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ADAPTING TO POLY-CRISIS:

A Proposed Australian National Security Strategy

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RSL Australia

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"If that's where you want to go, I wouldn't have started from here."
   - *Lewis Carroll (paraphrased), Alice in Wonderland*

ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

We face a poly-crisis involving overlapping demands relating to changing climate; cleaner, greener industry; stretched health services; deepening geopolitical shifts; accelerating technological transformation, increasingly autonomous systems; and growing challenges in governing cosmopolitan societies. War, famine and disease, daily in the headlines, make for an uncertain future while politicians struggle to rise above the tyranny of the urgent. This paper argues that in response An Australian National Security Strategy is needed to harness national resources, mindful of desired ends, available means and ways open to achieve them. The desired ends must address physical safety, social and educational needs as well as our liberal, democratic, and inclusive values, while seeking to pursue health and happiness.

The means to achieve this include the nation's geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, population, character, morale, quality of government, and quality of diplomacy. These national assets are significant, yet finite, requiring careful stewardship. Efficiently and effectively using the means available to achieve the desired ends involves reconciling the nation's history (largely Anglo-European, yet cosmopolitan) with its geography (an ancient, island continent, on the edge of Asia). Fear, honour and interests shape a country's foreign, trade and security policy, not least for Australia and its neighbours and partners.

Australian governments tend to weigh up crisis response choices on three criteria: (1) proximity and necessity (the closer, the more pressing a response); (2) alliance and regional partner concerns (with risks and benefits); and (3) risk tolerance. With challenges growing in frequency and severity, a substantial national response is required. Inter-disciplinary work is helping on some emerging challenges. Balancing risks and rewards is key to fostering a resilient society.

An incentivised scheme for national and community service would help ensure critical response organisations are adequately crewed. The scheme for Australian volunteers to work internationally could also be expanded, notably in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Working with Pacific partners is key to alleviate suffering, strengthen security and stability and further Australia's interests. A grand compact for shared governance, should be implemented, designed for local conditions and building on the Pacific Island Forum.

Collaboration with the consensus-constrained Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has its uses and limitations – including over the Myanmar crisis. A sub-regional governance and security cooperation body could sweeten regional ties and address festering security concerns.

This framework requires further consultation on (a) the challenges, (b) Australia's national power, and (c) a plan to formulate ways to use the means available to achieve desired ends. That plan must account for the nation's history and its geography, its cosmopolitan composition, established security and economic ties, and shared interests with its neighbours, and traditional security partners and allies.

MEGA TRENDS

Australian Defence Strategy has been the topic of discussion in various forms over the years. David Horner, in *High Command*, captured the essence of Australia's attempts at formulating wartime strategy at the time of the nation's greatest crisis to date: in the war in the Pacific. Tom Millar, in the mid-1960s wrote *Australia's Defence*. Paul Dibb contributed in the mid-1980s with his *Defence of Australia*. More recently, and echoing Millar's work, Dean, Fruehling and Taylor edited *Australia's Defence: Towards a New Era* which noted that the rise of China and the economic integration in the Indo-Pacific presents a complex mix of challenges and opportunities requiring a fresh appraisal. Adam Lockyer in *Australia's Defence Strategy: Evaluating Alternatives for a Contested Asia* argued in 2017 that transformational times have produced a smorgasbord of alternatives for policy makers.

Official national security pronouncements are now some years old. In December 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made the *First National Security Statement to the Parliament*, outlining a plan for a fairer, stronger and more secure nation. This covered the matter well but fell short in its implementation. His successor, Julia Gillard, launched *A Strategy for Australia's National Security* that built on the 2008 statement, stressing cyber security concerns and the need to ensure that the Defence Force, police, diplomats, border protection personnel and intelligence agencies "continue to work cohesively together".

A decade would pass without a fresh national security strategy. Instead, we were left with departmental policy papers. The 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* ,for instance, observed that Australia had to *c*hart a clear course at a time of rapid change in order to pursue its interests in a more competitive, but also interconnected and interdependent world. I consider this to be Australia's Foreign Policy Plan B. What one does when confidence in the principal ally is shaken is reach out for other forms of networks and assurances across as many economic, security and other fronts as possible. That approach, by and large, has endured, and manifests in close engagement with regional bodies including the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the more recently formed arrangements including the Quadrilateral partnership (the Quad) with India, Japan and the USA, and the trilateral technical agreement with the UK and US known as AUKUS.

More recently, *Defence Strategic Update of 2020* outlined strategic objectives to shape Australia's strategic environment, to deter actions against its interests and respond with credible military force when required. Similarly, the *Defence Strategic Review of 2023* set the agenda 'for ambitious, but necessary, reform to Defence's posture and structure'. It made the case for greater investment in Defence, and then set the funding envelope to achieve this well into the future, although to date the government has struggled to deliver the necessary funding. With the release of the *National Defence Strategy* in April 2024, the government has committed to follow through in principle on many of the DSR priorities, yet has chosen to do so by readjusting internal defence priorities rather than significantly boosting funding. The result is a mixed message to the Australian people about the gravity of the challenges and the urgency of our response.

Calls are growing for a broader, all-encompassing national security strategy which addresses fundamental questions raised by Rory Medcalf, Head of the ANU's National Security College, of unpreparedness for strategic trouble ahead. This is becoming urgent. This was also highlighted by a recent CSIRO report identifying seven global megatrends:

1.   **Adapting to a changing climate:** The protection of livelihoods, infrastructure and people's quality of life as the climate changes.

2. **Leaner, cleaner, and greener**: The global push to reach net zero and beyond, protect biodiversity and use resources efficiently.
3. **The escalating health imperative**: The promotion of health in the face of rising demand, demographic ageing, emerging diseases, and unhealthy lifestyles.
4. **Geopolitical shifts**: The increase in efforts to ensure global stability, trade and economic growth.
5. **Diving into digital**: The rapidly growing digital and data economy.
6. **Increasingly autonomous**: The rise of artificial intelligence and advanced autonomous systems to enhance productivity and outputs across all industries.
7. **Unlocking the human dimension**: The growing importance of diversity, equity and transparency in business, policy and community decision making.

