Australia’s 2014 Defence White Paper Submission

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Executive summary:

Australia’s current strategic documents do not agree. The National Security Strategy, 2013 Defence White Paper, the 2011 Counter-Terrorism White Paper, the 2010 Australian Maritime Doctrine, and several other documents from the last five years fail in the requirement to be mutually supportive, creating confusion Australia’s strategic direction, and as a result, neglecting key strategic issues, such the potential for utilising Southeast Asia to support Australian National Security. The 2015 White Paper, while unlikely to solve the problem on its own, presents an important opportunity to refocus such documents, and create a starting point for future convergence of strategic aims,

The following submission focuses on how to rectify the issue through a 2015 White Paper that supports a National Security Strategy based around regional co-operation. In it, I argue that it needs to be a critical strategic interest for Australia to increase relations with Southeast Asian nations in a multitude of ways, including defence industry, bilateral ties, and multilateral ties with ASEAN member states, in order to create stronger, more functional, regional bonds, resulting in a more secure region, which in turn will increase Australian national security.
Australia’s Strategic Direction: Diverging Strategic Documents and the Potential of Southeast Asia

In determining the strategic policy for Australia, the 2013 National Security Strategy fails to address key issues critical to maintaining and increasing Australia’s wellbeing; a failure that is endemic to Australian Strategic policy throughout the most recent series of White Papers. The change of government in 2013 has naturally generated different political views, however there are critical deficiencies within our security strategy that detract from the overall efficiency of Australia’s security efforts through lack of cohesion with subordinate documents. Rather than assume these will change as government changes, there must be directed effort to address this deficiency. The 2015 Defence White Paper provides an opportunity to do just that. The key issues in the current Strategy and White Papers include distinct divergences between relevant government security documents, such as the 2013 Defence White Papers, the 2010 Australian Maritime Doctrine, and the 2011 Counter-Terrorism White Paper. All of these documents have international ramifications for Australia’s security, and by failing to concur on the more specific areas of strategic interests, they generate confusion, rather than security.

In this submission, I will focus on the need for the 2015 Defence White Paper to focus on Australia’s regional security in order to increase national security. Whilst a direct attack against Australia remains unlikely, an attack within our region will have significant economic, personal, and information security ramifications that will influence the wider spectrum of Australian national security issues. The ability to maintain regional security strengthens other forms of security and in doing so contributes significantly to Australia’s strategic situation. Such a concept is not new,
and it is currently in favour with foreign partners such as Japan, who are focussing on regional diplomacy and defence industrial ties as key components of their own National Security Strategy.¹ Furthermore, such a policy has been identified as an overall positive for Australia, which therefore asks the question of why Australian does not have such a focus consistently in our own strategic documents. Therefore, the 2015 Defence White Paper needs to be in line with higher documents, such as the National Security Strategy (or preferably an updated version thereof), and outline a clear method of achieving strategic aims. It is my submission that these aims need to include increasing bilateral and multilateral ties within Southeast Asia, both in military operations and through defence industry. By doing so, Australia will be able to secure long term strategic relationships that will create a region conducive to Australia’s national security. Prior to this I will discuss the 2013 National Security Strategy, citing differences between the previously mentioned White Papers and the Australian Maritime Doctrine in order to demonstrate the initial issues with Australia’s current strategy. On completion of this, I intend to demonstrate the importance of bilateral relations with Southeast Asian nations as a way of ensuring regional security, specifically discussing Malaysia and Indonesia due to their critical importance to Australia. While I recognise there is a strong argument for increasing ties with Vietnam as well,² my focus will be Malaysian and Indonesia due to their geographically significant position.

The Gillard government released the Strategy in 2013, and almost immediately, retired Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy expressed concerns about its contents.\(^3\) He stated that it was not the end of the terrorism threat, as indicated by the shift in focus in the Strategy,\(^4\) nor was the problem of self-reliance clearly dealt with.\(^5\) To support his concerns, James Brown\(^6\) and Rory Medcalf,\(^7\) both members of the Lowey Institute for International Policy, also expressed disappointment in the supporting Defence White Paper released just five months later.

