

Australian Statecraft: The Challenge of Aligning Policy with Strategic Culture

David J. Kilcullen

Regardless of its political orientation, any government elected at the end of 2007 will face a series of important strategic choices. As this article shows, an important element in the new government's strategic decision-making will be the need to ensure that Australia's defence and broader national security policy aligns with the long-running stream of Australian strategic culture, which in turn reflects Australia's enduring strategic circumstances.

A casual observer of Australian public life in 2005-2006 would have noticed seemingly unconnected debates over multiculturalism, border protection, the Republic, reconciliation, the War on Terrorism, ANZUS, the United Nations, 'Culture Wars' over Australian history and civilisation, ageing, health, immigration and abortion. In a perceptive 2004 article, Paul Kelly outlined several of these debates but observed that 'as a nation, we prefer to discuss the various parts of our existence rather than the totality of our existence'.¹

Yet these are not separate questions but aspects of a single discourse. As Kelly pointed out, they can all be seen as manifestations of a deeper debate over Australian identity. Moreover, these are debates over fundamental perceptions about the relationship between the individual, the Australian state and its internal and external environment. Thus they are facets of a single, broader discussion about the Australian state, its people and its interests. This is a debate about *Statecraft*.

Statecraft is the art of defining and pursuing national objectives in their domestic and international contexts. It is larger than domestic or international relations, and broader than national security, economic or social policy. It is a (perhaps un-stated) conceptual construct of the individual, the nation, the state and all their internal and external relationships, which unifies approaches to all areas of policy. Notions of statecraft inform a conception of 'Australia' in the minds of individuals that drives actions across many disparate fields.²

¹ P. Kelly, 'Punching Above Our Weight', *Policy*, vol 20, no 2 (Winter 2004), p. 29

² Graham Allison argues that the notion of 'national behaviour' must be offset by a more individualist conception of the interrelationships of policymakers and leaders. This article uses collectivist constructs purely as a form of shorthand. See Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision*, New York, Harper Collins, 1971.

Effective statecraft is based upon the interplay of all sources of national power—including political, military, economic, scientific and technological, social, industrial and informational power. Its external aspect is expressed in four basic dimensions of influence: diplomatic, informational, military and economic.³ Its internal aspect emerges in attitudes to questions of political economy—issues at one time partly covered, in Australia's case, by the concept of 'The Australian Settlement'. Thus diplomacy, trade, science and technology, culture, domestic policy settings, economics and military force are not separable elements of government activity. Moreover, as Philip Bobbitt has argued, the domestic and external dimensions of policy are intimately connected through conceptions of statecraft.⁴ It follows that, to be effective, statecraft must weave all dimensions of influence into an integrated, self-reinforcing whole, in pursuit of national interests. That it rarely does so, and that errors of foreign and domestic policy emerge partly as a result, almost goes without saying.

This article examines statecraft through the lens of military strategy. It argues that, in the strategic sphere, there have been two major schools of Australian statecraft since Federation: a 'forward school' and an 'exceptionalist' school. The exceptionalist school—partly reflected by the 'Defence of Australia' theory (known as DOA)—dominated public discourse on Defence from the 1970s until the late 1990s. Meanwhile, the forward school has consistently dominated the practice of Australian statecraft, even when DOA (or variations of it such as the "Continental Defence" approach of the 1970s) prevailed as theoretical constructs for Australian strategy.

The paper draws on an established model in strategic theory, which holds that strategic culture drives patterns of statecraft, which in turn drive military strategy. Like other forms of culture, strategic culture changes slowly, if at all. Therefore even a perfect defence policy is likely to fail if it does not align with strategic culture. The evidence suggests that a policy which lies outside the boundaries of culturally normative strategic behaviour will simply not be followed—as shown by the history of Australian grand strategy under DOA. Strategic culture and its relationship to enduring circumstances will therefore frame an important set of issues for strategic decision-makers, as any new government seeks to form a future national security policy.

Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy

Strategic culture is conceptual framework for thinking about grand strategy. The term describes 'the traditional cultural, historical, political and societal factors that help shape the defence policies and strategic behaviour of

³ There are many national power models. The model referred to here is used in western War Colleges.

⁴ P Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2003.

countries.⁵ Inherent in the notion of strategic culture is the idea that a nation's enduring circumstances give rise to a distinctive manner of perceiving, and using, national power—including military power.⁶ The concept of strategic culture is somewhat problematic, and not all strategists or theorists of statecraft agree on its importance, or even on its existence. And the term means somewhat different things to different people, so it is worthwhile exploring the concept of strategic culture in reasonable detail.

Grand strategy⁷ seeks to “coordinate and direct the resources of a nation, or a band of nations, towards the attainment of...goals defined by fundamental policy”.⁸ Grand strategy may be formally expressed, perhaps in a document like the *National Security Strategy* published by the United States at regular intervals, but this is the exception rather than the rule.⁹ More commonly, it is simply a pattern of behaviour enacted in pursuit of long-term national goals. Thus grand strategy often exists solely as *praxis*, never consciously formulated or articulated. One characteristic of grand-strategic behaviour is that it tends to be independent of the political orientation of governments: regardless of party-political orientation or rhetoric in opposition, once elected governments tend to behave in ways that derive more from the circumstances in which they find themselves than from ideology. This means that strategic policy often tends to show a relatively high degree of continuity between governments—within boundaries derived from strategic culture and enduring circumstances.

In this vein, several theorists have convincingly argued that, over time, grand strategy derives from a strategic culture, which emerges from enduring geographical, economic and historical circumstances rather than from leaders' conscious decisions.¹⁰ Strategic culture, and indeed grand-strategic thought patterns themselves, do not of course specify or determine the courses of action that governments adopt. But they do tend to set parameters and mental boundaries within which conscious policy decisions are made, and thus tend to indicate a broad direction of strategic thinking rather than a specific set of policies. This can be illustrated diagrammatically, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

⁵ K. Booth and R. Trood, *Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific Region*, Auckland, Macmillan NZ, 2004.

