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**MEDIUM POWER STRATEGY REVISITED**

*Richard Hill*

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## MEDIUM POWER STRATEGY REVISITED

Richard Hill

Some fifteen years ago I set out, in a book called *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers*<sup>1</sup>, some ideas as to the principles by which such powers could conduct their maritime affairs in the foreseeable future—a future which should be subject to the minimum number of assumptions.

That caveat has been justified by events since, principally by the destruction of the assumption that the bipolar world and associated Cold War would continue indefinitely. It is therefore an opportune moment to examine whether the theories of medium-power maritime strategy, such as they are, have survived intact or need to be modified.

One critical assumption, however, must be made and needs to be stated. It is that the nation-state is and will remain the principal unit of account in the world's strategic dealings. That is not a statement that would pass unchallenged on the other side of the world. The experience of Europe, and maybe to some extent the United States, over past years has tempted many to wonder if the primacy of the nation-state has given way to other elements of the global village: federal institutions, structured alliances, multi-national corporations, irredentist factions, non-governmental organisations, powerful and media-supported special interest groups<sup>2</sup>. Those complexities and doubts are perceived as less far-reaching in this part of the globe: and for what it is worth I go along with that perception. But, even if they are given less weight in the Asia-Pacific region, account must be taken of these developments—for which a convenient shorthand is globalisation—in any re-analysis of medium-power strategy.

If then the nation-state is our unit of account, can we examine what is meant by the power of such states? Here we can venture a definition: power is

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<sup>1</sup> Rear Admiral J.R.Hill, *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers* (Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Literature on this theme abounds. But see particularly the following: Adelphi Papers published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies: Professor Sir Michael Howard, 'Old Conflicts and New Disorders', in No.275 (1993) at p.5 ff.; Professor Lawrence Freedman, 'Strategic Studies and the New Europe', in No. 284 (1994) at p. 15 ff.; and Adam Roberts, 'Humanitarian Action in War', No.305 (1996).

the ability to influence events. And for the nation-state, its two principal components are economic and military leverage. But there are other elements. A web of less tangible assets is available and is used: knowledge; educational attainment and facilities; diplomatic skills; cultural and linguistic legacies; ideological influence; religious and ethnic links; post-colonial guilt. An extremely unsatisfactory shorthand for this array of levers is intellectual power<sup>3</sup>.

What interests of the nation-state should its power serve? There are two enshrined in the United Nations Charter: territorial integrity and political independence. They appear, specifically and significantly, in the critically important Article 2(4) of the Charter, as interests against which no other state may use or threaten force. Yet even these core interests are not necessarily regarded now as inviolable. The territorial integrity of the former Yugoslavia, and the political independence of Haiti, are arguably both casualties of the past decade. Yet it is hard to discount the Charter and say these are not vital interests.

There is, however, in my view a third cluster of interests that are properly to be termed vital, and which for want of a more precise word may be called Betterment. It is the objective of any decent government—and most governments try to be decent most of the time—that the governed shall flourish, both economically and spiritually. Actions to achieve that objective may run counter to those of other states: often such competition can be resolved by negotiation before it turns nasty, but conflict over scarce resources, or over religious or ethnic hegemonies, can all too often erupt. It will be a concern of any medium power to be able to handle such conflicts in a way that ensures a favourable outcome for its people.

It is time to question whether the phrase ‘Medium Power’ is still capable of definition. It is easy enough to say what a medium power is not. It is not a small power. Small powers are not able themselves to safeguard their vital interests, not even their territorial integrity, against a determined predator’s *coup de main*. A classical example in recent times is Kuwait; or Panama. Small powers, to be even minimally secure, must live under guarantee, however much media suasion or moral strength they have. Neither is the medium power a superpower, and here the Post-Cold war world does present us with problems of definition. Is the United States now the only superpower? I would suggest that two other states still effectively merit superpower status: China and Russia. The reason is that no state in its senses,

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<sup>3</sup> Hill, *op. cit.* n. 1, pp. 8-13.

not even the USA, is going to attempt to mount a head-on challenge to the territorial integrity or political independence of either of these, and they are big enough and carry enough clout economically to ensure that the rest of the world respects their aspirations to Betterment.

If then the medium power lies between the small power that must live under guarantee, and the superpower that is effectively impervious to outside threat, how is it to view its power, its ability to influence events? It is suggested that the keywords are Vital Interests and Autonomy. The medium power, by its very nature, is likely to have few resources to spare for the exercise of power beyond what is necessary to safeguard and, where possible, further its vital interests of territorial integrity, political independence and betterment. The extent of those vital interests needs to be carefully assessed. But once that has been done, then the medium power will want to keep the levers of power in its own hands to the maximum extent possible. Australia calls that self-reliance; my word is autonomy; I guess we mean the same thing. I defined the medium power's fundamental security objective in 1986 as *to create and keep under national control enough means of power to initiate and sustain coercive actions whose outcome will be the preservation of its vital interests*<sup>4</sup>. On careful re-examination, I would not wish to change that.

Another matter to be re-examined is maritime-ness as a supplement to medium-ness. Here there does appear to have been a shift in the strategic, or perhaps one should rather say grand-tactical, pattern over the last decade, one that is not just a matter of defence fashion and one that will persist well into the next century. This is the sharply increased emphasis on joint operations. Cold War planning was dominated, on the other side of the world, by quite sharply differentiated concepts of land, sea and air warfare. Each made a contribution to the whole (though the short-war school in Britain tended to discount the importance of the sea), but they could be looked on as almost separate battles. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall a profound shift has been typified by the US *From the Sea* series of doctrinal statements<sup>5</sup>, and equally radical thinking in the UK featured not only in the *Strategic Defence Review* of 1998<sup>6</sup>, but in the doctrine statements of all three services, and in joint publications, and enshrined in the amalgamation of the UK staff colleges.