General Leahy’s concerns are warranted as they are supported by the change in tone between the 2010 Counter-Terrorism White Paper, which recognises that the delineation between domestic and international terrorism is difficult, implying a dismissal at a national level would be a mistake. Therefore, the Counter-Terrorism White Paper indicates that international engagement is a critical part of Australia’s counter-terrorism strategy.\(^8\) The current situation of Australian fighter jets preparing to fight the Islamic State militants more than justifies such concern. Still, some scholars have argued that terrorism is an over-inflated threat, and does not deserve the

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\(^5\) Desilva-Ranasinghe, op cit


importance it has been given. However, ASIO recently admitted to observing up to 200 Australians who were suspected of receiving terrorism training in Syria, and in his speech to the UN Security Council, the Prime Minister spoke of 60 Australians fighting directly for IS and al-Nusra in the Middle East. Furthermore, Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines still suffer from the risk of terrorism, a risk that given their proximity to Australian and Australian interests, warrants concern from Canberra. Given such scholars seem to focus on domestic terrorism, using facts such as the number of convictions under terrorism laws, ignoring the wider and more probable threat of international attacks, there is no reason to suggest that such a threat is ready to be dismissed. Once again, recent events such as multiple police raids and the knife attack on police in Victoria tend to support the requirement for concern.

Regarding General Leahy’s concerns on self reliance, it is unlikely that Australian will be entirely self reliant in our defence needs anytime in the near future; however Australia can contribute to regional self reliance, encouraging our closest neighbours to work together for a mutual strategic benefit of increased regional security. This can be achieved in a multitude of ways, including using compatible technologies,

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13 Michaelson, op cit 20
allowing for tactical integration of and into foreign task forces, and by virtue of all nations being required to conduct maintenance on their own platforms, an increased level of technical support throughout the region. The industry networks required for such a situation alone has potential to provide economic ties between nations, and military integration, a proven concept in the form of Cantabria in the Australian fleet and a permanent RAN vessel integrated into the US Seventh Fleet, builds relations in a region where a nation’s military hold significant political sway. It must be acknowledged that there is an inherent security risk with actioning such concepts, both industrial and force integration. However, this is not cause for dismissing the idea; such risk simply requires the strategic gain to be worth the risk, and the long term strategic relationships that such concepts would build, and their ability to counter future threats, provide strong argument for many risks to be worthwhile.

Furthermore, there were clear divergences present when the 2013 Defence White Paper was published. Despite being released just months after the Strategy, and presumably designed to support it, the secondary document places a heavy focus on the Indo-Pacific strategic arc, emphasising the importance of the region to Australia’s security. In comparison, the Strategy only mentions the region twice, and does not expand on the importance of it. In fact, the Strategy subcategorises the region with the Asia Pacific, reducing the specific importance awarded to it in a key document for Australia’s security. A similar case occurs regarding the disputes in the South China

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Sea, where the Strategy mentions the situation once\(^\text{17}\), despite the Defence White Paper stating that the military capabilities and ongoing nature of the disputes will encourage conflict.\(^\text{18}\) While some may argue that the two documents are produced by different departments, and may at times have different focuses, the 2012 Asian Century White Paper clearly states:

"At the core of Australia’s national security lies the capability of our defence forces— the Australian Defence Force’s ability to deter or defeat any attack on our territory, to contribute to the stability and security of Australia’s immediate region"\(^\text{19}\)

The consequence of such a statement is that if the ADF is a core component of national security, as is the stability of the region, then concerns raised in the key document governing the ADF should correlate with those in the overall Strategy. Additionally, matters that are causing instability for Australia’s immediate neighbours in ASEAN, such as the South China Sea,\(^\text{20}\) deserve much more attention than they are getting in the current Strategy.

One of the most influential writers on Sea Power, Alfred Thayer Mahan once argued that strong connections between maritime and national policy were vital to the success of any nation.\(^\text{21}\) In stark contrast, Australia’s Maritime Doctrine has little in common with the Defence White Paper and the Strategy, partly due to the time between the

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\(^\text{17}\) Ibid: 27.
\(^\text{18}\) Department of Defence, op cit.
documents, and partly due to the difference between the natures of ‘strategy’ and
‘doctrine’. However, there is good reason to heed Mahan’s advice, and create stronger
ties between maritime doctrine and national policy, as Australia is a nation that has
always been reliant upon the sea for a stable economy.\textsuperscript{22} In fact, any strategic policy
document, be it a maritime doctrine, a White Paper or a National Strategy, should
focus on achieving the same strategic interest, which must include regional maritime
security for both Australia and our northern neighbours. To put this into perspective,
54\% of Australian trade goes through the South China Sea alone,\textsuperscript{23} and other nations
are increasing their own maritime trade as well. According the World Bank’s statistics,
approximately three quarters of all countries have increased their connectivity by sea
since 2004,\textsuperscript{24} indicating that the requirement for maritime security in not unique to
Australia. Additionally, by the geographical nature of the region, Australia’s closest
neighbours are archipelagic in nature and therefore heavily maritime focused. It is only
logical then, that if Australia truly is interested in a stable region, as well as a stable
economy, that a proper Maritime Strategy be constructed (either as a separate
document or integrated into the 2015 White Paper) subordinate to the National
Security Strategy, but aligned to the strategic interests and framework contained
within it. Furthermore, such a Strategy needs to be written with the full intent and
result of supporting a regional security within Southeast Asia, addressing Australia’s
view on volatile regions such as the South China Sea, as should further defence
policies. However, there is currently a vast disconnect between the Defence White