⁶ See Colin S. Gray, 'Comparative Strategic Culture', *Parameters* (Winter 1984), pp. 26-33.

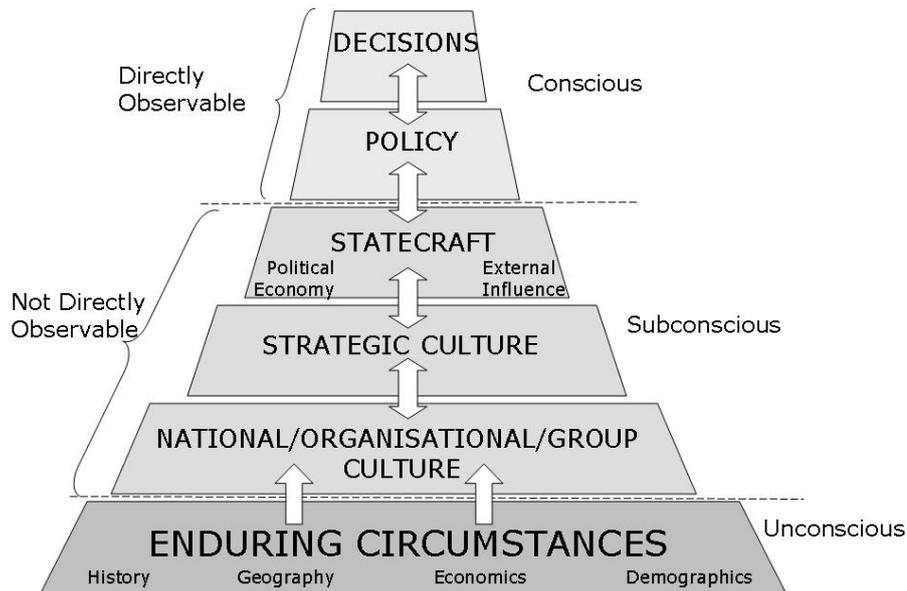
⁷ The term 'strategy', from the Greek *στρατηγικα*, 'generalship', has broadened beyond its original sense. It is used here to mean military and national security strategy.

⁸ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, New York, Meridian, 1967, p. 322.

⁹ US President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington D.C., White House, September 2002.

¹⁰ See, for example, Michael Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance: Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of war 1901-2005*, LWSC Study Paper, no. 306, February 2005. See also Victor Davis Hanson, *Why the West has Won: Carnage and Culture from Salamis to Vietnam*, New York, Faber & Faber, 2001.

Figure1: Statecraft Model



In this model, enduring strategic circumstances inform national (or sometimes organisational) culture, a subset of which is strategic culture. Strategic culture drives patterns of statecraft, which inform broad policy settings, which in turn drive specific policy decisions.¹¹ There is a dynamic interaction between levels within this model, rather than fixed causative relationship: sharp changes in policy do occur from time to time (as, for example, in Australia's decision to intervene in East Timor in 1999), and these in turn influence and change underlying patterns of statecraft. Nevertheless, each level of the model tends to change much more slowly than the levels above: enduring circumstances last hundreds of years; national culture changes over centuries and strategic culture over decades, while specific policy settings change year by year and individual policy decisions month by month or even more frequently. Thus patterns of statecraft tend to be much more enduring than the (often but not always short-lived) strategies and decisions that flow from them.

To the extent that this model illustrates real-life policy behaviour, it suggests that policies which do not align with strategic culture are never, or at least very seldom, enacted in practice: the flow of actual policy decisions tends, in

¹¹ See Adda B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1960; and Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

the main, to follow behaviour patterns driven by strategic culture. Of course, like other forms of culture, strategic culture is not directly observable—it can only be inferred from observed behaviour patterns, such as patterns in grand-strategic behaviour.

Australian Strategic Culture

In the case of Australia, it seems that grand-strategic behaviour does display a discernable pattern, albeit seldom declared and rarely conscious. Successive governments have adopted different declared strategies and decried their predecessors' policies. But the strategic practice of Australian decision-maker's reflects a relatively consistent pattern of 'forward engagement'—whatever the official, declaratory strategy.

Several enduring circumstances can be identified which would be likely to give rise to this pattern of behaviour. For example, as a nation with a small population, separated by intercontinental distances from major trading partners, allies and markets, Australia has the key characteristics of a classic 'trade-dependent maritime state'¹² and therefore cannot be secure in an insecure world or, more specifically, one where secure access to key trading partners and markets, secure international movement of Australian people and goods, and the security of Australia's overseas assets and infrastructure cannot be guaranteed. This applies particularly to Southeast Asia, where internal turmoil, refugee flows, terrorism, economic instability or state-on-state conflict could undermine our security and prosperity. But Australia is not solely part of the Southeast Asian regional system, despite recent 'Asianisation' debates and parliamentary controversies over regionalism versus globalism in the commitment of Australian forces to the War on Terrorism.¹³ Australia holds a central position in Mackinder's classic geopolitical 'outer or insular crescent' of sea-based power.¹⁴ This geographical location means that Australia is simultaneously a Pacific power, an Indian Ocean power and a major player in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.¹⁵ This "three-ocean dynamic" is an enduring feature of Australia's strategic circumstances.

But there is a continental dynamic as well as the maritime "three-ocean" dynamic at work. Rather than being part of any other continent, Australia is appropriately considered a continent in its own right. As the sixth largest

¹² D. Rumley, *The Geopolitics of Australia's International Relations*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1999, p. 274. Quoted in M. Evans, *The Continental School of Strategy*, LWSC Study Paper, no. 305, June 2004, p. 113.

¹³ See D. Martin Jones, 'Regional Illusion and its Aftermath', *Policy*, vol. 19, no 3 (2003), pp. 37-44.

¹⁴ See H. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *Geographical Journal*, vol 23 (1904), pp. 421-44. For a detailed analysis of Mackinder's geopolitics, see *The Geographical Journal* vol 170, no. 4 (December 2004), a special issue on Mackinder's ideas and influence.