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<sup>4</sup> Hill, op. cit. n. 1, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> *From the Sea* (1992), *Forward...From the Sea* (1994) and *The Navy Operating Concept* (1997). Further development was forecast by Professor Jan Breemer at the Conference on *Sea Power at the Millennium*, Portsmouth, UK, January 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Cm 3999 (the Stationery Office, 1998).

At the same time, the generality of maritime-ness in the West has shrunk somewhat. That is to say, merchant shipping fleets under western flags or beneficial ownership have diminished; distant-water fisheries have declined; exploitation of offshore resources has not expanded to the extent that the visionaries, at least, expected. There is some mismatch between the developing international law of the sea, with its emphasis on national sovereign rights, and the situation in practice where multinational characteristics predominate. Thus, one can see a good deal of confusion between an increased interest in the sea for security purposes and a relative decrease in the Western perception of vital interests in the sea itself. A crude summary might be: 'More by sea; less at sea'.

This is perhaps much more an Atlantic and European phenomenon than a worldwide one. In the Asia-Pacific area, maritime-ness is a strong feature of the whole scene both economically and in security terms. Sea trades increase; exploitation of resources increases; squabbles about the demarcation of those resources simmer, bubble and occasionally explode; sea armaments are augmented more swiftly than in any other part of the world<sup>7</sup>; and the area has caught the Joint bug no less than has the West. Scarcely any state in the Asia-Pacific does not think of itself as maritime, and most—certainly in the rim nations—must think of themselves as medium powers according to the definition and objective that are set out here.

This does, in spite of numerous strictures about continentalism and inward-looking tendencies, go for Australia as well as for most states of the region. It cannot really be otherwise. The enormous extent of Australia's coastline, its huge potential economic zone, the resources that are involved there, and the existence of vast human populations to the north and west, must mean that Australia is a medium *maritime* power whose area of security interest stretches far out to seaward: an area indeed defined by Dibb in 1986 and effectively enshrined in Government documents ever since<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> In spite of cutbacks caused by the economic crisis of the late 1990s (see eg Captain Richard Sharpe RN, Foreword to *Jane's Fighting Ships 1999-2000*, pp. 8-9 of separate reprint; Tim Huxley and Susan Willett, 'Arming East Asia', Adelphi Paper No. 329 (IISS, 1999) pp. 15-17), comparison of the two volumes of *The Military Balance 1989-1990 and 1999-2000* (IISS) shows some spectacular rises in naval numbers over the decade, and very few reductions, in the Asia-Pacific region.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1986) p.3; Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987) p. 10.



As has been suggested by some Australian writers, there is no current threat to this area of interest<sup>9</sup>. But it would be highly imprudent to use that condition as a basis for military planning. Threats can arise much quicker than one would think or than the men with moneybags would hope. And if self-reliance, rather than reliance on great and powerful friends, is to be the criterion—a policy which is entirely in accordance with medium-power principles—then Australia needs maritime forces in being to give her the leverage necessary to safeguard that interest.

But is that the extent of the interest of a developed, trading, medium power? Reference back to the Betterment element of vital interests suggests it is not. It is frankly not much good if a medium power finds its access to routes and markets severely restricted by turmoil amongst client states or by hegemonial claims from coastal nations. It may hope that many such matters will be settled or kept under control by the machinery of international negotiation, but it knows very well that all too often they will not. The keyword for this overarching security interest is Stability<sup>10</sup>. This is not the same as the status quo, though many developed medium powers would no doubt settle for that. It does however imply evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, change, continuity in government, preservation of the current pattern of nation-states, a general acquiescence in the norms of international law, and the absence of war. A single medium power may not be able to do much to help—though on occasion it can, as may be demonstrated later—but it can at least identify the condition of Stability as one of its interests, sometimes a vital one.

There are two words that have so far been almost entirely absent from this paper, and their absence has been quite deliberate. The words are ‘threat’ and ‘alliances’. Medium-power strategy, at least as I see it, is properly almost Palmerstonian in its insistence that it should be interest-based. Threats, actual and potential, are to be judged by the way they bear upon the vital interest of the nation-state. Alliances, if structured, are to be based upon the help that could be expected from the ally or allies in the event of a threat to those interests. If ad hoc, alliances or coalitions are to be entered into on a judgment as to how a particular situation bears upon the vital interest of the nation-state. Scenarios are not to be used as a basis for strategy, but may be used—indeed, should be used—as a means of testing whether the interest of the state will be

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<sup>9</sup> Graeme Dunk, ‘Security or Defence? Force Development in the absence of a Direct Military Threat’, in *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute* (henceforth ANI Journal), May/July 1994, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Of many statements, one of the clearest is in the UK's *Strategic Defence Review*, op. cit. n. 6, p. 11.

safeguarded, using the planned resources and expected alliances, in certain situations and conditions<sup>11</sup>.

This is not at all a simple process. Medium powers need to be brave as lions and cunning as foxes. Kuwait, 1990, offers an example from recent history. It was not a threat to Australia's territorial integrity. Neither was it a threat to political independence; there was nothing but a remote possibility of terrorist action here fomented by Iraq, most unlikely to rock an Australian administration, and in fact the possibility was diminished if Australia stayed out. But there was a threat to the objective of Betterment, and its first cousin Stability. Many of the conditions for stability had been breached by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait: international law had been violated, constitutional government overthrown, an energy source important to Australia put at severe risk, the balance of power in a volatile region disrupted. Betterment and stability were indeed threatened, and there was a further factor: the position and reputation of Australia vis-avis the United States of America. The USA is the superpower of choice if Australia's territorial integrity or political independence ever do, however unexpectedly, come to be threatened. In such a contingency, hanging back in the case of Kuwait will be remembered. The overwhelmingly sensible thing, as well as the right thing, to do was to join the coalition, and Australia's most appropriate contribution to coalition forces in such a case would be naval<sup>12</sup>.