\textsuperscript{22} Griggs R. (2012) The Navy in the Maritime Century. Available at:
http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/navys-role-maritime-century-speech-vice-
admiral-griggs.

\textsuperscript{23} Wesley M. (2013) Australia's Interests in the South China Sea. In: Busynski L and

\textsuperscript{24} The World Bank. (2014) Liner shipping connectivity index. Available at:
http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IS.SHP.GCNW.XQ.
Paper, the Strategy, and the Australian Maritime Doctrine, meaning the key documents determining methods to ensure National Security do not currently agree. Without a significant change in the form of the 2015 Defence White Paper, it will be impossible to maintain a high level of security within the scope of government intent. Furthermore, without a change to Australia’s National Security Strategy, the Southeast Asian region will not receive enough focus to ensure our own national security.

Despite containing critical inconsistencies with other government documents, the general focus of the Strategy towards Asia is a positive change, though it does not justify the focus away from terrorism. However, in order to achieve a stable region, Australia must focus on working closer with our Southeast Asian neighbours as a strategic interest,\(^{25}\) as the nations within the region most critical to Australia cannot be excluded from discussions and decisions effecting that region. The Strategy, in contrast to such logic, places ASEAN member states secondary to the North Asian nations of China, Japan and South Korea, attributing only vague, overarching comments to Southeast Asia.\(^ {26}\) Therefore, there is a clear failure to recognise the importance of the region, in particular the opportunities it offers in the way of bilateral and multilateral agreements.\(^ {27}\)

Southeast Asia has a recent history that demonstrates a willingness to co-operate. The formation of ASEAN demonstrates one aspect of this, but such a sentiment is exemplified by the Strait of Malacca patrolling between Singapore, Malaysia and


Indonesia,\textsuperscript{28} as well as the recognition between Vietnam and Malaysia of each others maritime claims in the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{29} In more recent times, the willingness of Malaysia to conduct military exercises with China,\textsuperscript{30} maintaining the longstanding Malaysian-Australian Joint Defence Partnership (MAJDP), and increasing US ties, demonstrates a nation with a genuine desire to increase international engagement, aligning with the suggested strategic interest of closer ties to SEA nations. This provides an opportunity for Australia to form a critical alliance with Malaysia as a key nation in Southeast Asia to foster increased security relations with states such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and the Philippines. In particular, relations with Indonesia, as Australia’s closest neighbour, are critical. Their stability in comparison with surrounding states such as Papua New Guinea and East Timor, along with their sizable and modern military and their rise to democracy means they are perfectly suited to being a key guarantor of security, in particular if working in conjunction with other states. Furthermore, the recent election of Joko Widodo, while far from securing closer relations with Australia, provides a critical point in Indonesian political narrative, which allows for the possibility of making significant gains in improved relations.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore, a feature missing in the current National Security Strategy is the framework of increasing bilateral and multilateral ties with Southeast Asia, a strategic feature that can be integrated into the 2015 Defence White Paper.

Bilateral Relations: Malaysia

The MAJDP is an important alliance for Australia, partly due to the centrality of Malaysia to Southeast Asia, and also due to the multilateral and bilateral relations between the countries, demonstrated through aspects of the Five Power Defence Agreement, Malaysia-Australia Joint Defence Program and the Australia-Malaysia Institute. Furthermore, the permanent stationing of RAAF and Australian Army units at RMAF Butterworth on the western side of Peninsula Malaysia demonstrates a high level of trust between Kuala Lumpur and Canberra. Strategically, Malaysia has access to the South China Sea, Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca, and shares land borders with Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia. When combined with Malaysia’s proximity to Singapore and shared sea borders with Vietnam and Cambodia, Malaysia is literally the centre of Southeast Asia. It also has the capacity to be a diplomatically ‘neutral’ zone for the US and China, as both have recently increased trade with Malaysia.

