intention of using military force against our neighbours, unless attacked, can our neighbours be so assured? Australia did intervene in East Timor, then part of Indonesia, in 1999, and, Prime Minister Howard did threaten that he would be willing to contemplate a pre-emptive strike against terrorist bases outside Australia if he felt Australia was about to be attacked.

The Defence of Australia strategy is narrow in its focus, in that it relates only to a military attack against Australian sovereign territory. However, "the protection of Australian sovereignty", against military attack, "has long been the core Defence mission", and should remain so for as long as such an attack remains a plausible, even if a somewhat remote, possibility..

Having the defence of Australian sovereign territory as a core mission does not mean that Defence activities should be exclusively focused on this one task. Because the threat of such an attack is remote, and has a long warning time, we can afford to employ the ADF on other important tasks, so long as we retain the basic capability to

carry out the core mission if so required.

Currently, the ADF is engaged in a range of tasks that fall outside Defence's core mission. However, what is important for the White Paper is to ensure that consideration of these and similar tasks does not distract from a full consideration of the core mission. In structuring the ADF we must first ensure that we have the capabilities required for the core mission. In doing so we should take account of the warning time for a military attack against Australia. Thus we do not need to have all of the capabilities needed to give effect to the Defence of Australia strategy in place and operationally ready now. Having put these capabilities in place the Government can then decide how much extra capability, and force readiness, it wants, and is willing to fund, to give it a range of options to deal with situations other than the (military) defence of Australia.

Finally, we need to recognise that the Defence White Paper is not a "whole-of-government" document. Rather it might more accurately be described as a Defence Department White Paper. Maybe things such as fighting terrorism, support to other national security problems, support of Australian statecraft, stabilisation operations, and, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief should be considered in the first instance in a broader whole-of-government national security paper.

I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

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