WAR, FAMINE, DISEASE.

The CSIRO mega trends model is instructive and points to what others have described as a poly-crisis. The essence of the trends can be distilled further into four categories. This distillation follows the work on the internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats Australia faces in *A Geostrategic SWOT Analysis for Australia* (summarised in the following section).

AN ASSESSMENT USING SWOT ANALYSIS

The *Geostrategic SWOT Analysis for Australia* identifies the turbulence of Australian politics associated with short-term political cycles, 24/7 mainstream and social media that has robbed Australian politics of the space for deeper reflection. Yet these times call for the nation to address opportunities and threats, mindful of internal strengths and weaknesses. In the age of clickbait, short attention spans and overflowing email inboxes, there is a tendency to focus on the challenges that demand immediate attention, leading to the tyranny of the urgent. In weighing up the

A Geostrategic SWOT Analysis for Australia

Strengths (internal)
- natural **resources**
- **Strong** economy
- Domestic **Political stability** & rule of law
- **Educated** workforce
- **Multicultural** society
- Boutique, **honed** & hi-tech **ADF**
- **Island continent** – no shared land borders/disputes
- Leverage from **US hi-tech**, Intel & interoperability

Opportunities (external)
- **South Pacific**: climate, resource & social challenges provide opening for greater Australian leadership, alongside New Zealand
- **ASEAN**: regional and sub-regional appetite for closer Australian engagement & investment
- **NE-Asia**: trade growth opportunities: ROK, Japan, PRC
- **Indian Ocean**: Growing ties to India and beyond
- **ROW**: NATO; UK, France, Germany, Canada interest in Aust & Indo-Pacific
- **USA** – Australia's Principal Ally – Demonstration effect
- **Antarctica & Southern Ocean**

Weaknesses (internal)
- **Complacency** about security & our place in the world
- **Infrastructure pressures & Uneven pop'n distro**-SE-Aust
- **Oil Refinery fuel dependency**
- **Power vulnerabilities** & Underdev'd solar/nuclear/hydro power
- **Cyber vulnerabilities** & dependence
- **Limited sovereign manufacturing capacity**

Threats (external)
- foreign **interference**
- **Cyber attack** – industrial, military state & non-state actors
- **US** transactional **retreat** from ideational leadership & political dysfunction
- Religiously & Politically motivated **violence** at home/abroad
- Conventional +/or thermonuclear **WAR** –
- Increased **environmental challenges**
- **Transnational security concerns**
- Large scale **unregulated people movement**
- **Breakdown in relations with Indonesia**
- **Pacific fishing stocks challenges**
- **Diminished bio-diversity & pandemics**

Australian National University

implications of this study, one must be realistic about the nation's strengths and weaknesses.

At the risk of sounding Shakespearean, we suffer from the weaknesses of our strengths. For example, the nation's resources endowment is a strength, but its dependence on resource exports is a potential weakness. Similarly, the US alliance is a strength, but dependence on the United States could be a weakness in certain circumstances. Likewise, ASEAN's success hitherto in Southeast Asia has been an asset, but its fragility in the face of internal and external pressures also could be a weakness. Australia's internal strengths may not be as great or permanent as we had believed, and the internal weaknesses may be more insidious than we have chosen to acknowledge so far. In the meantime, the opportunities are spectacular and the threats greater than ever.

Regrettably, Australia's capacity to mobilise a coherent response to these challenges, appears weak at the moment. This trend appears to be affecting many countries in "The West". In the past, a deeper reflection on the internal strengths and weaknesses may not have mattered so much, with decades of unbroken economic growth, but the nation can no longer afford to think that way. The strengths are more problematic, and the weaknesses are more pressing. Australian power is diminishing in relative terms and the nation needs to work hard to keep up, running just to stay still. In the meantime, the domestic political environment, designed to handle short-term problem solving for operational crises, appears ill-suited to handling the longer-term strategic challenges. A bleak assessment of this would suggest we are on a mission to find things that divide us rather than find things and do things that bring us together. Something has to change.

Meanwhile, the challenges identified cover the physical, environmental, economic, military, territorial and security domains. In the international security context, focusing on the major power dynamics is not enough: an unprecedentedly hard and thoughtful look at the neighbourhood, beyond regional stereotypes and a forensic examination of specific bilateral ties and regional concerns is overdue. There is a need to consider the challenges highlighted here, to explore them and develop plans in response, drawing on the whole range of our national resources, rather than relying solely on those people inside the bureaucracy with government security clearances. As this paper shows, a SWOT analysis helps to offer clarity in these uncertain times and points to key components of a strategic roadmap for the nation and its neighbourhood. It identifies important issues for policymakers to focus on, and the suitability of the means and ways for achieving the desired ends. This analysis highlights the imperative for Australia to pay more attention to its region and to be more self-reliant. In my book, *[The Australian Army: From Whitlam to Howard](#)*, I identified what determines government expectations of the use of military force. I found that three main factors influence these expectations: proximity of a threat to Australia versus the need to participate, alliance and regional partner expectations management, and the government's risk tolerance.

Following the crises in Bougainville, East Timor and Solomon Islands at the turn of the millennium, Australia then spent almost a generation providing niche military and aid contributions far away while inconsistently engaging sporadically where there are major issues of concern in its own neighbourhood. Yet close to home, perhaps in the near future, the nation may have to commit substantial resources to lead a coalition of participating forces, organisations, agencies and countries with whom Australian authorities are not familiar with leading or even working alongside. This could be in response to an environmental catastrophe, a regional crisis or other issues requiring an Australian-led response, collaborating, for instance, with, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, or Malaysia. Should the requirement involve an adversarial state with advanced weapon systems, Australia's defence force lacks the resilience or size to absorb a significant blow, let alone

multiple deployments, rotations and concurrency – a prospect that appears more likely than it has been in generations.