It is useful to rehearse this episode in those terms, related to medium-power strategic theory, because there were no doubt many voices raised in the Australian media insisting that the quarrel was nothing to do with Australia, that joining the intervention was risky and staying out was not, that Australia was an Asia-Pacific country and ought to look no further than the borders of that theatre so far as defence was concerned.

Having discussed interest and threat and alliances in very broad and general terms, it is time to move on to some of the conceptual tools of the trade, levels and types of operation and the important factor of reach, to see if

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<sup>11</sup> An approach adopted inter alia by James Cable, *Britain 's Naval Future* (US Naval Institute Press, 1983) pp. 126-139.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Gilchrist, *Sea Power. the Coalition and Iraqi Navies* (Osprey Military, 1991) pp. 3-7; Captain R.E.Shalders RAN, 'The Enforcement of Sanctions by a Multinational Naval Force - a RAN Perspective', *ANI Journal*, May 1991, p. 15 and Commodore C.J.Oxenbould RAN, 'Maritime Operations in the Gulf War', in the same, p.33.

they are still sharp or if they have become blunted with age, disuse or misemployment.

Any British judgment on this point, even that of someone who has used somewhat different taxonomy and has in any case been off the active list for 17 years, must take account of the work that has been officially published by our Ministry of Defence under the title of *British Maritime Doctrine*. The second edition of this work, BR1806, was published in 1999<sup>13</sup> and received on the whole even better notices than the first, for the depth of its discussion and the soundness of its argument. It is heartily commended to the interested reader.

But one is entitled to wonder whether it was originally thought of as a replacement for the Admiralty War Manual of 50 years ago (itself a very distinguished book) and does not still bear vestiges of that ancestry. Because although *British Maritime Doctrine* acknowledges at many points the use of naval force and forces, and the application of maritime power, in a very wide variety of situations, it does tend to regress into discussion of the conduct of war. That is well and good, navies are for fighting and must think how they should fight. But they are also for deterrence and coercion and constabulary work, and they must think about those things too.

An example lies in some of the terms that are used. One of the curious divergences between BR1806 and my own attempts to give some order to our thinking about the use of maritime power lies in the word 'level'. It may be remembered that one of the conceptual tools used by *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers* was 'levels of conflict'<sup>14</sup>: normal conditions, low intensity operations, operations at the higher level and general war. They were pretty crude, capable of further subdivision without doubt, but each was definable by certain characteristics, notably the nature of the objectives that participants would be looking to achieve, the stringency of the Rules of Engagement (RoE) they would employ, the potential for escalation that was involved, and the implications for alliances. Now *British Maritime Doctrine* uses 'levels' in a quite different sense. Its 'levels of war' are grand-strategic, military-strategic, operational and tactical<sup>15</sup>. They are, in my view, levels of the *command, tasking and management* of military forces rather than of the nature of conflict.

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<sup>13</sup> BR 1806, *British Maritime Doctrine* (The Stationery Office, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Hill, *op. cit.* n. 1, p. 87 ff.

<sup>15</sup> BR1806, *op. cit.* n. 13, p. 215. See also Commander P.D.Leschen RAN, 'Doctrine - Issues for the RAN', *ANI Journal*, November 1995 / January 1996, p. 12.

There is no objection to that. It is a useful tool. It is helpful to be guided towards the point at which decisions are to be made regarding objectives, deployments, weapon employment, assumption of the offensive, cover, logistics. But it is, in my view, a tool much more likely to be useful for what I have called Operations at the Higher Level—those which have the nature of war and will have objectives defined in military terms—than for what are loosely described, not only in British but in a great deal of other Western doctrine, as Operations Other Than War. These are, after all, what most of us in the fighting services are doing, most of the time.

So states do, it seems to me, still need the much broader idea of levels of conflict for objective assessment of any situation in strategic terms, and this will apply particularly to medium powers who have to weigh carefully the potential costs and benefits of military involvement.

First, then, let us consider normal conditions—few of us dare use the word ‘peace’ these days. The characteristics of normal conditions are that changes in the international situation occur in a controlled way aided by processes of negotiation; no use of force is taking place except at an internationally agreed constabulary level; and threats of force are confined to the normal processes of deterrence.

This is Australia’s current state. But it cannot be left entirely to non-military forces<sup>16</sup>, however effective the plethora of other agencies, including the Coastwatch organisation, may be. The key lies in the word deterrence: convincing a potential opponent that military action against you will be unprofitable for him. So it is necessary to demonstrate the ability to fight in furtherance of vital interests, and for that it is necessary to have forces that are ready and effective, appropriately equipped and trained. This is easy to say, but much more difficult to put into practice; perhaps medium-power theory can help, as I hope to show in the rest of this paper.

