

University of Canberra - National Security Lecture

The Role of the Navy in National Security

Address by VADM Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy

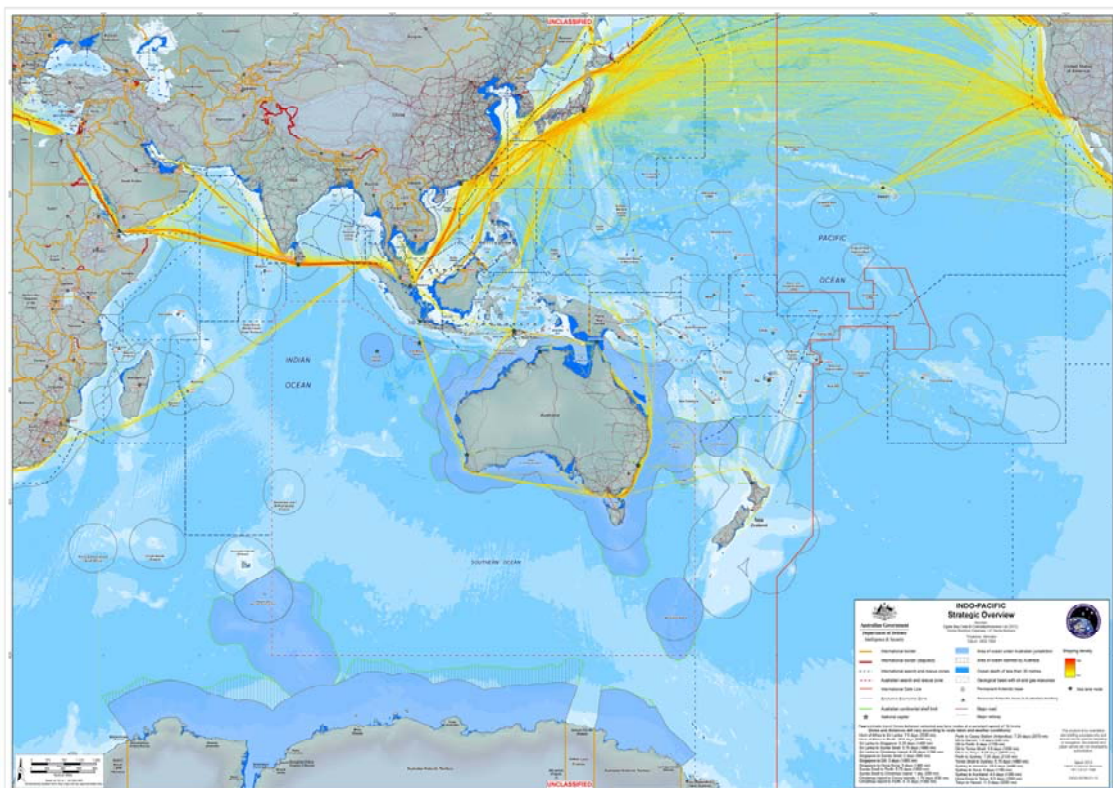
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- Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to talk about the Navy and its role in national security.
- As I always do when I give these speeches I am at great pains to stress that while the lens that I am looking through today is a naval one, it cannot be discussed in isolation from the joint and integrated effect of all elements of national power that we need to use to achieve our national security objectives.
- I do want to focus today on the military element and start by talking about the joint nature of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). For the record I think the ADF is a far more joint organisation than many give us credit for. The senior ADF leadership team could not be more joined up on the key issues even as we struggle with our own service and broader ADF and portfolio challenges.
- I think what we have at present is a very pragmatic approach to building a truly effective joint force, the last thing we need right now are ideologues and zealots. We need leadership that recognises the constraints and realities we are operating under and picks the right issues to focus on and take us forward – I think we have that.
- In pure military terms, the ADF cannot afford to be anything but joint, we are simply too small in the grand scheme of things to duplicate functions. That said, we do need to continue to value the individual

capabilities that the Services bring to the joint fight, right now we are seeing that play out in Exercise TALISMAN SABRE, our key bilateral warfighting exercise activity with the United States.

- What I want to talk about today though is not about Jointery, nor even the Navy so much, but about the maritime context that should shape our strategic thought.
- The chart on the screen is one way to view that maritime context. It is of course a chart of the Indo-Pacific which shows two great oceans, critical maritime trade routes and provides a glimpse into the complexities of the 'maritime terrain' particularly in relation to maritime boundaries and key Hydrographic features. It's a lot to take in and I am going to leave it up for most of the speech so you can absorb it.



- In saying that the maritime context should shape our strategic thought I suppose I have tipped my hand already – because I don't

think the reality of our maritime context genuinely does shape our strategic thought enough.