The ADF must be equipped, prepared and postured to address a range of security challenges this country faces. Perhaps for the first time in more than half a century, it needs to grow beyond its standard three regular force combat brigades, 100 combat aircraft and dozen or so warships, to include a surge in AI-enabled equipment, uncrewed vehicles and sensors, and enhanced space and cyber capabilities. Some initiatives are underway, including the Navy's Surface Fleet Review, which led to the announcement of plans to more than double the fleet from 12 major surface combatant warships. But many questions remain, including over how these new vessels will be crewed.

VENN DIAGRAM: FOUR MUTUALLY REINFORCING CHALLENGES
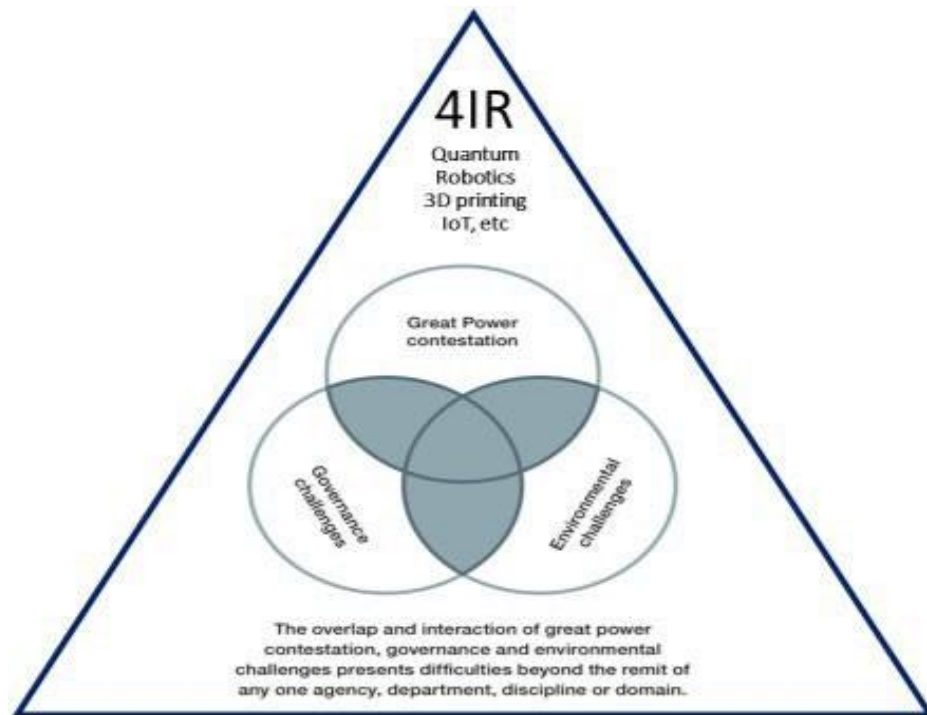
This attempt at mapping a strategy for Australia builds on the four-category model pictured above and described below. It is written with an eye to the challenging and complex circumstances Australia faces and includes mutually reinforcing challenges:

1.   **Great power contestation** is intensifying, along with unrestricted competition in the legal, media and psychological domains;
2.   **Looming environmental catastrophes**, including spikes in storms, floods, fires, sea surges, and pandemics;
3.   **Governance challenges**, including human trafficking and drug smuggling, terrorism, the breakdown of law and order, and civil war in places, combine to further complicate the management of a crisis or crises, all the while destabilising our societies; and
4.   **The Fourth Industrial Revolution**, or digital revolution, including the Internet of Things, 3D printing, quantum computing, robotics and autonomous systems, and all things cyber, which is accelerating the 'poly-crisis'.

STRATEGOS: ENDS, WAYS, MEANS

With so much to contemplate, strategies are in vogue these days. Strategy, as Dr Andrew Carr explains, is about problem solving; it includes diagnosis of a complex problem and proposal of a solution. Strategic plans are produced by government and non-government bodies, institutions, schools and industries. But the word can be mis-used. Its origins spring from the ancient Greek word, *strategos*, or the art of generalship, but it has come to be used as a catch-all term for statements of intent.

In its original sense, generalship meant grappling with an adversary and with uncertainty. It also meant the application of national power, drawing on art and science, to harness limited means to pursue clear objectives (an end state), by applying them to achieve the envisioned ends. In short, it involved an assessment and applications of ends, ways and means.

Ends: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In weighing up what to prioritise and emphasise as the ends for a national strategy, let us start with the basics. American psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote in 1943 that human needs can be arranged hierarchically, forming a virtual pyramid, with physiological needs the most basic, followed by physical safety, survival and more creative and intellectual self-actualisation needs at the top. Critics may see Maslow's model as having limitations, but it remains useful as a framing device. This model can be applied at a national level, to prioritise national endeavours in formulating *An Australian National Security Strategy*.

Physiological needs include access to food, water, air, shelter, clothing and reproduction. Without these, the human species doesn't survive. We address these through stable food production and distribution; housing (including construction industries), civic infrastructure projects (for water, sewage, energy management, etc), commercial enterprises (for clothing manufacture, distribution and sales). Strains are showing over society's ability to meet several of these concerns, which can't be ignored for a cosmopolitan society like Australia to be resilient.

In Australia, safety and security are often taken for granted but they are crucial for survival. We build institutions to manage these challenges for us; military forces for external threats, police forces for domestic security threats, fire, emergency, ambulance and hospital services for accidents or threats from naturally occurring events (floods, fires, pandemics, etc); financial services (for managing our wealth and enabling trusted transactions); and industrial capacity to supply these with necessary support. Many of these are currently under significant strain.

