Australia's
Defence White Papers by the Numbers

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An Australian Defence White Paper is analysis framed by numbers. For forty years, White Papers have been the ultimate public expression of Australian strategy and Defence understanding of the world. More than dollars and equipment, the simple statistics of Australia's seven Defence White Papers reveal meanings and mental maps. What does a word count of key countries and concepts reveal about those understandings and how they evolved across the seven White Papers? This commentary maps that mental topography from the typography.

The crudest measure is to rank countries by the number of times they're mentioned. The country count is employed by embassies to check out official statements. How often did we appear compared to everyone else? The reference count is useful for calculation and comparison. And it produces hierarchies. Apply the topography-from-typography test to the Australia Defence White Papers of the twentieth century—in 1976, 1987, 1994 and 2000—and the three White Papers of the twenty-first century, in 2009, 2013 and 2016.[1] Note that the first White Paper in 1976, in the age of typewriters, got the job done in sixty pages; all those that followed went well beyond 100 pages. The count attests to a simple and obvious fact.

The United States ranks first in Australian strategic thinking. In six out of seven papers the United States got the most White Paper mentions. The single exception to the top-ranking rule was 1976 when Australia fretted the United States was departing after the Vietnam defeat. On the 1976

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[1] The seven Defence White Papers are: Department of Defence, *Australian Defence* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1976); Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia, 1987* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1987); Department of Defence, *Defending Australia: Defence White Paper 1994* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994); Department of Defence, *Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000); Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009); Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013); Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).
Subsequent references to the White Papers are included as in-text citations with date and page number. This departure from the normal *Security Challenges* style reflects the nature of the article.

numbers, Australia was more worried about Indonesia and the Soviet Union than reassured by the alliance.

United States

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
12	62	60	43	80	86	129

China: China throbs powerfully today giving worrying answers to what were once only questions. The cautious yet upbeat tone for the final quarter of the twentieth century was set by the 1976 paper:

> There has been a major re-assessment of China. China's earlier isolation has been much modified and it has entered into widespread relationships with other governments. It plays an important role in world affairs. We welcome the opportunity to develop our relations with China; but we recognise the important differences in our political attitudes. (1976, p. 1)

In the 1987 White Paper, China dropped to four mentions (two of them on maps). The 2000 White Paper was when Australia stepped beyond three decades of relative optimism and considered the possibility of conflict. China's relationship with the other big players was "the most critical issue for the security of the Asia Pacific" (2000, p. ix). The 2009 White Paper was a not-so-polite rendering of Kevin Rudd's private description of himself to Hillary Clinton as "a brutal realist on China".[2] For the first time, China got more mentions than Indonesia. Even when discussing the United States, the thinking now is often about China. Julia Gillard's 2013 Defence White Paper expressed this in its Strategic Outlook chapter, with one section headed 'The United States and China'—the 2016 White Paper does the same. Today, you can't have one without the other.

China

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
10	4	20	13	34	65	64

Indonesia: While China has been a slow build, Indonesia always ranks. What is striking over the seven papers is how the temperature of Australian thinking on Indonesia jumps all over the place. This is the roller coaster relationship—always important, often problematic. The first White Paper noted how the two neighbours have "weathered occasional sharp differences" while stating the abiding geographic reality that any military threat will come from or through the archipelago:

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[2] 'Wikileaks—US Embassy Cables: Hillary Clinton Ponders US Relationship with Its Chinese "Banker"', *The Guardian*, 5 December 2010, <www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/199393>

> The Indonesian archipelago, together with Papua New Guinea, would be an important factor in any offensive military strategy against Australia. This consideration alone gives Australia an enduring interest in the security and integrity of the Indonesian Republic from external influence. (1976, p. 3)

The 1987 Paper saw a stable Indonesia as an important factor in Australian security and offered the positive judgement that Indonesia "forms a protective barrier to Australia's northern approaches" (1987, p. 15). The 1994 Paper said the stability and cohesion delivered by Suharto after the turbulence of the 1950s and 1960s had "done much to ensure that the demands on Australia's defence planning have remained manageable" (1994, p. 87). The paper looked to a day when Suharto was no longer in power with a hint of trepidation: "Indonesia will undergo an important leadership transition at a time of rapid economic growth and social change." (1994, p. 10)