¹⁵ Indeed, describing Australia as 'part of Asia' simply because we live near Southeast Asia is logically flawed, akin to describing Spain as 'part of Africa' because of its proximity to Morocco.

country on Earth Australia, with its external territories, covers almost 20% of the globe.¹⁶ And in economic terms our principal partners are in Europe, America, and Northeast Asia.¹⁷ Almost 4% of Australian citizens live overseas, three million Australians travel abroad annually (an extremely high proportion of our population, by world standards), and billions of dollars of Australian-owned assets are located outside our territory.¹⁸ International trade accounts for more than \$188.4 billion dollars of Australia's economy annually, and 99% (by weight) of this trade is carried by sea.¹⁹ Australia is therefore aptly described as “an island continent dependent on sea communications and trade”.²⁰

Australia's interests thus depend upon the security, stability and economic viability of numerous countries around the world, and of a vast portion of the earth's surface—an area well beyond our national capacity to secure on our own. Probably at least partly because of these enduring circumstances, policy decisions by successive Australian leaders indicate a strategic culture of ‘forward engagement’. This strategic culture values engagement with culturally compatible, like-minded worldwide powers, coalitions or multilateral institutions.

Schools of Australian Statecraft

This strategic culture appears to be the reason for a clearly observable and consistent statecraft pattern whereby Australian foreign and defence policy tends to be designed to contribute to global and regional security, with the expectation that this will result in a safer world system, bringing flow-on benefits for Australia's interests. This is not the simple insurance policy calculus caricatured by critics of the Menzies tradition of ‘great and powerful friends’. Rather it is a much more complex pattern of involvement in international and regional affairs, with the intent to benefit Australia by furthering a world order and a regional environment favourable to our interests and values—as even a cursory examination of Menzies-era Cabinet documents shows.²¹ But this is not purely a Liberal Party tendency;

¹⁶ Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, Canberra, AGPS, 1986, p. 37.

¹⁷ JSCFADT, *Australia's Maritime Strategy*, Canberra, Parliament of Australia, 2004.

¹⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Advancing the National Interest*, Canberra, 2003, Ch 1.

¹⁹ See RAN Seapower Centre, *The Strategic Importance of Seaborne Trade*, SPC Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs, no. 10, 2002; and Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, *Australian Sea Freight 2001-2002*, Information Paper, no. 50, 2003.

²⁰ Parliament of Australia, *Australia's Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century*, Parliamentary Library Research Brief, November 2004, p.6.

²¹ See, for example, the 1951 Cabinet notebooks covering Australia's reaction to the outbreak of the Korean War, which show a high degree of understanding of the Chinese position within a broader geopolitical framework. See National Archives of Australia, *1951 Cabinet Notebooks*, at <<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/explore/cabinet/notebooks/1951.aspx#section1>> [Accessed 26 October 2007].

indeed, it is not really party-political at all: the same pattern has obtained under Australian governments of almost every political character.

Historically, Australian governments have sought to align our security with a world power, coalition or multilateral institution that meets two criteria. These are that (1) the partner reflects Australia's Western democratic values, and (2) the partner demonstrates an ability to create a secure, stable, economically dynamic global environment. This, in essence, is the 'forward school' of Australian statecraft.

The other main school of Australian statecraft seeks to opt out of global engagement in favour of a continental, or at most regional, exceptionalism. This tradition views Australia as a nation which, thanks to unique geographical and historical circumstances, can stand aside from Northern Hemisphere great-power politics, and pursue its unique interests through self-reliance. This tradition has a long and distinguished pedigree in Australian strategic thought; it values Australia's egalitarian origins, free of the British class system, sees offshore military engagements as adventurism ('other people's wars') and finds alliances ethically distasteful. It sees armed forces as dangerous, since military power is believed to be unnecessary for a remote, unthreatened country like Australia, and military forces are believed to divert funds from the pursuit of a prosperous, socially just, classless society. Defence—especially defence capabilities, policies or spending that relate to global commitments—is thus seen as irresponsible, perhaps immoral, since it absorbs funds better spent on welfare, health and education, when our remote geography (the theory goes) already provides all the protection we need.

As described, statecraft has both an external dimension and an internal, political economy dimension. Exceptionalism in external policy sometimes (though not always, by any means) tends to cluster with ideas like the 'welfare state', trade unionism, protectionism and industry nationalisation in domestic policy. It resembles policies followed in some EU countries, which perhaps arise from a similar cluster of social-welfare values. A variant of this pattern sees engagement with Southeast Asia and the Pacific as a *counterpoise* to global engagement with Western powers (rather than, in the forward school tradition, as a *complement* to global engagement).

The exceptionalist school has been influential in some left-wing circles (although many on the Left follow forward school thinking in the H.V. Evatt or Gareth Evans mould). But whereas it has been prominent in the domestic dimension of statecraft, in foreign and defence policy it has largely been a theoretical construct—Australia's actual behaviour has consistently reflected

'forward school' statecraft, even when governments have talked exceptionalism.²²

The forward school tradition is not solely Menzian, although Menzies was perhaps its greatest exponent. Indeed, using the terms persuasively advanced by Owen Harries in his 2003 Boyer Lectures, the forward school would embrace aspects of all three traditions in Australian foreign policy, including the Menzies tradition, the Evatt tradition of support for empowered global multilateral institutions, and the Spender-Casey tradition of regional engagement.²³ Further, 'forward school' behaviour need not imply craven, lapdog-like or uncritical support for allies—managing alliance relationships is a key element in any school of statecraft, not just the forward school.

The Forward School in the Twentieth Century

From Federation until 1942, the forward school dominated Australian grand strategic behaviour, initially manifesting itself in Imperial Defence—a policy that sought to secure Australia by contributing to the collective defence of the Empire. In return for this contribution, Australia drew upon Royal Navy power projection, British political and economic might, and relationships with other Dominions to secure our portion of the globe and our trade, finances and lines of communication.