Social needs are met by friendships, romantic attachments, family ties, social and community groups, churches and other civil society organisations. These are essential to avoid depression, anxiety and loneliness – issues faced by a growing number of people who seem to be more connected to devices and avatars that to other humans.

Next rung up the hierarchical pyramid is the need for esteem – the need for appreciation and respect. This need becomes more pronounced once the previous three levels of need are being met. For this we rely on elementary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions (universities and vocational colleges) that reward achievement with recognition and provide entry credentials to society and the workplace. Beyond that, government institutions and corporations reward accomplishments with pay and status and a sense of belonging. In a more fractious and divided society, these mechanisms are fraying, with increasing

disagreement over what merits esteem. The polarisation of politics, and distrust of institutions reflects the fractures.

At the peak are the needs for self-actualisation, whereby one's talents, capabilities and potentialities are able to flourish. This is reinforced by a society that acknowledges and rewards excellence with community and national honours and public acclaim. Maslow in the 1970s would add to the hierarchy, by including three additional categories: cognitive, aesthetic and transcendence needs.

These steps are all vulnerable to challenge, be it from the environment (natural or human-triggered disaster); governance challenges (including terrorism, smuggling and breakdowns in law and order), great power contestation (international crises or wars), and the accelerating effect of the fourth industrial revolution, causing unprecedented disruptions to industry and society. These effects are considered further below.

In summary, the ends for *An Australian National Security Strategy,* must enable Australians to have their basic survival and psychological needs met, and their higher order needs satisfied. Australian values nowadays are associated with a coherent society that espouses liberal, democratic and increasingly cosmopolitan and predominantly English-speaking characteristics. There is some doubt emerging over how inclusive and respectful it may be, and how able, or unable, it is likely to be to unite around a common cause when necessary, in a crisis. How to do that is addressed in the following sections of the paper. Now to consider the means for *An Australian National Security Strategy.*

Means: Elements of National Power

In reflecting on the means upon which a nation can draw, it is worth examining the model developed by Hans Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations* (1948). He identified nine elements of national power which have enduring relevance: geography, natural resources, industrial capacity, military preparedness, population, national character, national morale, quality of government, and quality of diplomacy. This paper applies them in the Australian context.

Geography: Australia ranks sixth globally in geographical size, with the third largest marine jurisdiction in the world. The country spans an entire continent, covering 7.7 million square kilometres, with an even larger Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 10 million square kilometres and a coastline of 34,000 kilometres. Australia's major strategic ally, the United States, is 12,000km away, while its major trading partners in Northeast Asia are over 5,000km from Darwin. The ancestral roots of most Australians lie in Europe. Yet today, almost one-third of its citizens were born in countries across Asia and beyond, including India, China, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. While facing no immediate threats along its borders, its distance from traditional allies in Europe and North America induced what Allan Gyngell described as *Fear of Abandonment.* Conversely, close alliance ties also generate a certain fear of entrapment. In formulating security ties and responses to international collaboration to crises, governments must take these constraints into account.

*Natural Resources***:** Australia is still the lucky country in that it is a net food exporter, one of the most food secure nations in the world and Australia's natural resources make it perhaps the most megadiverse country in the world. It exports 70 per cent of agricultural production and imports about 11 per cent. Australia's level of food security is the envy of the world. Australia is also the world's largest iron ore producer and ranks third globally for black and brown coal reserves. Australia's onshore gas resources account for around 20 per cent of national energy supply and is expected to meet both domestic and overseas demand for

another 40 years. Australia also has over a third of the world's known uranium resources. Australia also accounts for 12 percent of world thorium production. This makes Australia an economic powerhouse.

Australia is an advanced economy that imports much of its manufactured goods. Indeed, it even now imports all its printer paper. This in part explains why, as the Australian Naval Institute points out, Australia is the fifth largest user of shipping in the world. As such, Australia is vulnerable to disruptions in global supply chains for many essentials to maintain the economy, including refined petroleum.

Australia has an enviable range of rare earth minerals. There is the potential for Australia to convert the nation's endowment of natural resources into greater international influence by moving from a peripheral to a higher, more central position in the global economic value chain. Efforts are underway to accelerate this process. The question is why has Australia not done this already? This paper earlier mentioned national weaknesses and strengths. There is a danger that being so superbly endowed with natural resources has encouraged Australians to treat their nation as a mine and a quarry with little regard to the future or the fact that even the most generous resource endowment is not limitless.

Industrial Capacity: Furthermore, Australia's endowment with natural resources and its proximity to growing Asian economies, have reduced the incentive for Australians to focus on the technological innovation and productivity growth experienced in other OECD countries. Australia largely has been following an extract and export model, reliant on emissions intensive commodities. Reconciling the pressures for greater fuel efficiency and carbon neutral industrial output is creating a significant tension between our economic and political aspirations. This manifests in difficult to reconcile priorities of different parts of society. Since the global shock of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the limits of a just-in-time economics and the added shock of sudden and significant Chinese economic sanctions, a renewed sense of needing to be resilient has emerged. Somethings are required not just in time, but just in case.

Military Preparedness: For Australia, military preparedness in defence of a continent covering ten per cent of the world's landmass is an acute challenge, particularly given it has less than 0.3 percent of the world's population. Recruitment shortfalls and personnel retention challenges, however, have resulted in only a boutique defence force for Australia – one intended largely as a niche contributor to coalition operations abroad. Australia's geography and its maritime approaches, notably the key sea lines of communication between Australia and its major trading partners, have also historically offered defence planners the luxury of assuming a ten-year strategic warning time for a major conventional attack. Today, grey-zone tactics—including economic coercion, espionage, foreign interference, and cyber-attacks—amount to a major threat to national security, leaving the prospect of high-intensity conflict affecting Australia and its regional partners less remote than in the past, be it over Korea, the South China Sea, Taiwan or elsewhere.