There are other elements in the ability to cope at the level of Normal Conditions beyond the readiness of one’s fighting arm. For a start, there is the matter of Constabulary Duties. Now that we have an up to date Law of the Sea Convention in force—full of over-complication, defects and ambiguities as it

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<sup>16</sup> Commodore Sam Bateman, AM, RANEM, ‘Old Wine in New Bottles?’ *ANI Journal*, May/July 1995, p. 11; and Lieutenant Tom Lewis RAN, ‘Awash in a Sea of Agencies?’ *ANI Journal*, April/June 1997, p. 40.

is<sup>17</sup>—the powers and responsibilities of any coastal state are potentially both broad and deep. In the case of Australia they are massive. The regulation of activity, by one's own and foreign nationals, on, in and at the bottom of these vast tracts of water is a huge and complex task, requiring extensive surveillance, information gathering and collation, the ability to warn, instruct and if necessary detain, all done within a framework of municipal legislation that must conform with international law. Reference has already been made to some of the various agencies employed by Australia in this complex task; it is necessary to point out that the characteristics required of constabulary forces do not *necessarily* march easily with those of fighting units.

That is one reason, naturally, for having maritime forces that are not simply constabulary in nature. But what are the more overtly deterrent units of a medium power going to do, apart from train for conflicts that may never occur? Well, the theorists have several ready answers. First, these forces will be occupied in gathering intelligence that may be of value if any one of a number of balloons goes up. It is worth recalling that the low level of British intelligence resources devoted to Argentina had a bad effect in the run-up to the Falklands<sup>18</sup>. But once the invasion had occurred, British intelligence contacts with the USA—carefully cultivated by both nations, to their mutual advantage, over the years—enabled a great deal of operational intelligence to be provided from US sources. The lesson for medium powers is to maximise their assets—including their geographical position and their maritime capabilities—in the intelligence field, including the care and feeding of extra-national contacts.

The second set of things for combatant forces to do in Normal Conditions is described by that nice Humpty Dumpty word Presence<sup>19</sup>. For naval practitioners, it is a more accurate and comprehensive term than Naval Diplomacy, which suggests a directed and focussed effort. Sometimes, naturally, it is just that, in say the case of a ship or fleet visit to break the ice after a long foreign-relations freeze-up, or a sales pitch for equipment. But usually, as service people well know, presence serves less well defined objectives, demonstrating a variety of characteristics from fighting power at one end to intent of the most benign at the other. A telling characteristic of maritime forces is that they can cover the whole gamut at the same time. Moreover, medium-power maritime forces can do this without appearing to

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<sup>17</sup> Ivan Shearer, 'Current Law of the Sea Issues', in Ross Babbage and Sam Bateman ed., *Maritime Change - Issues for Asia* (Allen and Unwin, 1993) p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Admiral Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days* (Fontana, 1992) p. 74; Commander 'Sharkey' Ward, *Sea Harrier over the Falklands* (Orion, 1993) p. 98.

<sup>19</sup> BR1806, op. cit. n. 13, pp. 57-58.

overbear or menace, as the forces of superpowers may too often do. Presence may also bring with it the opportunity to do really beneficent things: disaster relief, search and rescue, projects for small and scattered communities.

Before leaving Normal Conditions, it is necessary to bring in one factor that, though present twenty and indeed two hundred years ago, is increasingly prominent now, and that is the media. Where the press is free, scrutiny of every activity connected with the military can be expected. Where it is state-directed, the military may expect an easier ride from the media but less inherent trust from the population. We shall need to return to this factor with each level of conflict that is to be discussed.

The next level of conflict, as defined in medium-power strategy, is Low Intensity Operations. These can be defined as operations that never merit the title of war, are limited in aim, scope and area, are subject to the international law of self-defence, often include sporadic acts of violence by both sides, and have objectives that are predominantly political in nature<sup>20</sup>. Having carefully studied the alternative definitions of Operations Other than War, I would not wish to change that definition, because it brings in all the factors that a medium power in particular may have to consider.

One thing that has changed a good deal during the last decade is that Low Intensity Operations involving the democracies are likely to be multinational, rather than single-state, and under the *nominal* aegis of a supranational organisation. That is all the more reason for a medium power to examine carefully the aim of the operation and whether its vital interests are involved: these are, in Lawrence Freedman's phrase, operations of choice<sup>21</sup>. By no means all will be like that; but if even East Timor was considered by some parts of the media both here and elsewhere to be outside Australia's area of interest, then surely many will be.

Limitation of area is very closely linked to limitation of aim, though in the case of purely maritime operations—demonstrations of rights under international law, or of resolve in disputes over anything from marine resources to the protection of nationals—there may be some concern about the outer limits. There is reason for caution over the fashionable concept of Exclusion Zones or the like—if you declare a jousting area, the public may

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<sup>20</sup> Hill, *op. cit.* n. 1, p. 111.

<sup>21</sup> Professor Lawrence Freedman, 'Military Strategy and Operations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', *Conference on British Security 2010*, London, November 1995.

think what lies outside it is a sanctuary<sup>22</sup>. Neither idea is likely to be strictly accurate.

This brings us on to limitation of scope, and here we are concerned mainly with the law of self-defence and its resultant RoE. The two great principles of self-defence are Necessity and Proportionality: in a well-known formulation ‘a need immediate, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment for deliberation’ and a requirement to do ‘nothing unreasonable or excessive, since the act ... must be limited by that necessity and kept clearly within it’<sup>23</sup>. A medium power acting on its own may not find it too difficult to craft RoE to suit a particular situation, even though the difficulty of distinguishing ‘hostile intent’ and ‘hostile act’ will always be present. But if it has associates in Low Intensity Operations, the process may be a lot more difficult; the superpowers, for example, tend to have a more cavalier attitude to RoE than medium powers, and thrown-together coalitions are unlikely to have a common base from which to work. Moreover, joint operations, in particular those that span the littoral, bring in a host of potential situations that are absent at sea. As always, the media will be watching.