Additionally, Malaysia has strategic aims common with those such as Australia, including an expressed interest in expanding bilateral ties within the region, providing further opportunity for Australia. Therefore, with close co-operation, it is likely that the respective governments will be able to have a more complete strategy through combined multinational agreements rather than through individual strategies. However, the lack of interest in Malaysia demonstrated through the Strategy

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demonstrates that the potential for such agreements is yet to be realised. The 2015 White Paper offers a golden opportunity to change this.

An example of the benefits of such a relationship can be explored hypothetically through the recently developed CEAFAR system, which is a US/Australian developed active phased array radar, capable of numerous channels of fire-control. The benefits when compared to other similar systems are the lightweight nature and low cost by comparison. It is designed primarily for defence against multi-axis, supersonic, sea-skimming missiles, and was proven effective by the upgraded HMAS Perth in 2013.  

For Malaysia, who due to the nature of their archipelagic nation and proximity to the Strait of Malacca face small, fast moving targets in the way of Fast Attack Craft and pirated vessels, the detection capability alone would be a significant technology. The added defence for ocean going vessels such as the Lekiu Class Frigates would be even more beneficial for a nation with access to many volatile maritime regions. However, the benefits are not purely in shared technology; the economic benefits would also be advantageous. By sharing such technology, there are more customers for Australian defence industry, which is currently in a negative state. Furthermore, future joint efforts would encourage the development of shared repair facilities, increasing flexibility of both nations. Given the current issues faced by defence industries, this would certainly be positive for Australia.

It is critical to emphasise that the CEAFAR system is an example only. I am not an engineer and have not been personally involved in the project or with any ship related to it, and being a combined US/Australian project would likely induce limitations on

sharing. However, this does not preclude similar joint ventures over other projects, and in a similar way to the modern changes in intelligence, the move from a secretive ‘need-to-know’ policy to an inclusive ‘need-to-share’ approach.

If similar partnerships were to be established with other Southeast Asian nations, such as Indonesia, or even Vietnam or the Philippines, the benefits to industry and the flexibility for warships would make it worth the effort. Further to this, the established relations and technological congruency between Southeast Asian navies would encourage joint exercises and operations, giving Australia significant strategic support, and allowing for a joint Southeast Asian maritime force, should one ever be needed. Australia’s interoperability with the US has already demonstrated the benefits of such an arrangement; it is only logical that such partnerships should be made with Australia’s closer neighbours as well.

**Bilateral Relations: Indonesia**

Australia’s relationship with Indonesia has been described as the most strategically important in the region, due to geographical location an Indonesia’s international influence in ASEAN and the G20. Additionally, their distance from Australia means they provide a prime staging point for illegal entry into Australia, and are therefore of contemporary strategic importance to Australia’s security. However, the recent White Papers, along with the Strategy, fail to support the importance they place on such a relationship. Additionally, Australia’s current relationship with Indonesia has

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38 Ibid
40 Ibid
not been strengthened by recent events and allegations.\footnote{(2014) ASIA:Indonesian-Australian relations timeline. AAP General News Wire U6 - ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info%3Aofi%2Ffenc%3AUTF-8&rfr_id=info:sid/summon.serialssolutions.com&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=ASIA%3AIndonesian-Australian+relations+timeline&rft.jtitle=AAP+General+News+Wire&rft.date=2014-02 19&rft.pub=Australian+Associated+Press+Pty+Limited&rft.externalDocID=3224096471&paramdict=en-US U7 - Newspaper Article. Sydney: Australian Associated Press Pty Limited.} It is certainly not the first time Australian-Indonesian relations have been shaky, either. However, Indonesia has made several inroads dealing with domestic terrorism, including working with the US,\footnote{Pitsuwan F. (2014) Smart Power Strategy: Recalibrating Indonesian Foreign Policy. Asian Politics & Policy 6: 241.} as well as combining with the Australian Federal Police in order to disrupt people smuggling.\footnote{Hanson F. (2010) Indonesia and Australia: Time for a Step Change: Lowy Institute for International Policy: 5.} This relationship has proven fruitful, and has potential to pave the way for further partnerships. Despite temporary cessation of cooperation due to the recent spy scandal, Indonesia has stated a desire to continue working with Australia in the future.\footnote{Roberts G. (2013) Indonesia suspends cooperation on people smuggling as Tony Abbott expresses 'deep and sincere' regret over spy reports. ABC News. Available at: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-20/abbott-regrets-indonesias-spy-scandal-embarrassment/5105326} The success of counter-terrorism in the region does not translate directly to Australian domestic terrorism due to the distinctly different environments; however Australia has primarily been targeted overseas, with over 100 Australians killed offshore,\footnote{Australian Government, (2010) op cit, 7.} and when Southeast Asia combines as a popular destination for Australian tourists and a centre for terrorist training, the possibility of another attack becomes much higher. Therefore, in order to actively increase the security of Australians from terrorist attacks, Australia must become more involved in Indonesia’s counter-terrorism strategy.
Multilateral Relations: ASEAN