Reflecting both its limited industrial capacity and military preparedness, Australia is an outlier amongst G20 countries in having a small local defence industry. It usually rates about third among these countries in the value of its arms imports. It will likely top the list as the trilateral AUKUS program gains traction, however.

Australia's alliance with the United States also remains a major source of influence. Indeed, Australia's own influence with key regional partner nations in the Pacific and Southeast Asia is, to a large extent, predicated on Australia's access to and interoperability with US technology and intelligence. The most prominent example of this is the Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap. Furthermore, lessons from previous military commitments in the Middle East have contributed to a more honed force which is now increasingly focused on its region.

Longstanding but marginal public criticism over the alliance centres on ill-founded fears of entrapment due to US adventurism. Such critics look to a Taiwan scenario, suggesting the US would trigger a war there. This view unduly discounts a rational US desire to retain access and influence, while knowing it cannot be assured of winning in a war over Taiwan, and therefore needing to focus instead on bolstering its military capabilities to enhance deterrence.

From warfighting to humanitarian and disaster relief operations, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) serves as a prominent and powerful instrument of national power that can be applied in pursuit of Australian foreign policy objectives. Yet, mutually reinforcing threats from climate change, pandemics, rapid regional military modernisation, grey-zone threats, cyber-attacks and even open warfare will stretch the ability of the ADF to respond. Creative ways of bolstering the capacity of the ADF beyond being a one-punch force are critically important if it is to cope with more than one crisis at once. With a spectrum of emergent challenges, that prospect appears increasingly likely.

Population: With only 26 million people, population, the fifth element of national power, precludes Australia from being seen as more than a Middle Power. The waves of post-war migration, however, have turned 'White Australia' into something truly cosmopolitan, creating a multicultural and multilingual nation with an appreciation for and greater understanding of neighbouring countries. With one-third of the population born overseas and more than one-fifth speaking multiple languages (including Mandarin, Arabic, and Cantonese) the tapestry of Australia's population is reflected back to the world. Meanwhile, Australia's ageing demographic generates a strain on government coffers, economic participation, and productivity; it also leads to increased spending on healthcare, pensions and agedcare. Bearing in mind that Australians want the older generation to continue to enjoy a high quality of life, there will need to be a concerted effort to improve workforce skills and industrial productivity, capitalising on technology made possible by the fourth industrial revolution.

National Character: National character is said to imbue the material elements with what Morgenthau calls "an invisible spirit... that gives each nation its unmistakable distinctiveness." The American Dream and its attendant belief in the infinite potential for individual achievement has no obvious Australian equivalent. Despite the apparent successes of people like my ancestors in crossing the Blue Mountains in 1813 and finding a way to fertile lands beyond, the disastrous experience of inland explorers like Leichardt and Burke and Wills reminded the early settlers of the stark contrast of the Australian continent to its north American counterpart, with its fertile plains, great lakes and plentiful rivers. However, the need to cooperate in a harsh and isolated frontier environment did create an Australian spirit of great resourcefulness and unconditional helpfulness and willingness to lend a hand when a colleague or 'mate' was in trouble. The downside of this experience of an extremely harsh environment is a surprising lack of intellectual self-confidence. Psychologists might speculate about the reasons for this, but living in such harsh conditions for long periods would do nothing for self-esteem. And there were no Eton-like colleges in the outback to imbue young people with intellectual self-confidence.

This history indicates the need to invest as a priority in higher education, to reward excellence and welcome and reward diversity of experiences, thoughts, ambitions and fields of endeavour. This applies across the humanities and social sciences (HASS), as well as in the domains of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The origins of modern Australia as an association of separate colonies also contributes to the character of a nation built, not on revolutionary ideals, but with a lawful approach to Federation. The federated Westminster system has remained largely fit for purpose as the nation has grown, ensuring a diffusion of authority and political power across the nine

separate but complementary and widely dispersed jurisdictions of the six states, two territories and federal governments.

Furthermore, the lack of a rigid class system has contributed to a sense of egalitarianism, which underpinned the creation of universal health care and social safety nets for lower income earners. At the same time, for predominantly 'White Australia' to anchor itself in a region with populations differing in history, language, ethnicity and politics, Australians have tended to view geopolitical circumstances through the prism of a culturally familiar Anglosphere. The island-continent of Australia became a haven for the dispossessed Irish, poor British, refugees from Europe and (since 1967, at least) Asia who were offered a 'fair go'. Meanwhile, until recently the unmentionable wars against Indigenous Australians were concealed under a narrative of an uninhabited *Terra Nulius.* As the country becomes more cosmopolitan, and self-aware, these foundational 'myths' are being challenged. Managing the emerging narratives requires visionary leadership to keep disparate elements from diverging too far. The war in Gaza has made that self-evident.

National Morale: The seventh element of power, national morale, demonstrates how recent recognition of diversity may enhance Australian national power by enhancing its quality. Perceptions of economic standards of living and sense of belonging can affect Australia's power and influence. Research has shown that a society which not only welcomes but encourages diversity will be more productive economically. And the more Australia is seen by the world as a culturally diverse society, while maintaining its core values and trusted partnerships, the higher national morale is likely to be. But this upward trajectory can't be taken for granted. Thoughtful, respectful and collaborative governance is needed.

Quality of Government: On the eighth element of national power, Australia is a liberal, federal, bicameral, Westminster-style (but US influenced), parliamentary, democratic system, in which political power is diffused through a partial separation of powers between the legislative (Senate and House of Representatives), executive and judicial branches, at the federal level, as well as with similar separations at the state and local levels of government. Critics are right to highlight problems, but in essence, Australians enjoy a high quality of government, supported by professional public service agencies, police forces with strong anti-corruption mechanisms, and review procedures, including inspector-generals, auditors and anti-corruption mechanisms. These are mechanisms that emerged after trial and error over more than a century of self-government, and they are ones that can only be sustained by a country large enough, like Australia. Many neighbouring states in the Pacific lack the critical mass to generate such oversight and accountability mechanisms. At the same time, the propensity of political leaders to preference expedient short-term gains over long-term policy planning has weakened public confidence in the political processes.