- I would contend it used to of course. If we cast our mind back to 1902 and quote not an Admiral but a General, Major General Edward Hutton, our first Chief of Army or as he was known Commandant of the Military Forces of the Commonwealth, said:
 - The defence of Australia cannot, moreover, be considered apart from the defence of Australian interests. Australia depends for its commercial success and its future development firstly upon its seaborne trade and secondly upon the existence, maintenance, and extension of fixed and certain markets for its produce outside Australian waters. It therefore follows that Australian interests cannot be assured by the defence alone of Australian soil.¹
 - The Government agreed with the maritime outlook expressed by Hutton, the first Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Sir William Creswell and others and in 1909 made the decision to purchase its own modern fleet of ships, in essence it was a decision to buy a Navy; the first major purchase of the Commonwealth Government.
- The majority of that Fleet sailed into Sydney on 4 October 1913. A truly significant day for the nation, the centenary of which we will proudly celebrate this October.

¹ Minute, *Upon the defence of Australia*, Major General Hutton, Commandant of the Military Forces of the Commonwealth, Headquarters, Melbourne, 7 April 1902, CPP, 1901, Vol II, p.53, in David Stevens (ed), *In Search of a Maritime Strategy: The Maritime Element in Australian defence planning since 1901*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.119, Australian National University, 1997.

- At the heart of the concerns in that early post Federation era was the threat of disruption of trade and communications. Disruption of the lifeline that was crucial to Australia's prosperity. It was in short, concern about us being able to protect our ability to trade.
- Until recently that point in time was probably the high water mark of strategic maritime awareness. Some will no doubt take issue with that statement. But, from 1914 on, a series of conflicts followed that led the national consciousness, for very understandable reasons, down a different path. People became more concerned with what happened ashore than at sea. This is despite the crucial nature of some of the maritime campaigns within those conflicts. We recently saw in the UK the 70th anniversary of the battle of the Atlantic, which combined with the Arctic Convoys to Murmansk were among the most significant actions in WW2 because they enabled outcomes of such strategic import for the entire war.
- As a result we have allowed our strategic discourse to become very land centric. It is always critical for me to stress that I do not use this term in a pejorative way. But the continentalist and expeditionary schools remain fundamentally land centric schools of thought that do not pay enough heed to our maritime context.
- Australia, as Michael Wesley said last year needs a well developed maritime imagination – the implication is clear he doesn't think we have one.
- I do need to stress when I talk of the maritime context or maritime strategy, I am not talking about a naval context or strategy. It is important that I say that because if I don't people tend to draw the wrong inference from what I am saying

- So, is a land centric strategic discourse a problem? If it is, why? These are good questions. I would maintain that we are now more dependent on the maritime domain for our prosperity and security than at any time in our past.
- I want to take you through some key statistics to reinforce that view.
 - Our sovereign maritime zones cover around 1.5 times the size of our continental landmass; that's around 12.65 million square kilometres.
 - Our Search and Rescue area covers around 11% of the world's surface.
 - 98% of our trade by volume moves by sea, yet we have no domestic merchant marine to speak of.
 - Our exports make up 21% of GDP (up from 15% in the mid-1980s).
 - 70% of our key bulk commodities (coal and wheat for example) are exported.
 - 40% of our two-way trade is between just three countries (China, Japan and South Korea) and most of it travels through waterways where sovereignty is disputed.
 - A recent NRMA study reported that Australia's net import holdings for liquid fuels has dropped from a stockpile measured at 310 days in 2002 to 71 days in 2012. And this 71 day net import figure is estimated to equate to only 23 days of actual consumption.
 - There are about half a dozen key submarine cables which carry our connectedness to the rest of the world.

- About 78% of our crude oil and 92% of our natural gas reserves are concentrated in the north west of the country.
- For me these statistics are why a land-centric view is problematic and why we have been working to reinforce the notion of the need to develop a robust maritime school of thought as the intellectual underpinning for the maritime strategy which we are pursuing.
- This school of thought should of course be relevant to Australia should have an appreciation of our geographic, economic and diplomatic situation. It should include an appreciation of our interests, relative strengths and weaknesses; and it must be framed by a clear statement of our national aims and the manner in which we wish to pursue them.
- In framing a maritime school of thought there are a few things that must be recognised. Firstly, it must recognise the sheer scale of our sovereignty and the area where we can exercise sovereign rights (the two of course are quite different).
- It must recognise the increased pervasiveness of maritime trade and our national dependence on it for our ongoing prosperity. It must recognise the increased value of activity in our maritime environment, be it oil and gas installations, alternative energy generation, the value of maritime biodiversity reflected in both tourism and food security, particularly the value of farmed and wild fish stocks. It must also recognise that our terms of trade play a significant role in the growth of our real gross national income.
- But, it must also recognise the fundamental vulnerabilities that our geo-strategic situation exposes us to in such a highly interconnected and just in time economic system. Thus, it must recognise the

importance of collaboration and cooperation in keeping the global commons and our global maritime trading system free and open.