It may not be necessary to put in sizeable forces to Low Intensity Operations. Clearly, if the operation is multinational, a single medium power’s contribution may be small indeed. If, on the other hand, it is a single-state operation then some very careful force assessment will be needed to match the situation and the potential opposition. Too much, against an indeterminate threat—perhaps from small bands of terrorists ashore, or harassing or quasi-piratical craft at sea and it will look like over-reaction; too little, and there is the possibility of an embarrassing casualty after a surprise attack. In some situations, it has been suggested, the requirements of international law, and the political premium attached to not firing the first shot, will mean that however sophisticated your self-defence systems, there will be a risk that an initial casualty may be sustained<sup>24</sup>. But no one will relish being in HMAS *Initial Casualty*.

There is no absolute safeguard against this, as there is no guarantee of a no-casualties conflict. But there is a well-known principle of maritime tactics

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<sup>22</sup> J.R.Hill, ‘Maritime Forces in Confrontation’, *Brassey's Annual 1972* (William Clowes, 1972) p. 33. Note the date.

<sup>23</sup> *The Caroline*, 1839.

<sup>24</sup> Professor Daniel O'Connell, *The Influence of Law on Sea Power* (Manchester University Press, 1975) p. 82.

and strategy that goes some way to guarding against it, and that is Cover<sup>25</sup>. Forces of greater power than those deployed forward, poised to retaliate in the event of escalation by the opponent, are a precondition of well-planned low intensity operations. That is not a difficult concept for maritime forces to implement, provided they are strong enough; though in struggles between the bigger medium powers, they may—even at the Low-Intensity level—start looking to their potential superpower allies. But they must be able to provide enough cover themselves to demonstrate, in a head-to-head with another medium power, that they are determined to fight at the higher level in defence of what they consider to be their vital interests.

The next level of conflict, the Higher Level, may occur suddenly, or by accident or design. Of course it does not always result from escalation; for example, the Falklands started with a Higher-Level invasion by Argentina, and Kuwait similarly in 1990. But often Higher-Level conflict grows from low intensity operations.

That does not mean it is a seamless process. I believe, and this is one place where I claim some precision for medium-power theory, that there is a quite well-defined shear line between Low Intensity and Higher Level Operations. The definitions are markedly different. Higher Level Operations at sea are active, organised hostilities involving on both sides fleet units and/or aircraft and the use of major weapons<sup>26</sup>. Thus they are different in kind from Low Intensity Operations. And even though they are still limited in aim, scope and area, those limitations are different in kind too.

The Aim in Higher Level Operations is likely to be expressed in military, rather than political, terms. That does not mean the political element will ever be lacking entirely; but the commander on the spot will be entitled to a military aim. There is a quite interesting sidelight here from the Falklands. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence Lewin, Chief of the Defence Staff, personally drafted the British Government's aim: 'The overall aim of Her Majesty's Government is to bring about the withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands and dependencies, and the re-establishment of British administration there, as quickly as possible. Military deployments and operations are directed to the support of this aim'<sup>27</sup>. And even the directive from Commander in Chief Fleet to the Commander of the Task Force, up to

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<sup>25</sup> BR1806, *op. cit.* n. 13, p. 37. The concept, implicit in countless operations in World War 2 and earlier, was omitted from the First Edition of BR 1806 but happily is prominent in the second.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, *op. cit.* n. 1, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Information supplied by Lord Lewin



mid-May—very shortly before the British landing—was ‘to land...*with a view to repossessing the Falkland Islands*’. This was eventually replaced with ‘in order to repossess’<sup>28</sup>, but all these wordings show just how much influence political considerations can have. Nevertheless the overriding point is that the aim must be something the military commander can live with.

As to the scope of operations, RoE in Higher Level Operations will naturally be more liberal than they are in Low Intensity Operations, and in particular the distinction between hostile act and hostile intent largely falls away. There is a link here between limitation of scope and that of area, for Exclusion Zones can positively bedevil RoE at this level and are best avoided. Once more we are into the realms of the Media: you may feel perfectly comfortable with the legal and moral basis of your RoE, but the perceptions into which the public are led by media interpretation may not be the same as yours, and are very important in a democracy. I have only to mention the sinking of the *Belgrano* to make the point in my own country<sup>29</sup>.

Once again, for the medium power, the question arises of the compatibility of RoE with other members of coalition operations, particularly any superpowers participating. It is all too likely to be the subject of last-minute discussions in a messy politico-military way<sup>30</sup>. Even NATO, which has a fairly structured RoE framework, finds itself agonising over the precise terms when the heat is on: ad hoc coalitions find it all the more difficult.

As for the nature of Higher Level Operations, they are much more the stuff of War and Doctrine manuals than operations at Low Intensity or in Normal Conditions. Sea Use and Sea Denial, Projection of Power from the sea to the land, these are bread-and-butter staff course business and it is not necessary to labour them. But looking at them from a medium-power perspective it is necessary to ask one critical question: how much should one be able to do on one’s own before being forced to call on help from an ally—whether that ally be formal or informal, superpower or another medium power?

The cheap answer, naturally, is ‘as much as the situation demands’. But for planning purposes that is about as much use as a wheelbarrow in a dinghy. Recalling that medium-power strategy is fundamentally interest-based, it should be possible to define areas of vital interest, asses likely threats and

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<sup>28</sup> Woodward, op. cit. n. 18, p. 185.

<sup>29</sup> One of the largest files left by Lord Lewin consisted of press cuttings and representations about the *Belgrano* sinking.

<sup>30</sup> Captain Chris Craig RN, *Call for Fire* (John Murray, 1995) p. 208.

construct forces that can robustly contest the maritime elements for long enough to convince an opponent, and potential allies, that the business is serious: serious enough to risk substantial casualties, serious enough to threaten the wider peace. Having planned such forces, then—and only then, it is suggested—they should be tested against the more likely scenarios.