Indeed, it was this 'boring but safe' approach to financial regulation that led Australia to become exceptional among OECD economies for avoiding an economic recession following both the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the Covid-19 outbreak. The Future Fund, with its trillions of dollars of investment funds, is Australia's most significant and far-sighted mechanism to ensure the future prosperity of the nation. The Future Fund has enabled Australia to achieve financial security and independence on a scale unimagined by Australians a generation ago, let alone by many other countries which looking on with understandable envy at the continuing run of good fortune for the lucky country.

While short election cycles and intra-party politicking have, at various times, limited the space for political leadership in initiating national conversations on long-term solutions to big problems, Australia boasts a relatively high quality of government with the rule of law and sufficient checks and balances. Worryingly, though, that isn't necessarily how Australian

governance is viewed by the nation's relatively unhappy youth – a [problem associated with social media](#).

Quality of Diplomacy: The ability to formulate and execute foreign policy based on an understanding of international trends enables a government to seize opportunities to achieve national objectives. This is a mark of the quality of the nation's diplomacy. Australian governments, since signing up to an alliance in 1951, have tended to maintain strong support for its ties with the United States. They have also sought active engagement in Asia and the Pacific. These actions are in part premised on recognition that Australia benefits from an international order with clear and consistent rules which Australia has played a part in setting. That support is as strong now as ever before.

By the early 2020s, the [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#) managed a network of 122 diplomatic posts in 85 countries. With 19 embassies, Australia also has the largest diplomatic presence of any country in the Pacific. Southeast Asian capitals today host 17 Australian posts with a greater gender balance in recent years than ever before.

The approach to diplomacy to a large extent reflects Australia's strategic culture, which has been described as '[an interplay of anxiety and dependence](#)'. Australia's military is sufficient to defend limited core interests and form a base for support to key allies, notably the United States, and regional partners and neighbours in times of distress. Australia has consistently [looked outside of its region for security](#), seeking partners with political, cultural and ethnic similarity, although informed also by its [increasingly cosmopolitan](#) make-up.

Mindful of this culture and the diplomatic imperatives, there is every reason for the Australian Government to keep investing in a diplomatic corps increasingly representative of the people. As well as DFAT, defence diplomacy, and the diplomacy of other government agencies like Home Affairs, Industry, Science and the Environment, as well as various security agencies, is critical to engaging international counterparts on common interests, ranging from policing, scientific research and fisheries management to education. Investing in other opportunities to develop relationships between Australian businesspeople, artists, sportspeople and students with counterparts abroad, is also important. Groups in industry and society need to consider how to cultivate relationships which are likely to facilitate the long-term pursuit of Australia's economic, political, educational and strategic interests.

Ways: Strategic Implications

Australia enjoys natural advantages in terms of individual elements of national power. And this has implications for *An Australian National Security Strategy* from an understanding of these elements of national power. In terms of the material elements of power, Australia is situated in the epicentre of global economic and geopolitical activity with a continent for a nation, sharing land borders with no countries. Australia's endowment of natural resources is unparalleled in terms of size and diversity. Despite limitations that come with a small population, the ADF is professional and well-placed as an effective instrument of national power to meet a number of challenges. Australia has a diverse population which brings with it invaluable cognitive diversity which can be expected to assist in creating and improving relationships between Australia and its neighbours in the region. Where there are untapped opportunities is in industrial capacity, where international consumption and production patterns are increasingly diverging from the structure of the Australian economy.

Regarding the human side of national power, Australia enjoys a largely egalitarian culture. In Australia's international relations dealings there is no lasting sense of ethnic or moral superiority. National resilience has historically been reflected by the high level of

morale among the public in times of crisis – although some would question how much this may continue being the case into the future. While short election cycles and intra-party dynamics have at times stymied the government's efforts to pursue long-term, national strategies, Australia, by and large, enjoys a high quality of government with sufficient checks and balances and the rule of law. Its bipartisan approach to foreign policy is fortified by a highly capable diplomatic service increasingly representative of the Australian people, including women.

There are untapped opportunities in addressing public attitudes towards social cohesion. In pockets of the population there is a lack of diversity and inclusion, and this could open the door to malicious attempts at influence or misinformation. On the other hand, Australia's example as a successful multicultural society, where first and second-generation Australians have been successful and treated with respect and equality, is a national 'soft power' asset, making the country attractive globally.

Meanwhile, great power contestation is in full swing and is likely to present flashpoints, while regional governance challenges and environmental concerns will compete for attention. A three-way overlap is at work including great power contestation, environmental challenges, and governance crises, as we have seen in places like Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands' pact with China in 2021 took many by surprise, but to others the signs of relentless competition for influence were long evident, reflecting an evidently more long-term, or strategic view of regional engagement than Australia has tended to display. At the best of times, Australia's political leaders struggle to look beyond the tyranny of the urgent to manage longer term issues. This is all the more challenging when such a development occurs during an election campaign. Visionary leadership is needed that looks beyond the clever way Canberra was outplayed in Honiara. An examination of the issues in relation to fear, honour and interests is apposite.

FEAR, HONOUR, INTERESTS

Looking for soothsayers to help forecast what might happen in the future, some pundits have looked back to the ancient Greeks for a parallel to the so-called Thucydides Trap, which holds that where "one great power threatens to displace another, war is almost always the result." That view is too determinist and unduly downplays the agency of nations and their leaders. Today we face layer upon layer of interconnected challenges and opportunities, including economic, diplomatic, informational, military, and climate challenges. The combination makes formulating a strategy for Australia that much more complicated. What remains pertinent is the overlap of factors leading to conflict that Thucydides identified more than two millennia ago — fear, honour, and interests.