- No single maritime focused force can achieve this mission; there must be cooperative arrangements and contributions across the whole system. And of course this mission cannot be achieved solely with the military instrument of power as the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper reinforces.
- Importantly, no school of thought should be reverse engineered to prop up existing force structures (naval or otherwise) or used as a crutch to justify reductions when times are tight.
- What does this mean from a maritime perspective? I think the first thing to recognise is that our strategic economic centre of gravity is not the resources in and on the land, nor the manufacturing capacity of our industry.
- In my view it has always been our ability to trade, the importance of getting imports in – most obviously in a strategic sense fuel – and critically, exports out. That gives the ADF a central role in a crucial national mission – the protection of our ability to trade - the very thing that underpins our national prosperity.
- This is a mission that starts at home with port and critical infrastructure defence but equally involves key choke points and shipping lanes throughout the end to end global maritime trading system. And taken together, I think this explains why Australia's fundamental approach to military matters is encapsulated in a maritime strategy.

- It means the protection of critical offshore infrastructure, which in the future may exist up to 350nm – about 650kms, or nearly Canberra to Melbourne - from our shores, let alone sovereign territory such as our offshore island territories. This is a whole of Government task from Department of Regional Affairs keeping runways operating at Cocos and Christmas Island, to Customs and Border Protection managing port and border security, and Customs and Defence maintaining security of our critical offshore infrastructure.
- Militarily it means we need an ADF that has both reach and endurance if we are to properly play our part in this cooperative and collaborative task, particularly further from our shores, be that in peacetime or in combat operations.
- It is crucial for example that we have frigates and submarines that can be operated and sustained where they need to function in this system; that we have reconnaissance assets that can do likewise; and that we have the ability to deploy and sustain credible and potent land forces to support the broader national objectives.
- So how do we go about protecting our ability to trade and in turn our national prosperity? First we need to start at the national level. Australia plays a key role in ensuring that there is a functioning, rules-based global order. There are a range of international conventions such as United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Safety of Life at Sea Convention and the International Search and Rescue Convention, among others, which lay down the ground rules for how we operate at sea. The Law of the Sea Convention and all its attendant mechanisms in particular underpins good order at sea

which is essential for the conduct of free and safe functioning of our global maritime trading system.

- The diplomatic instrument of national power has a key role to play not only bilaterally but just as importantly in the many UN fora where so many of these conventions and their practice are discussed and then updated.
- For Navy there is a strong military diplomatic contribution. There is one thing that binds navies across the world and that is that we are all first and foremost mariners. You should never underestimate the power of this. I have seen it work in our collective favour so often because of that innate understanding that mariners bring to the resolution of an issue.
- The existence of fora such as the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium are good examples of important multi-lateral naval engagement that takes place continuously. They have brought navies together not only for discussion but also at sea through a range of seagoing exercises. The work in these fora complements higher level multi-lateral activities such as what occurs in the International Maritime Organisation or in the various constructs of ASEAN.
- We take over Chairmanship of IONS in March of next year which coincidentally coincides with our national chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). It is an important time in the Indian Ocean region as maritime security issues have some prominence and it is an area where there is little in the way of a formal security architecture. Our goal will be to build on the work of previous IONS chairs to cement IONS as an important IOR

maritime focussed organisation. Regular exercises, be they Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Search and Rescue or fully fledged warfighting training activities are also important to help build trust and transparency.

- Our ships have been engaged in international engagement throughout the Indo Pacific for decades. Ships are ideally suited to engagement across the spectrum from friendly port call to steaming off the coast sending a very clear but different message.
- We have over that period built up a web of routine exercise activities with 16 countries that are either strictly bilateral or part of arrangements such as Five Power Defence Arrangement. We of course exercise with a host of other countries through larger multi-lateral activities such as RIMPAC or the Indian Navy-led interaction MILAN. These types of activities allow us to develop levels of interoperability and build trust, transparency and understanding that would otherwise not be possible. This can directly translate into real world action that helps preserve our ability to trade.
- The collective effort of a range of countries engaged in the counter piracy mission off Somalia is a case in point. As you may know there is no single counter piracy force or organisation. The contribution is made up of multiple groupings be they the US led Combined Maritime Force, the NATO and EU task groups or the independent deployers (such as China, Russia and India). This very loose collection had the real potential to make for an uncoordinated mess. Instead the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) process was developed and has helped to coordinate the efforts of the nearly 30 navies involved and importantly involved key maritime industry members. These

coordinated activities have had enormous impact on the safe passage of goods along a critical waterway.