During 1942-45, a much closer relationship developed with the United States. This period (symbolised by Curtin's New Year speech of 1942, in which he dramatically appealed for American assistance)²⁴ has become a cohering myth in exceptionalist circles. It is emblematic of self-reliant nationalism, a break with Empire and reassertion of our unique needs in the face of Winston Churchill's cynical willingness to sacrifice Australian lives for British interests. In fact, its significance may be more symbolic than real: Britain too sought close alignment with the United States at precisely this time. The whole Empire turned to the United States for assistance; indeed, US troops arrived in Britain on 26 January 1942, three months before their arrival in Australia.²⁵ So Australia's alignment with the United States was arguably based more on wartime necessity, a necessity shared with the rest of the British Empire, than on what would then have appeared as a permanent change of strategic direction.

²² This description of the two schools of statecraft is, of course, a rough caricature at best, and proponents of each school are likely to find it a gross oversimplification. This is true: in this brief article it is impossible to do justice to the complexity and nuanced variations of each school. Nevertheless, though all models are systematic oversimplifications of reality, the historical record suggests that there is a measure of accuracy in this characterisation.

²³ See Owen Harries, *Benign or Imperial? Reflections on American Hegemony*, Boyer Lecture Series, 2003, at <<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/boyers/stories/s987633.htm>> [Accessed 24 August 2007].

²⁴ See <http://www.pm.gov.au/your_pm/pms/curtin.html>

²⁵ M. Brayley, *The British Army 1939-45 (1): North-West Europe*, London, Osprey, 2001, p. 10.

This became clear after 1945, when (under the Chifley Labor government) Australia again aligned very closely with the United Kingdom, under a strategy that sought a stable global environment through forward engagement. Australia's principal military plan was agreed as part of Imperial Defence under the Baghdad Pact. This involved provision of ground forces to secure the Suez Canal—then a key economic lifeline for Australia—in the event of Soviet aggression.²⁶ Actual tasks included peacekeeping in the Middle East and Kashmir, the Occupation of Japan and the Korean War. But at a broader level than Defence, activities like the Colombo Plan, support for Indonesian independence and activism in the United Nations reflected a deeper pattern of 'forward school' statecraft. This approach employed a balanced combination of influence across four dimensions (diplomacy, information, military power and economics) to further a stable and secure global environment in support of Australia's interests.

With the signing of the ANZUS treaty by the Menzies government in 1952, Australia began a drawn-out process of adjustment to the decline of British power, seeking global engagement with the United States as well as the British Commonwealth. This represented a change of great-power partner, but essential continuity in grand strategy. Canberra still sought forward engagement in order to further its interests, securing Australia by contributing through the alliance partnership to a secure global system. Moreover, Australian and New Zealand alignment with the United States mirrored a similar British alignment with Washington, most pronounced after the 1956 Suez Crisis. Thus, it did not represent a rejection of Imperial Defence, but rather a broadening of the concept to *de facto* Anglo-American global collective defence. Forward school strategic culture remained the dominant driver in grand-strategic practice.

During the first 20 years of ANZUS, for the only time since Federation, Australia's declaratory defence policy ('Forward Defence') aligned with its *de facto* grand strategy.²⁷ This involved Australia in a modest series of deployments in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam. Contrary to later myth, these commitments were neither especially frequent nor—except for Vietnam—particularly onerous. They averaged one deployment every five years, compared to one every eighteen months under Defence of Australia in the 1990s.²⁸ Similarly, the scale of deployments was not substantially larger than today: for example, Australia's commitment to the Malayan

²⁶ See Australian Government, *An Appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff on the Strategical Position of Australia*, Canberra, Department of Defence, 1946.

²⁷ See Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance*.

²⁸ 'Forward Defence' deployments included Korea 1950, Malaya 1955, Borneo 1964, Vietnam 1962 (trainers) and 1965 (combat troops). DOA deployments included Fiji 1987, Namibia 1988, First Gulf War 1991, Cambodia 1992, Somalia 1993, Rwanda 1994, Bougainville 1994, Bougainville 1998, Kuwait 1998, Timor 1999, Solomons 2000, Solomons 2003.

Emergency during the 1950s involved fewer troops, and less combat, than the INTERFET campaign in East Timor, though it lasted longer.²⁹

In each case, Australia committed forces in return for an implicit strategic guarantee, and on the broader understanding that support for the democratic world against Communism was most likely to create a secure and viable environment for Australia's interests—classic 'forward school' engagement. Australia also maintained garrisons in Malaysia, Singapore and New Guinea as part of a comprehensive strategy of regional engagement, indicating that regional and global engagement were seen as complementary, rather than competing imperatives.

This period of alignment between actual and stated strategy ended after Vietnam. Vietnam highlighted a key vulnerability in 'forward school' statecraft—namely, the danger of over-reliance on the judgment or gratitude of a great-power partner. This, indeed, is a serious structural weakness in the forward school approach, and one that has emerged periodically since its inception: when a great-power partner makes a mistake, or acts (as it is bound to do from time to time) in accordance with its own national, rather than broader alliance interests, Australia may also be harmed. This was evident in 1942: the fall of Singapore, due to Britain's strategic misjudgement of Japan, left Australia exposed. Again, in 1962 the United States chose to support Indonesia against Australia and the Netherlands over West New Guinea. In 1975 the same problem emerged—US defeat in Vietnam harmed Australia, just as previous American successes in the Cold War had strengthened us. This is not to criticise our allies, who were merely acting in accordance with their interests, as was Australia. Rather, it highlights the need for realistic expectations, independent judgement and frank communication in alliance relationships.

Post-Vietnam Exceptionalism

After Vietnam, forward school practice in Australian statecraft was submerged by exceptionalist theory. Australia adopted a defensive strategy sometimes described as 'Fortress Australia', based on continental defence and withdrawal from forward engagement.³⁰ This strategy ignored our enduring circumstances: Australia simply lacked the capacity to secure a fifth of the globe alone. Even had this strategy allocated sufficient resources to

²⁹ The first unit into both Malaya and East Timor was 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. During a 12-month tour in Malaya the battalion (which was then the only Australian ground unit deployed) had only one contact resulting in an enemy killed. During the four months of INTERFET the same battalion (then serving as part of an Australian-led multinational force that included three Australian battalions, Special Forces units and substantial Brigade-plus supporting structures) had six contacts resulting in five enemy casualties, while in the same time period the other units of the task force killed or captured several dozen militia.