By 2000, Australia couldn't repeat the claim in the 1994 Paper that the "defence relationship with Indonesia is our most important in the region" (1994, p. 87). Suharto had fallen, Australia had led the intervention to save the East Timor vote and Jakarta had torn-up the 1995 security treaty negotiated by Keating and Suharto. The 2000 Paper worried that Indonesia faced a series of challenges "at a critical point in its history" (2000, p. 20). Picking up the pieces, Australia would work to get "a new defence relationship" with Indonesia (2000, p. xi). The chance of "adverse developments" in Indonesia threatening the whole region had to be expressed: "While not regarding developments of such seriousness as likely, Australia needs to recognise the possibility that, were they to occur, Australia's security could be affected" (2000, p. 20).

In 2009, Indonesia got the least number of mentions since 1987. The relief at Indonesia's "remarkable gains in the past decade" was tempered by gloom about where Indonesia's new democracy could go awry. Australia fretted that "a weak, fragmented Indonesia beset by intractable communal problems, poverty and failing state institutions, would potentially be a source of threat to our own security and to Indonesia's other neighbours" (2009, p. 35). Nearly as bad as failure, "an authoritarian or overly nationalistic regime in Jakarta would also create strategic risks for its neighbours" (2009, p. 35). The shift from Kevin Rudd's 2009 Paper to Julia Gillard's 2013 Paper brightened the mood. Indonesia was back as "our most important regional strategic relationship". The partnership was "strong" and "continues to deepen and broaden in support of our significant shared interests" (2013, p. 11). The 2016 White Paper called the relationship "vital" (2016, p. 59).

Indonesia

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
20	13	25	33	20	32	32

Papua New Guinea: If Indonesia is the roller coaster, the same fundamental questions on PNG recur in various guises in all seven White Papers. What must we do? What can we do?

Papua New Guinea

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
13	18	10	29	11	7	24

Japan: In the twentieth-century White Papers, Japan was the biggest trade partner. In the twenty-first century, Japan's trajectory is to become a strategic partner in the trilateral with the United States. In the 2016 White Paper, Japan for the first time gets more mentions than Indonesia.

Japan

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
11	3	14	14	18	20	36

India: The 1987 Paper mentioned the Indian Ocean nine times while India itself got zip. The astigmatism in the way Canberra and New Delhi viewed each other is tracked in the twentieth-century White Papers. This century, India's numbers zoomed. Can't have the Indo-Pacific as the defining strategic frame without India in the picture.

India/India Ocean

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
3	9	8	11	32	68	51

Soviet Union/Russia: The bear fades from view. A set of prosaic numbers chart a profound shift in Australia's understanding of power and what will matter in Asia.

USSR/Russia

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
23	16	3	8	2	6	4

Geography

After the country count, turn to the geographic constructs that Defence uses to describe what it sees. In the first two White Papers, Defence ignored the word 'Asia' as a single construct, preferring South East Asia and North East Asia (or North Asia as it has become of late). In the 1987 Paper there was one reference to the Asian mainland. The Defence hardheads didn't think there was an Asia system worth considering (a criticism today levelled at Defence's concept du jour, the Indo-Pacific). As the immediate

neighbourhood, Southeast Asia always gets more mentions than North Asia. The big actors in North Asia are so distinctive they demand individual treatment. The centripetal effects of ASEAN consolidate the idea of South East Asia, while North Asia tends to the centrifugal.