China's assertiveness in Asia and in the Pacific has driven a more focused multilateral response, notably the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between India, Japan Australia, and the United States (otherwise known as the Quad); although the value of this arrangement remains uncertain. While some creative ideas have infused elements of the partnership, the close alignment between Russia and India, for instance, points to the limits in the utility of the Quad.

Chinese assertiveness has also helped generate the trilateral security arrangement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (known as AUKUS) which is discussed further below. Bilaterally, the Philippines and Japan are the most prominent example of Asian countries pushing back in the face of PRC assertiveness.

Neither the bilateral endeavours or multilateral arrangements connecting Australia with countries like Japan and the Philippines would have been made without growing unease over Chinese assertive authoritarian behaviour coupled with its exponential increase in military power. There is considerable scope for judicious use of these arrangements, for promoting good relations between nations, without overplaying them, to Australia's advantage.

For the United States, given its relative military decline, strengthening the military capability of longstanding ally Australia makes sense. Tying Australia more closely to US plans and encouraging greater spending on interoperable US technology can be seen as adding to the stockpile in case of a major confrontation with China. But it also suggests a greater sense of vulnerability in light of China's rapid rise and an eagerness to bolster capabilities in case Australia is left to take the lead in responding to a regional crisis, should the United States be less able or willing to do so. For this reason, as part of its strategy, Australia must capitalise on opportunities arising from access to US–sourced high technology equipment to strengthen Australian defensive capabilities.

For Australia, China's list of "14 grievances" came to be seen as being too great, effectively a mark of dishonour, causing a backlash. At the same time, greater US and UK engagement in the defence of Australia (including rotating nuclear propulsion submarines) allays the fear of abandonment by "great and powerful friends" while also, ironically enough, causing, in some, a fear of entrapment. The view is that Australia could be drawn into a conflict in Asia not of its own making — possibly over Taiwan. Deft (and well-resourced) diplomacy, preferably on all sides is required to mitigate such risks. Being well represented diplomatically, in more posts with more intelligent and well-educated officers able to gain insights as well as access and who understand the tensions is key to an effective strategy for Australia.

HISTORY VERSUS GEOGRAPHY

Formulating *A National Security Strategy for Australia* cannot happen in a historical vacuum. It does not begin with a clean slate. Rather, it starts with the current means, identified earlier. The ADF now recognises there was a significant decline in its regional language and cultural skills while the focus was on the Middle East. It recognises there was undercooked regional defence diplomacy and regional defence relations. While the saying is largely true that the ADF 'can walk and chew gum', in practice the ADF's performance has been inconsistent. While the Air Force maintained its tempo of regional engagement, the Navy and the Army slipped while distracted by operations elsewhere: operations in support of its principally ally far from its shores and its immediate geographic circumstances. The distraction would prove costly, particularly in terms of the ADF's regional security priorities and understanding and knowing the region well.

This experience reflects the fact that Australia has always been torn between its neighbourhood (its geography), and prioritising engagement with its United Nations partners and Anglosphere cousins, further afield (its history). For more than a century the call of great power friends has drawn Australia away from its shores only to be drawn back to engage more closely with its immediate neighbours, notably those in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, particularly when crises presented themselves nearby.

Notwithstanding these matters, the heightened operational tempo has been a key reform driver in the first two decades of the new millennium, with niche contributions in the
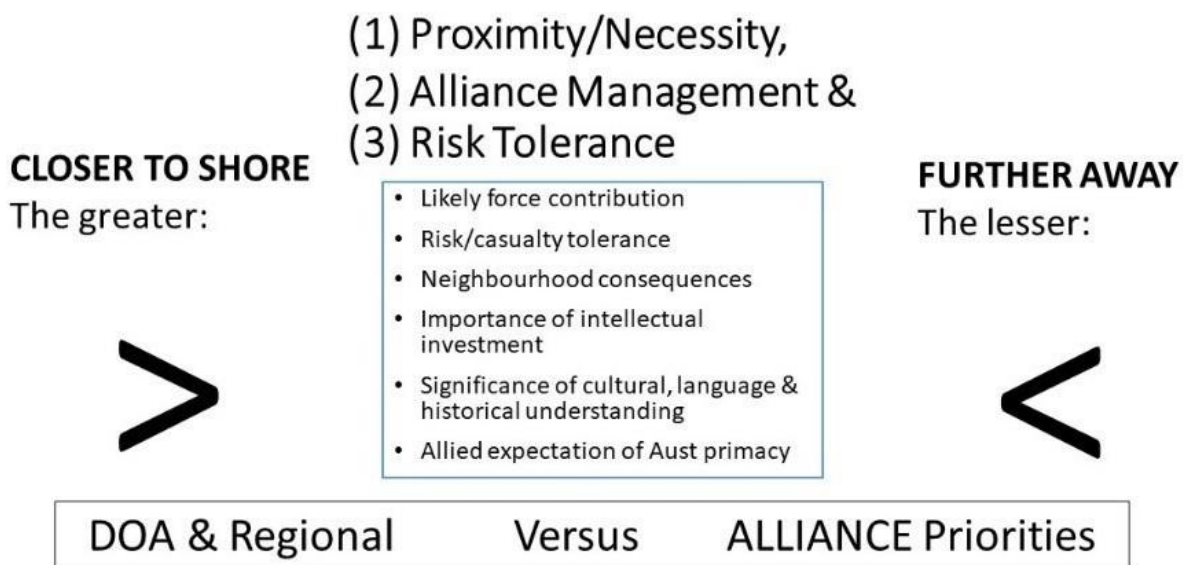
Middle East Area of Operations as part of Australia's wars of choice. This operational experience has helped to hone the force, notably with the special forces being the force of choice with their smaller operational footprint giving confidence to government of lower casualty risk and its reputed better operational security. Arguably, however, the special forces were too heavily relied upon and pushed too far. At the same time, the Navy maintained its operational tempo of Middle East engagement with relative ease for more than two decades. Meanwhile the Air Force's leading-edge capabilities were much sought after by their US counterparts, with Australia's tanker and E-7 airborne warning and control aircraft more capable that their US equivalents.