³⁰ P. Dibb, 'Does Australia Need a New Defence Policy?', 2003 at <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/sdsc/viewpoint/paper_030811.pdf> [Accessed 24 August 2007].

defend our physical territory (which it did not), Australia remained economically and demographically interdependent with the rest of the world. Hence, defending our territory was a partial solution, at best, for national security. It assumed a potential enemy would need to enter our territory in order to do us harm—an assumption that did not match the reality of our circumstances as a maritime trading nation. It also did not consider what Vicki Bailey has described as the overlapping regional geographies of culture, economics, religious affiliation and physical geography, which complicate calculations of Australia's security interests.³¹ Nevertheless, the strategy emphasised self-reliance while reallocating resources from defence to social expenditure—characteristic of the exceptionalist tradition in domestic political economy³².

In the 1980s, declared strategy remained continental defence (until 1987) and then Defence of Australia. This represented an attempt to find a formula for defence in which Australia could secure its territorial area without reliance on combat forces from any ally, and was based on an analysis of Australia's enduring circumstances that was of unprecedented depth and rigour. Paul Dibb, in 1986, proposed a 'strategy of denial'³³ later renamed 'defence in depth', based on concentric circles of layered surveillance, air and naval forces operating in a 'sea-air gap' between Australia's northern coastline and insular Southeast Asia. The Army was to remain inside Australia, functioning essentially as a last line of defence (or, as some contemporary critics of the strategy described it, a Home Guard to mop up stragglers).³⁴

To be fair, many policy-makers supported this strategy primarily because the proposed alternative was pacifist neutralism.³⁵ DOA seemed the least bad option. And the policy undeniably contributed to the preservation of skills for low-intensity conflict, including the development of capabilities for regional surveillance, maritime constabulary and long-range patrolling, and platforms like the Bushranger infantry mobility vehicle, that have proven very useful in current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

But despite declared policy, and to some extent regardless of its merits, even under DOA governments actually pursued 'forward school' global engagement, including committing assets to the 1991 Gulf War, which was justified on the grounds of supporting an international environment favourable to Australia's interests. Thus the practice of statecraft showed considerable continuity, with the difference that Australia's global partnership

³¹ Vicki Bailey, forthcoming: 'Globalisation and the Australian Army', November 2004, p. 5.

³² For example, under Whitlam, land combat forces were reduced by 30% (nine battalions to six) at the same time as social welfare initiatives such as Medibank were established.

³³ Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, p. 49 ff.

³⁴ Australian Government, *The Defence of Australia*, White Paper, Canberra, AGPS, 1987, p.

31.

³⁵ Greg Sheridan, 'RAAF Chief to head defence', *The Weekend Australian*, 19 February 2005, p. 22.

was stronger during this period with the United Nations, particularly after the end of the Cold War. Although this characteristic Labor Party focus on multilateral institutions contrasted with the conservative preference for a strong national ally, both were 'forward school' rather than exceptionalist approaches, and apart from a difference of emphasis between multilateral and bilateral relationships, both positions involved remarkably similar, and logically consistent, policy settings.

Figure 2: Australian Statecraft Patterns



Thus, during the DOA period (1987-2000) Australia's stated Defence policy was aligned neither with its strategic culture, nor with the resultant 'forward school' statecraft behaviour that was actually followed in practice by successive governments.³⁶ The clearest illustration of this is the fact that during the DOA period, despite a formal policy that opposed the deployment of land forces outside Australia and its immediate neighbourhood (and which prevented the acquisition of suitable capabilities for land force expeditionary operations), Australia nevertheless committed land-based expeditionary forces to Fiji, Namibia, Cambodia, Western Sahara, Somalia, Rwanda, Bougainville (twice), Mozambique, Kuwait, East Timor and the Solomon Islands. In terms of the strategic culture model outlined earlier, DOA sat outside the behavioural statecraft parameters defined by Australian strategic culture, and was therefore bypassed by decision-makers, who continued to

³⁶ Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance*, p. 67.

follow forward school statecraft patterns. Again, this can be represented diagrammatically, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

But as we have seen, statecraft has both an internal and an external dimension, and the domestic influence of the exceptionalist school has been stronger than its (admittedly limited) influence on foreign and defence policy. Thus although seldom reflected in decisions about whether to deploy the Australian Defence Force (ADF) offshore, DOA was well reflected in domestic policies such as capability investment, basing arrangements, and budget allocations. Thus, the DOA period coincided with a sharp reduction in ADF strength and in ground and maritime power projection capabilities.³⁷

This created a mismatch between the demands placed upon the ADF (driven by external statecraft) and the resources provided (driven by domestic statecraft). As we have seen, external statecraft patterns drove repeated decisions to deploy the ADF on expeditionary tasks offshore. But domestic considerations meant that the forces that conducted these twelve expeditionary deployments were resourced, equipped and trained primarily for the direct continental defence of Australian territory. Indeed, as a report by the Joint Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade authoritatively showed, Army capabilities that could not be justified for garrison operations were stripped, despite their usefulness in operations actually being conducted.³⁸

Defence of Australia as Strategy

As the model of strategic culture and statecraft suggests, policy that does not align with strategic culture will simply not be followed in practice. The history of the DOA period, outlined above, demonstrates this admirably: DOA did not align with strategic culture, and therefore was never enacted in practice.

This does not, of itself, imply criticism of DOA as a strategy. The point is rather that the forward school reflected Australian strategic culture and enduring circumstances. Any policy—even the most perfect imaginable—that failed to align with this strategic culture would have been stillborn, as was DOA.

Nevertheless, DOA was far from perfect. It adopted a relatively narrow geographical definition of security, subordinating economic and demographic factors to 'enduring geography'. It surrendered the strategic initiative by treating the sea-air gap as a moat to be denied to an attacker in the event of

³⁷ For example, the decision not to replace the Navy's aircraft carrier capability was based, at least in part, upon a defensive theory that argued Australian maritime forces would never in future operate outside the range of land-based air cover.