In 1994, Defence got a big dose of the Paul Keatings—Asia was everywhere in the document. Defence got the Asia-Pacific memo, but never wanting to be slavish about following fashions elsewhere in the bureaucracy rendered it twenty-seven times as 'Asia and the Pacific' and three times as Asia-Pacific. By 2000, Asia Pacific didn't even need a hyphen, and it got more mentions than South East and North East Asia combined. In Kevin Rudd's White Paper, 'Asia Pacific' was in the document title ('Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030') but not in the text. 'Asia Pacific' was at the foot of every page in 2009 as part of the title, but the usage appeared only three times in the text (twice for Rudd's vain bid to create an Asia Pacific Community). The 2013 paper also had three Asia Pacific mentions; by 2016 it got a donut.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Indo-Pacific has replaced the Asia-Pacific as the reigning geographic construct of Australian Defence policy. And Defence has had the Indo-Pacific embraced by Labor and Coalition governments in successive White Papers. Australia is widening its geo-strategic lens. The nation with its own continent has an Indian Ocean coast as well as a Pacific coast. Yet the adoption of the Indo-Pacific is also an intensely Canberra tale, reflecting a Defence view of the world. The Indo-Pacific replaced the Asia-Pacific as Defence waged bureaucratic push-back against Canberra's adoption of the idea of the Asian Century during the Gillard government. In the 2013 White Paper, Defence managed to give ten mentions to Julia Gillard's 'Australia in the Asian Century' White Paper;[3] this was necessary Defence obeisance, not obedience, to the Asian Century.

Rather than 'Asian Century', Defence preferred the Indo-Pacific because it was explicit about the continuing US presence in the system. The Asian Century label gives no specific acknowledgement to the role of the United States, straying close to China's 'Asia run by Asians' language. The Asia Century can be read as cutting across the understandings offered by either the Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific. Refer to the country count to recall where the United States ranks in Australia's strategic universe to see why this caused conniptions at Russell HQ. Australia, Japan and plenty of others built the Asia-Pacific model because it gives an explicit role to the United States. It aligns Australia's strategic and economic interests. To shift from the Asia-Pacific Century to the Asian Century is to reframe the power

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[3] Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australia in the Asian Century: White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

equation and the hierarchy. All this matters for politics and government, for bureaucracy and the chattering classes.

South East Asia

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
11	20	25	31	29	39	53

North East Asia/North Asia

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
5	0	4	6	7	6	17

Asia Pacific

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
0	0	30	44	3	3	0

South China Sea

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
0	3	1	1	0	6	9

South Pacific/South-West Pacific

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
5	30	13	10	18	33	21

Indo-Pacific

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
1	0	0	0	0	58	68

On winning office in 2013, Tony Abbott quickly discarded Gillard's 'Asian Century'. Gillard's Asian Century White Paper got the flick while a key thought in Gillard's Defence White Paper lived to serve another government. The Indo-Pacific construct is a continuity linking Labor's 2013 White Paper and the Coalition's 2016 remake. The figures show just how new it is. The 1976 White Paper used the term Indo-Pacific once, but then it fled the scene for three decades. After zero appearances in four White Papers, the Indo-Pacific was everywhere in 2013 and did a repeat performance in 2016. Defence embraces the Indo-Pacific as the defining geographic expression of strategy and seeks a new India dimension.

Ideas

Now to the themes and memes that flow through the seven White Papers. Australia's defence thinkers are ever worried about self-reliance and order. The Rs reign: rules and self-reliance and region. On the order front, the 1976 White Paper described the demise of colonialism producing "a new world order" (1976, p. 1), while the Communist victories in Indo-China made for an uncertain regional future (1976, p. 2). The White Paper said the

United States wanted "a peaceful and stable world order" while USSR ideology sought "disruptive political change" (1976, p. 4). The 2016 White Paper worries repeatedly that the old order is cracking. The United States is still seen as central to a stable world order. One guess about the identity of the big player suspected of seeking disruptive change (hint: starts with *C*, ends with *a*—not Cuba—and it got sixty-four mentions in the 2016 Paper). The seven White Papers track the rise and fall of the stated commitment to self-reliant defence of Australia.