And what is the top limit? Here I think we can fall back on an old word: Battle. In Higher Level Conflict, the will of one side to use the sea, and of the other to deny it; or the will of one side to project power ashore, and of the other to resist that power projection; can result in a clash that can only be called battle. By then, maybe, an ally will be on the scene—but maybe not. The best that can be said is that if a medium power plans never to have a battle, it may get one on the most unfavourable terms.

And what is the geographical limit for operations at the higher level? Here too there is a word that can help to clarify thinking: Reach. A simple definition of Reach is the distance from the home base at which operations can be sustained<sup>31</sup>. Now clearly, for any medium power, there is a close link between level of conflict, degree of autonomy and reach. For example, many states may be able to send a training ship across the world. That is predicated on Normal Conditions and low autonomy. On the other hand, the Falklands operation was a Higher Level conflict at very long reach with a high degree of autonomy (though not complete, because the UK had help in certain fields from friends and allies). Those are the ends of the spectrum. A useful criterion for most medium powers, it is suggested, is that they should be capable of conducting higher-level operations autonomously for a limited period within their area of vital interest.

So, finally, what maritime force structures are most appropriate now to the medium power that follows the principles of interest-based strategy, and uses to the maximum extent the tools of Levels of Conflict and Reach? Clearly every state's circumstances are different, and it would be presumptuous to prescribe too closely, but there are some considerations that may generally apply. First, normal conditions will persist most of the time, and for normal conditions deterrence, constabulary duties, intelligence acquisition and presence predicate a quite wide range of capability. Mostly it will need to be visible and versatile, with good communication up, down and across. That puts a premium on surface units, not necessarily all large or impressive, patrol aircraft and a politically responsive command structure capable of directing

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<sup>31</sup> Hill, *op. cit.* n. 1, p. 149. There, the words 'carried out' were used rather than 'sustained'. Both beg questions, which I have tried to clarify in this paragraph.

and coordinating a diverse effort. Submarines at this level may be useful for covert intelligence acquisition, or just to show you have some.

At Low Intensity very much the same considerations apply, but one or two extra factors come in. First, the ability to project a limited amount of power beyond one's borders will for many medium powers be seen as important in order to further the objective of Stability, and that will mean specialised forces and probably shipping. And clearly a capacity for effective self-defence becomes an important factor. But, it is suggested, at this level such a capacity is most likely to be needed against sporadic surface, air or missile attack rather than against submarine action—which has always been a characteristic of higher-level rather than low intensity operations<sup>32</sup>. It may therefore be possible to optimise some larger units to the low intensity level by cutting down on sophisticated anti-submarine capability<sup>33</sup> and on nuclear, chemical and biological defence, some of the biggest spenders in design terms. But the prudent medium power, if it can possibly afford it, should provide enough high-capability forces to give cover to its units deployed forward at this level—and here is the place for the submarine and the combat aircraft. At the Higher Level of operations, clearly, these units become the prime instruments. But it must be remembered that the actions of a medium power, at least in a democracy, will always be under the scrutiny of a critical media: and if your force structure has too many bludgeons and too few rapiers, so that you are forced into the higher level more quickly than public or world opinion can accept, then you may never be allowed to cross the threshold at all.

What then this paper argues for, in the field of force structure, looks remarkably like balanced maritime forces. There is no reason to apologise for that. When interests are widespread, threats diverse and hard to predict, tasks so wide-ranging from the most delicate to the most violent, no other solution is rational. Getting the balance exactly right is something else, and paying for it is something else again, but it is hard to gainsay the principle.

It is not necessarily the only road. A recent book about the navy of a Commonwealth country, of very similar population to Australia's, analysed the

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<sup>32</sup> Not since the Spanish Civil War, 1937, has a submarine warshot been fired in anything short of higher level operations.

<sup>33</sup> But this option may not be open to the RAN since, as Graeme Dunk points out ('Technological and Operational Trends in Submarine and Anti-Submarine Warfare', *ANI Journal*, February / April 1996, p. 26) proliferation of submarines in the Asia-Pacific region has been rapid.

effect of an almost totally ‘contributory’ strategy—a specialised force, ocean-going ASW in this case, planned to slot into a structured alliance in the only scenario that alliance recognised. The author’s conclusion was that this resulted in a navy that was totally dependent on its superpower ally, quite incapable of serving any independent interest of its parent nation. And, from my own UK standpoint, this was also the situation into which the Royal Navy was being driven by the Nott Defence Review in 1981, before its fortuitous rescue by General Galtieri of Argentina.

To sum up: a strategy of self-reliance, based upon the vital interests of the state and using to the full the concepts of levels of conflict and of reach in the planning of its forces, is still the most appropriate for a medium power. Such a strategy never did depend on rigid alliance structures or scenarios, and that is why it has remained valid when so many other strategic ideas fell into ruin with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The last decade has seen added complexities: shifts in the balance of power, increased influence from the world media, more weight from non-state actors, a greater tendency to countenance intervention in the internal affairs of independent states, and account must be taken of all these. But so long as a nation-state disposes of the means, including the military means, to safeguard its vital interests, then it has the right to think of itself as autonomous.

Australia thought that through many years before the Cold War ended, and acted upon it to the maximum that it believed its resources would allow. Resources will always be the biggest problem, but if the principles are right no one should despair. Australia is very big and difficult to defend; but she is very big and difficult to attack. Her interests are widespread and vulnerable; but they are also quite small on the world scale and capable of redundancy. Australia approaches her strategic problems thoughtfully and deserves every success in her efforts to strengthen her military arm to meet the challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead.