Australia holds a very unique geo-strategic position, with a security based primarily in Southeast Asia, as discussed in the Strategy, yet the two powers that Australia is balanced between, the US and China,\(^{46}\) are external to that region. Furthermore, nations within that region do not recognise Australia as a Southeast Asian country, but rather a Dialogue Partner; the same category as Japan, China and the European Union.\(^{47}\) While it would be a considerable leap for Australia to become a fully fledged member of ASEAN within the next few years, to be considered in the same category as distant nations such as those in the European Union is not conducive to Australia’s strategic objectives. The consequences of such a categorisation are many, but from a security point of view, it means that Australia is currently dealing with threats as an individual nation. However, this need not be the case; by becoming more involved with ASEAN and integrating further with Southeast Asian nations, there is no reason Australia cannot utilise ASEAN to help secure future National Security Strategies by making it a focus of our next Defence White Paper. While ASEAN is mentioned often in the Strategy, there is little substance to the comments. For example, achievements such as the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, an incredibly noteworthy achievement,\(^{48}\) and a possible springboard for further agreements, is not mentioned at all. Therefore, despite multilateral relations with ASEAN maintaining a presence in Australia’s national security, there is very little in the way of real effort to encourage closer relations.


\(^{47}\) ASEAN. (2011) *Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity*, Jakarta: The ASEAN Secretariat: 16

Previously arguments have been made that due to the close allegiance of Australia to the US, some nations may be wary of Australia; however there is no reason that such an alliance cannot be used to advantage. The US recognises the importance of Southeast Asia, increasing funding and defence agreements in recent years. 49 Similarly, Southeast Asian nations, at both ASEAN and APEC summits have lauded US commitment to the region. 50 Additionally, The US trusts Australia’s military. This evidenced in several recent operations and exercises. Most notably, General Jim Molan commanded US forces in Iraq, 51 an honour bestowed upon few foreigners, but also the integration of an Australian ship into the US Seventh Fleet in the volatile Pacific region 52 and the positioning of Rear Admiral Simon Cullen as Deputy Commander of RIMPAC 2014 53 demonstrate great levels of trust and confidence. Due to the US support, Australia has long prided itself on having better intelligence and equipment than her neighbours, but that time is rapidly coming to a close as Southeast Asian nations build their own military forces. 54 Therefore, while Australia still holds an edge, it would be an ideal time to use such advantages, with caveats to protect the US, to the advantage of Southeast Asian nations in order to foster closer relations. Such a relationship would be based on mutual strategic aims, in a similar manner to

50 Ibid
the Strait of Malacca security program between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. This program utilised resources from all three nations to achieve a common goal, beneficial not only to the three nations involved, but to the wider global community, while ensuring not to allow any nation’s sovereignty to be any way impinged. This introduces another advantage that Australia maintains; it is not a major Asian power. One of the cornerstones of ASEAN is the maintenance of sovereignty, and one of the keys to its success has been the lack of any single, major power leading the organisation.55 Due to Australia not being a major power, but having close relation with many major powers in the region, Australia has the opportunity to be involved without threatening the current state of ASEAN. With concerns over international crime, terrorism and maritime stability common to most nations in Southeast Asia, there exists much scope for a multilateral security arrangement in Southeast Asia, of which Australia both can and should be a major part.

In conclusion, it is clear that the 2013 National Security Strategy and Defence White Paper failed to provide congruency with key government documents, creating the potential for misguidance and confusion in key security areas, such as Defence and the maritime environment. Furthermore, the immediate concerns brought forward, such as the shifting of focus away from terrorism, demonstrates a lack of faith in the documents, especially when such shifts are not justified. Furthermore, the Strategy fails to satisfactorily address bilateral and multilateral relations. The utility of increased relations with Malaysia and Indonesia cannot be overstated, and while ASEAN is mentioned several times in the Strategy, there is little substance to any plans. There is also a lack of recognition of previous achievements, foregoing the

conclusion that such achievements will not be used to encourage even closer relations. Therefore, it is clear that the current National Strategy is not sufficient for Australia’s current strategic situation. The security of Southeast Asia needs to be a driving strategic aim, and increased bilateral and multilateral ties with the nations of the region are critical.
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