The phrase 'self-reliance' was put at the heart of Australian strategic thinking by one of the great Canberra mandarins, Arthur Tange, Defence Secretary from 1970 to 1979. He described "self-reliance" as "the nearest I ever got to launching a political idea" to detach Australian policy statements from dependence on the United States:

> I wanted to have self-reliance recognised as having a necessary place in the posture of an independent self-respecting country. While in later decades the concept became regularly used in the language of all political parties, I believe I was the first to make it part of the language of discussion. Much defence policy lies in the mind; and what may seem no more than a slogan can be made a powerful directing influence on more material matters. In a talk with the editor of a Sydney periodical [Donald Horne of the *Bulletin*], I tried out the idea that this concept might provide an escape from the sterile political argument between 'forward' and 'continental' defence.[4]

Donald Horne described that same meeting:

> Arthur Tange came to my office, sat in a remote chair, forcibly immobile, like a statue of a nineteenth-century statesman in a frock coat, and asked me if I had a new phrase that could replace 'Forward Defence'. '*Fortress Australia?*'—*never.* '*Self-reliance?*'—*perhaps.*[5]

In the 1976 White Paper, 'self reliance' or 'self reliant' appeared in the text only six times (once as a heading). This was enough to make it "seminal".[6] The number of mentions is not the only measure of the importance of a key idea—although the usual White Paper habit is instruction and injunction by multiple iterations. Say the same thing repeatedly so everyone gets the point. The full rhetorical flowering of the idea that Australia could defend itself came in Labor's 1987 White Paper. Australian 'self-reliance' got forty-three mentions and 'self-reliant' defence got a further thirteen goes. By 1994, self-reliance/reliant was worth twenty-four mentions. The Cold War was gone. Asia would "increasingly" determine its own affairs and "a new

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[4] Tange, Arthur, *Defence Policy-Making: A Close-up View, 1950-1980—A Personal Memoir*, edited by Peter Edwards (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), p. 40; <press.anu.edu.au/ publications/series/strategic-and-defence-studies-centre-sdsc/defence-policy-making> [Accessed July 2016].
[5] Ibid., p. 48 fn 24 (original emphasis).
[6] Dibb, Paul, 'DWP 2016: The Return of Geography', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 1 March 2016, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/dwp-2016-the-return-of-geography/> [Accessed 23/7/2016].

strategic architecture will evolve" (1994, p. 8). The new architecture was supposed to deliver order. In John Howard's 2000 White Paper, self-reliance was given due weight with eight mentions. In Kevin Rudd's 2009 Paper self-reliance was worth fifteen goes, while Julia Gillard gave it seven. The 2016 White Paper salutes 'self-reliant' twice.

Self-reliance may remain a central concept; it just doesn't get referred to as much. By contrast, the number of times the United States gets mentioned keeps growing (from 12 times in the 1976 Paper to 129 in 2016). Arthur Tange might lament that Australia has trouble throwing off old addictions to focus on the self in self-reliance. John Howard's 2000 White Paper is notable for delivering both process and cash. Howard created the National Security Committee of Cabinet and it put in the hours on the 2000 Paper. The Howard government boasted it was "the most comprehensive process of ministerial-level decision making about Australia's defence policy for many years" (2000, p. v). And a big difference from all previous White Papers—the promised cash arrived in the years that followed.

As self-reliance faded in usage, the need for rules rose. Kevin Rudd's Strategic Interests chapter had a section headed, 'A Stable, Rules-Based Global Security Order'. There were eleven 'rules-based' mentions. Julia Gillard's 2013 Paper matched it with a dozen references to the need for rules, while its heading was 'A Stable, Rules-Based Global Order'. Come to 2016 and 'rules' is used sixty-four times—forty-eight of these in the formulation 'rules-based global order'. Rules turns up in three section headings: 'The rules-based global order', 'A stable Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based global order', and 'Australia's interests in a rules-based global order'. Talk about hammering the point. And the point is fear of what is fraying. 'Rules-based global order' is a big phrase to cover such disparate forces as jihadism and China's rise. Mostly, though, it's about China. The 'rules-based' mantra is another expression of the thought that these days when Australia talks about the United States, often it's really thinking about China. As the repeated message of the 2016 White Paper, 'rules-based' is the meme for an Australia proclaiming a bigger defence budget, driven by a region throbbing with political nervousness, diplomatic neuralgia and strategic angst.

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