## APPENDIX

### Balanced Maritime Forces

I have been asked to explain further, and particularly in the Australian context, what I mean by 'Balanced Maritime Forces' in the penultimate page of my paper 'Medium Power Strategy Revisited'. This is a task to be attempted with much reluctance by someone who is, perforce, not fully informed on the current condition of, or plans for, Australian maritime forces, nor of current financial and budgetary parameters, much less of any future (undisclosed) targets that are being set by politicians or civil servants. A venture into this field is likely to be met with a riposte of 'You cannot be Serious' or even 'Who does this Pom think he is anyway?'

That said, if the framework of Medium Power Strategy set out in my paper cannot be applied to a country like Australia and have its outcome in force structure, organisation and deployment, it clearly has not done its job. Therefore this piece is appended to demonstrate how theory might be translated into combatant and supporting assets. It employs terms developed in Paul Dibb's *Review of Australian Defence Capabilities* (March 1986) which, even if not in the current lexicon of official strategic thought, are nevertheless very useful for working out the issues.

### Geography and Reach

Australia is an island. It is very big and difficult to defend. It is very big and difficult to attack. Those three propositions, which are not contradictory, lie behind every discussion of Australian strategy. The areas of direct military interest (4000 miles E-W Cocos-New Zealand, and 3000 miles N-S Archipelago-Southern Ocean) and of primary strategic interest (SE Asia and South Pacific) (Dibb, 1986), stem also from geographical fact.

It follows that the Reach of Australian forces must extend at least through the area of direct military interest, which can be roughly delineated as 1000 miles west of Perth, 1000 miles north of Darwin, 1000 miles east of Brisbane and 1000 miles south of Melbourne. For operations of choice, Reach should extend to the area of primary strategic interest.

## Security Goals

Derived from medium-power theory, Australia's external security goals can be listed as follows:

- a. Territorial integrity of the Australian continent including Tasmania.
- b. Political independence of Australia.
- c. Maintenance of good order and sovereign rights in, above and beneath sea areas under Australian jurisdiction.
- d. Security of sea communications in the area of direct military interest.
- e. Stability in the area of primary strategic interest (which includes ipso facto the area of direct military interest).
- f. Care and feeding of critical alliances.

## Derived Force Characteristics: All Levels

**Surveillance.** To support goals a., c. and d., surveillance at all levels of conflict (Normal Conditions, Low Intensity and Higher Level) is necessary. The current P-3C force, patrol craft, mines clearance force and hydrographic ships are barely adequate. In my view, numbers (particularly of surface patrol craft) should take precedence over capability. It is just as important at the higher levels of conflict: historically, in war numbers of bottoms are always needed.

**Intelligence Gathering** (goals d., e. and f.). This is not always a subset of surveillance; for clandestine work, special forces and submarines are required at any level of conflict. There is no requirement for large numbers of submarines in this role; however, three to give one on task is sufficient.

**Readiness.** Maintenance of forces at sufficient readiness for operations is an essential tool of strategy in support of all goals at all levels of conflict. Therefore you cannot skimp on training or material support, nor in Australia's case can two-coast basing and deployment be forgoone.

### **Derived Force Characteristics: Normal Conditions**

**Constabulary Work** (goals c. and d.). Forces required for surveillance double in this role. With the Coastwatch organisation they may be just adequate.

**Disaster Relief** (goals a., c., e.). Surge deployment of relatively large resources may be required. Amphibious ships, transport helicopters and surveillance units are of most utility but general surface combatants are often first on the scene.

**Presence** (goals d., e. and f.). Generally, for a medium power, the greater the visible fighting power the more influential the presence. For the most powerful navies a very heavy presence (eg large carriers, nuclear-powered submarines) may be counter-productive. But for Australia within current constraints this does not arise, and major surface combatants are the optimum units.

### **Derived Force Characteristics: Low Intensity Operations**

**Peacemaking, Peacekeeping** (primarily goals e. and f.). Amphibious forces, working from specialised ships, are the optimum, providing a more politically flexible base than anything ashore. Depending on the situation, escort by surface combatants may be required. At this level defence against sporadic surface and missile attack is the most likely operational need, and 'Anzac' and 'Adelaide' classes are probably sufficient. History of such operations suggests submarine attack is unlikely.

**Intervention by Invitation** (goals e. and f.). Similar to peacemaking /peacekeeping, but the risk of air attack is higher.

**Demonstrations of Right or Resolve** (primarily goal d.). Risk of surprise attack may be higher than in other operations at this level. It is more likely to be above than under water. If under water, it is more likely to be mine than submarine. A capable mine countermeasures force is a good multiplier.

**Clearing up after other people's wars** (goal e.), where amphibious forces are of prime utility. A self-defence capability, individually and at unit level, is predicated. A capable mine countermeasures force can also be helpful.

**Elimination of armed coastal lodgments** (goal a.). While not a likely contingency now, these are a distinct possibility in N and NW Australia at some time in the next three decades. They are unlikely to be supported by external forces and may not be a state-sponsored activity at all. Amphibious units will be critical in dealing with them.

**Cover.** For all the operations above, Cover by high-capability forces may be required, to deter or if necessary counter escalation. It is here that Australia's current and projected forces begin to fall short of the acceptable, much less the optimal. Submarines are good cover against surface intervention, and ASW capability (particularly P-3s and ASW helicopters) against submarines. Australia's assets in both these fields may be enough to deter regional actors, but against air threats—which are the ones that may develop fastest—the current capability is weak and with the demise of the 'Perth' class will diminish further. The F-111, similarly ageing, may while they last give some element of cover with their strike capability, but I am not qualified to say if a particular successor will have any such influence throughout the area of direct military interest. Another source of cover may be the US Navy. In Low Intensity Operations conducted by coalitions such cover is quite likely to be available, but in operations conducted by Australia alone or with Australia as a principal, it is not. And how is the principle of self-reliance to be explained if Australian forces cannot cover their own up-front deployments?