³⁸ JSCFADT, *From Phantom to Force: Towards a More Effective and Efficient Army*, Canberra, Parliament of Australia, 2000.

war, rather than a maritime manoeuvre space to be exploited to our advantage in both war and peace. It did not directly acknowledge the fact that the sea-air gap is actually a sea-air-land gap containing thousands of islands, requiring maritime power projection capabilities (including the ability to control rather than merely deny sea and airspace, and to project land forces ashore). It worried neighbours, who felt threatened by a doctrine that identified military threats as coming predominantly from or through the 'archipelago to our north'.³⁹ It alienated allies who reacted with concern to some elements of its isolationist rhetoric. It used the least likely contingency—defending the Australian mainland against conventional invasion—as the primary determinant of force structure. It allocated resources to fixed garrison installations such as 'bare' air bases in northern Australia, which were of little use except in highly unlikely circumstances. It moved the bulk of the ADF into Australia's north—with negative consequences for recruitment, retention, divorce rates, equipment, and inability to use training areas that are waterlogged for significant parts of the training year. And it led to a reduction in precisely those capabilities—land, air and maritime power-projection assets—that were needed most frequently.

Ironically, decisions by successive governments to eschew "expeditionary" operations were based in part on a limited definition of expeditionary operations. Australia is about 5000 kilometres from coast to coast. Even with the ADF based in Northern Australia, in the event of an enemy lodgement in the Kimberley—the most orthodox DOA scenario—joint forces would still have needed to travel at least 1500 kilometres from the nearest permanent base to the scene of action. They would have needed to deploy from peacetime locations, transition a strategic distance, establish an operational area in a hostile environment, and conduct mobile operations at the end of a long logistic chain. By any definition, these are expeditionary operations demanding joint-force power projection capabilities. Thus, the very capabilities needed to defend continental Australia properly proved to be identical to those needed for offshore operations, rendering moot the often-claimed distinction between onshore, regional and global operations. The same logic undermines the notion that power projection capabilities are beyond Australia's resources, or less fiscally responsible than capabilities for defending the mainland: the same capabilities are needed for onshore and offshore operations.

This is especially so because 85% of the Australian population and more than 90% of key infrastructure is located within 50 kilometres of the sea, well within striking distance of sea-based forces.⁴⁰ Thus defending Australian territory is primarily a problem of amphibious and littoral power projection by

³⁹ Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ See <www.abs.gov.au> for relevant population statistics. Amphibious warfare forces typically have an inland 'reach' of up to 200 nautical miles.

joint air-land-sea forces, not land-based defence of the outback⁴¹ behind a naval screen and land-based air cover, as advocated under DOA. For a force as small as the ADF, in a continent the size of Australia, expeditionary operations are a terrain-imposed operational necessity. Where those operations occur is a political decision, not a primary driver of force structure or capability acquisition.

A further serious criticism of DOA is that it treated physical geography as a constant. Because physical geography is unchanging, the theory argued, geography is the only sound basis for long-term strategic planning. In fact, geographers agree that physical geography, let alone human or economic geography, is neither unambiguous nor unchanging.⁴² And, of course, geographical features have no intrinsic military significance. Their strategic meaning changes, depending on the political and strategic environment, the tactical situation, weapons technology and the organisation of each adversary. There is no such thing as an inherently defensible or indefensible piece of terrain: what makes a portion of the earth's surface 'defensible' involves the interaction between geography, force size, mobility and weapons technology. (Consider castle or fortress architecture: terrain that was highly defensible in the age of sail and smoothbore cannon became entirely irrelevant in the age of carrier-based aircraft and long-range missile systems, which is why Australia's coastal fortresses are tourist destinations today rather than critical lynchpins in a defensive system, as they were in the nineteenth century).

Geography matters in relative terms—in relation to technology, population, and strategic intent—not in absolute terms. It is not a constant; and treating Australia's strategic environment as if coastal geomorphology were its only constant was therefore problematic—the truly consistent element in Australian strategy was not physical geography but strategic culture, emerging partly from geography but also from history, economics and demographics, and driving a consistent 'forward school' pattern in Australian statecraft.

But the most serious criticism is that DOA focused on military, state-on-state aspects of defence, ignoring the need for integrated statecraft based on diplomatic, informational, military and economic power. A close reading of the 1987 White Paper or the 1986 Dibb Report discloses scarcely a mention of diplomacy, let alone the other instruments of statecraft such as information, or science and technology. Indeed, in the only passage addressing military support to diplomacy, the paper asserts that a 'modest

⁴¹ Army Vanguard Concept, *Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment*, 2002.

⁴² Processes such as erosion, desertification, or climate change contribute to constant change in physical geography. This change, and its influence on strategy, has long been a key source of discussion in the discipline of geopolitics. See Pascal Venier, 'The geographical pivot of history and early twentieth century geopolitical culture', *The Geographical Journal*, vol 170, no. 4 (December 2004), pp. 330-336.

military contribution in support of our more distant diplomatic interests...should be seen as a gesture of support, not as a contribution that could materially affect the outcome'.⁴³ The ADF is discussed as if its only function is to defend Australia's continental territory in the event of war. The use of military force as an instrument of statecraft, in what Michael Evans has called the 'extrinsic' role of military power, receives much less attention.⁴⁴ The supple application of military strength along with diplomacy, information and economic power to support and enable national influence is, in fact, explicitly discounted as a factor in force structure.⁴⁵

The damage done by this approach was not suffered primarily by the Defence Force. Indeed, as explained, the ADF continued to be used as an instrument of forward school statecraft, albeit with fewer resources and at greater risk. Instead, the truly damaging aspect was conceptual: in our thinking, military power became divorced from the other instruments of statecraft, as if the rational calculus of interest and influence that drove other elements of national power somehow did not apply to the military. Thus a generation of defence officials, diplomats, trade officials, intelligence officers, aid agency staffs and even military officers grew up, who did not regard the military as an intimate partner with the rest of the government in the execution of national policy. As Craig Snyder suggested at the time, it became the norm for defence policy to follow an agenda separate from, sometimes even contradictory to, foreign and broader government policy.⁴⁶ Michael Evans has noted that Foreign Minister Gareth Evans wrote approvingly of this trend, arguing that a geographically-based defence policy 'liberated Australian foreign policy' to pursue broader multilateral issues (that is, it de-coupled military considerations from broader statecraft).⁴⁷ And as Alan Dupont has argued, the DOA doctrine generated similar effects well into the first decade of this century.⁴⁸