- The Somalian piracy issue also helps to illustrate the fallacy of the 'defend the moat' thinkers. Few would argue that the shipping that passes through the Horn of Africa or the Straits of Hormuz is of crucial importance to us or our key trading partners. If our force structure does not allow us to be involved in that counter piracy effort, it means we are not contributing to this critical collective challenge. Thankfully we are structured to do this, to play our part as we currently are with the frigate HMAS *Newcastle*, our 55th individual ship deployment to the Middle East since 1990.
- While protecting our ability to trade and contributing to the protection of Sea Lines of Communication more broadly is fundamental to a maritime strategy, so too is the ability to project power across the spectrum of conflict. The two go hand in glove. There is no doubt that the maritime power projection capabilities of the *Canberra* class amphibious ships, the LHDs, when combined with other parts of the broader ADF force structure, will significantly enhance our ability to execute a maritime strategy. I think Army's approach to the step function increase in capability that the LHD brings to the ADF is terrific. The decision to orientate 2 RAR toward amphibious operations was in my mind crucial.
- Maritime power projection is a critical capability for the ADF, particularly in its regional role of contributing to the security and stability of the South Pacific and East Timor, so a dedicated focus on further developing the competencies needed is critical. At the very heart of maritime power projection is the delivery of force from the

sea, be that through naval fires or the use and support of land forces in an amphibious activity.

- Power projection however does not always involve the use of military forces in a 'hard power' way. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and non-combatant evacuation operations are, of course, a manifestation of the same foundation techniques and capabilities used for harder edged power projection missions in achieving important non-combat missions.
- In the LHDs we will have the core of the Defence Force's hard and soft power projection capability. As important as this capability will be for the Defence Force, and as big a challenge as it will be to exploit its full potential, I do think we run the risk of being somewhat consumed by it at the expense of the other individual domain war fighting disciplines that we must maintain to deliver the overall joint effect. In each domain we have particular skills that we must excel in, we cannot afford to lose sight of that.
- Of course I would be ignoring the elephant in the room if I were not to mention the issue of border protection. There is no doubt in any ones mind in the Navy that these constabulary roles are a legitimate part of what Ken Booth describes as the naval trinity of operations (Warfighting, Diplomatic and Constabulary) and has been for centuries.
- Upfront I will say what I have been saying for 18 months or so. Navy has a simple role and it has always been thus – and that is to safely execute the lawful direction of Government. I don't and won't get into commentary on Government policy or other potential policy

options. Despite how it may be represented, I have never done that and nor should I.

- Most of the commentary around 'my position' on these matters is drawn from testimony I gave to the Senate estimates committee in October 2011. What I was asked and how I answered is on the public record. I would though make the point that testimony and commentary are two very different things.
- I reject, very strongly the recent assertions that there is growing anger in the Navy at the current Government border protection policy. This is simply not true. While individuals in any organisations will certainly hold their own views, and some will get frustrated from time to time, they all understand what our job as a Navy is.
- I am going to read an excerpt from an email from a patrol boat Commanding Officer whose team has been and still is in the thick of it off Christmas Island. In the email the Commanding Officer talks about the cancellation, for the second time of a logistics visit to Singapore. If you want the bell weather indicator for sailors and how they are feeling, cancel a port visit!
- The Commanding Officer writes: 'The team were all really good about our Singapore visit being cancelled twice. In fact quite a number of my crew have told me that they were almost glad because they felt guilty leaving the area with all that was going on and placing extra burden on our comrades. Just goes to show that even the most junior and inexperienced of our sailors can - in times of adversity - see the bigger picture. So long as I get them ashore for a 20 minute duty free run before we leave, they'll be happy.'

- This is not the attitude of an angry workforce, nor is it the attitude of an uncaring workforce as others have suggested – what it represents to me is an outstandingly professional group of mostly young men and women who are doing themselves, the Navy and their country proud every single day out there.
- They are faced with enormous challenges in this relentless, gruelling and dangerous operation where their actions and decisions face enormous scrutiny. They are certainly weary when they come off rotation and I do care deeply about the potential long term impact of these activities on them. Having experienced them myself, I know it is not something we can underestimate which is why we have in the last couple of years developed I think a good program of mental health surveillance and support. We owe them that at least given the dedication and guts that they show each day.
- I hope that I have laid out for you a few things to think about today. Foremost for me is that you take away why the maritime context and our maritime geo-strategic realities are so fundamental to our national security discourse. If we can protect our ability to trade and have a functioning global maritime trading system we can maintain our prosperity. That is a national effort that the Navy in particular and the broader ADF have a crucial role to play.
- Again, I am very appreciative of the opportunity to speak today and I look forward to your questions on what I hope will be a broad range of issues.