**Support.** The logistic support of forces involved in low intensity operations is likely to be demanding and protracted. Australia has provided herself with just enough auxiliaries to give afloat support on the scale likely to be needed. By UK standards one more unit is required to be safe.

### **Derived Force Characteristics: Higher Level Operations**

**General.** In 1966, UK Defence Minister Denis Healey set out as a strategic assumption that Britain would not undertake major operations of war without allies. Sixteen years and several further sapping defence reviews later, the Falkland Islands crisis imposed just such a war on Britain. I do not suggest that Australia will find herself in such a situation in 15 years or ever, but it is a point to be remembered.

**Escalation.** In any operation at Low Intensity, in support of goals a., d., e. or f., escalation to the Higher Level can occur through outside intervention or from unexpectedly strong indigenous forces. The definition of 'higher level' includes 'use of major weapon systems', that is to say combat aircraft, major



surface units, submarines, and extensive mining; missiles from air, surface and subsurface units can be employed. Generalised use of such assets may result in Battle.

**Allies and Battle.** It is not suggested that Australian maritime forces will be involved in protracted battles on their own against even local powers, much less those further afield. More likely is the prospect of an initial shock attack which, if robustly resisted, is likely to bring allies in, but which if succumbed to will result in humiliation and no rescue.

### **Key Elements**

**Air.** By far the most likely element of a shock attack is air, and specifically missile. Anti-missile defence is a characteristic of the bulk of RAN surface combatants and—including its ‘passive’ components like decoys—must be a key element in future. It consists however primarily of self-defence for the parent unit, and when the ‘Perth’ class goes that will get worse unless their capabilities are replaced. In view particularly of the stress on amphibious and support shipping throughout this analysis, an area air defence capability must be maintained. It can not only impose attrition on missiles but on any aircraft that come within its envelope.

**Mine.** I put this second on the list of key elements because it is so constantly underrated, in spite of the evidence of its potency. With emphasis on littoral operations, and recalling its ease of use by irregular forces, it is foolish to discount this threat, and because the principal ally largely ignores it the foolishness is compounded. Australia needs a mine countermeasures force, deployable throughout its area of direct military interest. Existing and planned operational numbers appear barely adequate and from the information available here it appears that support in many geographical areas might have to be improvised.

**Surface Attack.** The threat from surface-ship missiles can be treated as an air threat. The surface platforms themselves may be countered by various means: F-111 if within range and reaction time, submarine or surface unit. Australian forces as presently constituted can cope with them, as long as they do not ignore them.

**Submarine.** Very few submarine warshots have been fired since the Second World War. Navies within the area of direct military interest are relatively new to submarine warfare. Those further afield who might introduce

submarines into the area are not experienced in such distant operations. Thus I tend, not without trepidation, to place submarine warfare low in the list of elements likely to be encountered even at the Higher Level of operations. The current level of shore-based and embarked ASW assets in the Australian maritime forces appear sufficient to counter any likely threat in single-nation operations.

**NBCW.** At sea, it appears very unlikely that Biological or Chemical weaponry will be employed before there is adequate warning from land sources. Nuclear attack on RAN ships is even less likely. The biggest risk is getting caught up in other people's nasties, committed against each other. It may be possible to limit current provision for NBCD (which is a very expensive part of ship design) on that basis.

## **Summary**

Australia is going to **NEED** to use the sea for a great many activities and her government will **WANT** to use it for many more. Whether the RAN and RAAF will be able to do all the government wants will depend on the resources they are given and how wisely they use them.

The general shape of the RAN for the tasks that lie ahead of it is soundly conceived. The balance between surface combatants, submarines, amphibious ships and afloat support is about right. In the next two decades more emphasis can be foreseen on amphibious work in low intensity operations, and for this reason extra effort on this force and its protection, and de-emphasis on the submarine arm, is indicated; I would not support, for example, any increase in submarine numbers beyond six.

There are, it seems to me, two major deficiencies and these could be dangerous in terms of cover and in case of escalation. They are in air defence and mine countermeasures.

So far as air defence is concerned, it would be wonderful to have two carriers with VSTOL aircraft. Since that is almost certainly beyond the wildest financial dreams, an area air defence capability in at least two surface combatants is necessary. If they are to be new ships, build 'em big like the Type 45, steel is cheap.

Mine countermeasures look to need further updating and expansion, with appropriate reach. Indigenous design is not required if adequate provision is made for regional conditions.

I am not qualified to comment on RAAF strike capabilities. If the F-111 is to be replaced, the question of ability to support maritime operations will surely arise. If a potential successor is unable to give such support then its utility in its remaining roles will presumably come in question. The P-3C will necessarily soldier on, aided by further updates. In the context of air warning I cannot usefully comment on the contribution to be made by Jindalee OTHR nor on the possibility of AWACS; to the outsider, both these methods of wide-area surveillance seem to give no more than general cueing, but my information is scanty.

## **Conclusion**

Australia spends 1.9% of its GDP on defence. It has a task to fulfil in its region and in the wider world, and this task will inevitably involve maritime forces. There are shortcomings in these forces as presently projected, when measured against medium-power strategy as applied to Australia's geographical and economic situation. It appears to me important that they should be rectified.