This tendency is highlighted by a 2005 article by Paul Kelly, examining grand strategy, and how Australia can maintain its influence in the world, in which Kelly does not consider defence policy at all. The word 'defence' appears only twice, and in a list of key 'hard' power assets Kelly mentions GDP, population size and technological sophistication but not military power.⁴⁹ This is not to criticise Kelly, who is extremely well-versed in military matters and a highly perceptive strategic commentator. Rather, it is to point out that

⁴³ Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ Evans, *The Continental School of Strategy*.

⁴⁵ Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ C. Snyder, 'Australia's Pursuit of Regional Security into the 21st Century', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol 21, no. 4 (December 1988).

⁴⁷ G. Evans and B. Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1991, pp. 29-30, quoted in Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance*, p. 83.

⁴⁸ See A. Dupont, 'Transformation or Stagnation? Rethinking Australia's Defence', *Australian Security in the 21st Century Lecture*, Menzies Research Centre, 13 November 2002.

⁴⁹ Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

even in the best contemporary Australian public discourse the military dimension of statecraft has been somewhat de-emphasised, and de-coupled from its other dimensions. Thinking about military strategy has become something of a 'black art' practised mainly by specialists rather than, as it should be, an integral element in the worldview of every Australian involved in policy formulation. DOA, by divorcing defence planning from statecraft and pinning it instead to geographical 'concentric circles', was one of several factors that contributed to this state of affairs.

The fact is that armed forces are primarily an instrument of statecraft. Indeed, to the extent that military forces cease to be an instrument of broader national statecraft they have no right to exist. Such 'rogue militaries'—the Japanese Army of the 1930s or the Army of Wilhelmine Germany, for example—are dangerous to the state and its people's liberties. They also have a tendency to strategic incompetence, mastering the grammar of war but not its logic, which can only be supplied by policy.⁵⁰ In the final analysis, executing government policy—within a continuum of diplomatic, informational, military and economic influence—is what armed forces are *for*.

Grand Strategy in the 21st Century

With the publication of the 1997 Strategic Policy and the 2000 White Paper, formal defence policy began once again to align more closely with strategic culture and Australia's enduring circumstances. The tradition of depth and rigour of analysis, established by Paul Dibb's review, continued but the strategic vision of both these documents was broader and more regionally focused than under DOA. Thus, the 2000 White Paper represented a measured and well-calculated, but still very significant, departure from the continental focus of DOA. Fundamental to this change was government's recognition of the need to structure and equip the defence force for the frequent regional and infrequent global expeditionary operations that have been the norm ever since Federation. These included the deployment to East Timor in 1999, the end of which overlapped with the start of commitments further afield in the War on Terrorism.

The War on Terrorism is the most obviously new element in the 21st century strategic environment, along with the resulting new patterns of strategic behaviour by non-state actors, great powers and the United States, as the sole remaining superpower (though one whose influence has been significantly weakened by the course of events in Iraq). The fact that US policymakers believe themselves to be fighting a worldwide defensive war has significantly increased their willingness to use military action as an integral element of statecraft. This is a fundamental problem for great

⁵⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, Book 8 Ch. 6 argues that 'war has its own grammar, but not its own logic'.

powers and world institutions—the UN foremost among them—who disagree with Washington's assessment of the threat from Islamic extremism. It has also created uncertainty about the role of the United States in the world order—in the terminology of an earlier era, whether it is a *status quo* power or a revolutionary power.

For Australian statecraft, this poses issues of alliance management—maintaining objectivity and independence in our appraisal of the environment, managing relationships with other powers who may oppose US actions, and deciding to what extent we should participate in American-led collective defence. But it does not invalidate the broader current of Australian statecraft. The United States still meets our two fundamental partnership criteria of shared values and capability. Australians remain interdependent with the region and the globe: we are a democratic people fundamentally identified with the West in our own way of life, and in the minds of potential adversaries.

The long-standing trend toward globalisation is likely to continue, and to be even more influential in Australian grand strategy in the 21st century. Globalisation, along with the new technological and information tools that it makes available to non-state actors and states alike, renders it increasingly unnecessary for an adversary to enter Australia's territory in order to do us harm. Exceptionalism, with its desire to opt out of the global system and rely upon geography for protection, takes little account of the increasing interconnectedness between Australia and the global economy, culture and political system. It seems clear that globalisation will tend to reinforce our existing global interdependence so that, like all other aspects of Australian life, national security will become increasingly intertwined with global realities. For example, in today's globalised energy economy, closure of the Strait of Hormuz might have a worse, and substantially faster, impact upon Australia's economic wellbeing than closure of the Strait of Malacca. Thus any strategic concept based solely upon a geographic construct of concentric circles, where events closer to our territory, by definition, are seen as mattering more to our security, will remain poorly aligned with our circumstances. This is not to say that events closer to home do not often matter more than distant events: they often do, but for reasons based more on complex calculations of economic and political wellbeing and regional influence than solely on geographical proximity. Thus, exceptionalist policy will remain alien to our strategic culture and hence, whatever its intrinsic merit, is unlikely to be followed.

Policy, Practice and Strategic Culture

In essence, as this article has shown, the long-standing practice (as distinct from theory) of successive Australian governments has been global and regional engagement. As we have seen, this 'forward school' of statecraft has been a strong consistent pattern in Australian grand strategic behaviour

for most of the past century, and is only likely to intensify in this century under the continued influence of globalisation.

Whether one agrees with this pattern of behaviour is largely irrelevant. Its key weakness, the tendency to rely on the judgment of great-power partners, is a serious one. But the fact is, this behaviour pattern exists because it aligns with our underlying circumstances and therefore is part of our strategic culture. It thus drives practical policy decisions regardless of declaratory strategy. Hence, policies that fail to account for this strategic culture—regardless of how rational or well considered they may be—will probably be doomed to irrelevance because, like DOA, they will not be followed in practice.

The forward school has its negative side—for example, the risk of a ‘knock-on effect’ from an error by a partner. But this is an argument for greater assertiveness in alliance relationships, maintaining a supporting network of multilateral and bilateral relationships and a robust independent intelligence assessment capability, not an argument against the forward school approach *per se*. It emphasises the need for Australian leaders to bear firmly in mind Palmerston’s observation that ‘We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual and those interests it is our duty to follow’.⁵¹ As this article has argued, over time the pursuit of Australia’s interests has tended to involve us in forward engagements. But we have changed partners willingly, promptly and un sentimentally when they ceased to meet our key criteria of like-mindedness or capability. Forward engagement can only ever be a means to an end—the furthering of our own interests—not an end in itself.

This article has argued that DOA was a limited strategy that warped our application of statecraft and divorced military power from the clear-eyed pursuit of national interests. Nevertheless, supporters of DOA could argue with some justification that it is a rational response to one interpretation of physical geography, creates clear force structure criteria and encourages tighter policy discipline within the largest department of the Commonwealth government. They could also point to the usefulness of platforms—like the Bushranger infantry mobility vehicle—that were developed for DOA but have proven handy in current conflicts.

This is all true, but it is still somewhat irrelevant. DOA did not fit Australian strategic culture, as we have seen, and so it never existed in external statecraft practice, only in theory and in its impact on capability and posture (considerations driven by questions of internal political economy). Without a fundamental change in Australia’s circumstances, leading to a shift in strategic culture and changed patterns of grand strategic behaviour, merely

⁵¹ Viscount Palmerston, quoted in P.H. Liotta, ‘To Die For: National Interest and Strategic Uncertainties’, *Parameters*, vol XXX, no 2, (Summer 2000), p. 46.

producing a new defence policy could only ever be a theoretical exercise—as 20 years of ‘forward school’ practice under DOA theory demonstrated. Only with the fresh thinking of the 2000 Defence White Paper did this situation begin to change.

As we have seen, statecraft can be solely a matter of *praxis*, and there is nothing unusual (or necessarily wrong) with this. Indeed, such an approach is characteristic of Australian strategic culture. But—because of the DOA legacy, and the complex and counterintuitive nature of non-state threats—Australia probably needs a consciously articulated grand strategy, or at least a national security statement. This might perhaps say what *should* go without saying: that military force, diplomacy, economic and cultural power are intimately connected forms of influence and must be pursued in an integrated fashion. The strategy could mandate the requirement for government agencies to work together, and set parameters for each department’s contribution to overall policy. It could be brief, and need not be elaborate. But because most people in Australia’s national security establishment grew up under DOA, there remains, even towards the end of the first decade of the new century, a widespread sense of ‘business as usual’ that is unlikely to dissipate without a unified strategic review.

From this it follows that one of the first tasks of any new government, regardless of its political orientation, will be to conduct a comprehensive strategic review of Australia’s national security situation, ideally going well beyond previous practice (of producing stove-piped Defence, Foreign Affairs and Counter-Terrorism white papers) to produce a single unified national security document. It also follows that forward engagement, based on constructive interaction with larger currents in the world environment and partnership with like-minded great powers or multilateral institutions, is likely to play a key part in such a review and the future policy settings that flow from it.

Conclusion

To summarise, one of the issues any new government will have to take into account is the fact that many of the debates in Australian public life revolve around the broader issue of statecraft: defining and pursuing national objectives in their domestic and international contexts. Statecraft has both an external aspect (of diplomatic, informational, military and economic influence), and an internal aspect of political economy. A well-established model argues that statecraft flows from strategic culture rather than formal policy.

This model suggests that Australia’s enduring circumstances have contributed to a strategic culture that engenders a ‘forward school’ pattern of Australian statecraft. The forward school sees Australia’s interests as intimately connected to the wellbeing of the global environment, and

contributes to stable and secure global and regional systems in order to foster an environment conducive to our values and interests. The exceptionalist school applies the rhetoric of 'self-reliance' and the avoidance of great-power entanglement, but in practice governments of all political orientations have recognised the need for forward engagement.

Regardless of its merits, because DOA did not align with strategic culture, it was never likely to be enacted. Nevertheless, even as a strategy that only ever existed in theory, it continues to distort many Australians' thinking on defence policy and the role of military power in integrated statecraft. Moreover, as the debate over Australian statecraft in the 21st century continues, and the process of globalisation continues to erode the distinction between local, regional and global security interests, it will become increasingly clear that 'forward school' statecraft emerges from enduring elements of Australia's circumstances, and involves no inherent contradiction between regional and global focus, land and maritime power, or national and alliance interests. It is therefore likely to remain a key component in Australia's national security policy, and any future government will almost certainly need to take it into account in formulating future strategy.

Dr David Kilcullen has just returned from Baghdad, where he was senior counterinsurgency advisor, Multi-National Force Iraq. Before serving in Iraq he was chief counterterrorism strategist for the U.S. State Department. In this role he designed and led the implementation of the Regional Security Initiative, the policy framework that drives United States diplomatic efforts in the War on Terrorism. He previously served as a senior analyst in Australia's Office of National Assessments. He is a former Australian infantry officer with operational service in East Timor, Bougainville and the Middle East, service with the British Army and as an advisor with Indonesian Special Forces. He worked in the Pentagon as special adviser for counterterrorism during the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review, advised an Arabian Gulf state on counterterrorism in 2004, and was a member of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's writing team for Australia's 2004 White Paper on Terrorism. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 2000, analyses the political power-diffusion effects of guerrilla warfare on traditional societies, and involved fieldwork with members of Dar'ul Islam, the forerunner to Indonesian terrorist group Jema'ah Islamiyah. dkilcullen@hotmail.com.