As we reflect on the experience of the opening years of the millennium, one can perceive a pattern: the closer to shore the greater the likely force contribution, the greater the casualty tolerance, the greater the neighbourhood consequence, and the greater the importance of intellectual investment as well as the greater the significance of cultural language and historical understanding and the Allied expectation of Australian operational primacy. Conversely, the further away such operations, the less these factors have been at play. In sum then, we see that there is a critical government expectation determinant concerning proximity, alliance management and risk tolerance. Nonetheless, the see-saw pull of contingencies far away reflect Australia's longstanding concern over possible disruption in world trade. Australia is indeed *Girt by Sea*. Like a living organism with its vital organs located outside its body, Australia's imperative to contribute to defence of global trade is an enduring priority that has repeatedly drawn Australia to offer calibrated support to international coalitions responding to crises far from its shores.

Part of this reflects a dichotomy between Australia's central strategic planning dynamics relating to geography; that is, where we physically are located, our place in the world; and our sense of history – as in, where we are from; as well as the idea of defence of Australia and the region, versus alliance priorities further afield.

GEOGRAPHY & HISTORY

Government Expectation Determinants:
(1) Proximity/Necessity,
(2) Alliance Management &
(3) Risk Tolerance

CLOSER TO SHORE
The greater:

- Likely force contribution
- Risk/casualty tolerance
- Neighbourhood consequences
- Importance of intellectual investment
- Significance of cultural, language & historical understanding
- Allied expectation of Aust primacy

FURTHER AWAY
The lesser:

DOA & Regional   Versus   ALLIANCE Priorities

In addition to that, is the continuum between operations of choice versus operations of necessity. I would contend that the ADF, and the Australian Army in particular, has spent the last couple of decades conducting operations of choice, mostly far away, not against a peer competitor, making niche contributions, but supported with gilt-edged international back-up to small taskforces with around two killed per year over 20 years. That's very few, relatively speaking, when considering the costs incurred by countries like the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. For these relatively minor contributions, though, Australia managed to get outsized kudos from its principal ally, along with a generation of close and trusted friendships between officials and practitioners which added to the highly refined levels of interoperability with US and other partner nations' forces.

GEOGRAPHY & HISTORY

Capabilities Government Expects:

Operations of Choice v Operations of Necessity

- Far away war
- Not near/peer competitor
- Niche contribution
- Gilt edged national back-up to small task force
- Few if any casualties

- Closer to home
- Near/Peer Competitor – PGM/ISTAR/air
- Full spectrum 'all arms' ADF contrib
- National reach-back facilities patchy
- Higher casualty tolerance
- Cyber heavy

@War
The Rise of the Military-Internet Complex

When one compares Australia's experience far afield to that of operations of necessity closer to home, the contrast may be starker than we appreciate. That is, potentially facing a near-peer, or peer, competitor, equipped with precision munitions and high-quality intelligence, surveillance and targeting capabilities. In such a setting the ADF likely would be required to muster a full spectrum 'all-arms' capability.

The requirement for such a response last presented itself in the war in the Pacific in late 1941 and early 1942. Australia forward deployed forces to what is now Indonesia at places like Ambon, Kupang and Java, as well as to Singapore and Rabaul. Those forces were under-gunned, under-equipped and deployed in numbers that were too small, scattered and uncoordinated to make any substantive difference to what happened next. But the concept of forward deploying to defend Australia made sense. After all, it was from places such as Ambon, Kupang and Rabaul that Australia and Australian bases were attacked. This paper does not project a repeat of the dark days of early 1942, but the imperative for a self-reliant capability to operate in Australia's neighbourhood is less remote than it has been for generations.

While such a dire scenario is not anticipated, the ADF could be expected to operate either in a largely self-reliant manner, in response to contingencies in which Australian sovereignty is challenged, or in a coalition context, in response to a regional crisis further from shore to

which other countries likely would also contribute forces. In such circumstances, national reach back facilities probably would be patchy because the technical and intelligence support would have to be shared more broadly. In addition, there would probably be a higher casualty tolerance, as was the case in 1999, when Prime Minister Howard calculated he might have to be prepared to take up to 500 casualties. In addition, it is probably going to be cyber heavy. In such circumstances, the ADF's ability to operate as a self-reliant force could be stretched to breaking point.

What this leads to is a conclusion whereby we are dealing with a spectrum of challenges into the future related to great power contestation, looming environmental catastrophe (including pandemics) and a range of governance challenges (including transnational crime, law and order breakdowns and terrorism). The combination of these three broad challenges presents an overlap which is generating a whole series of plausible concurrent ADF support demands. Humanitarian disaster, fires, floods, droughts, cyclones, pandemics, crisis flashpoints (or, as my colleague Professor Brendan Taylor called them, *The Four Flashpoints* including the Korean peninsula, the East China Sea, the South China Sea and Taiwan), may feature. In addition, cyber-attacks on key infrastructure, border security challenges generating waves of refugees, and the possibility of great power competition and disaster in Antarctica are appearing on the horizon.

ROBERTS' RISK REWARD RESILIENCE MODEL FOR STRATEGISING

A National Security Strategy for Australia must take to heart the implications arising from the weaponisation of trade and finance that could be associated with the dire scenarios mentioned above. Balancing risk, reward, and resilience will be important in strategizing and as part of public discussions and policy-making.
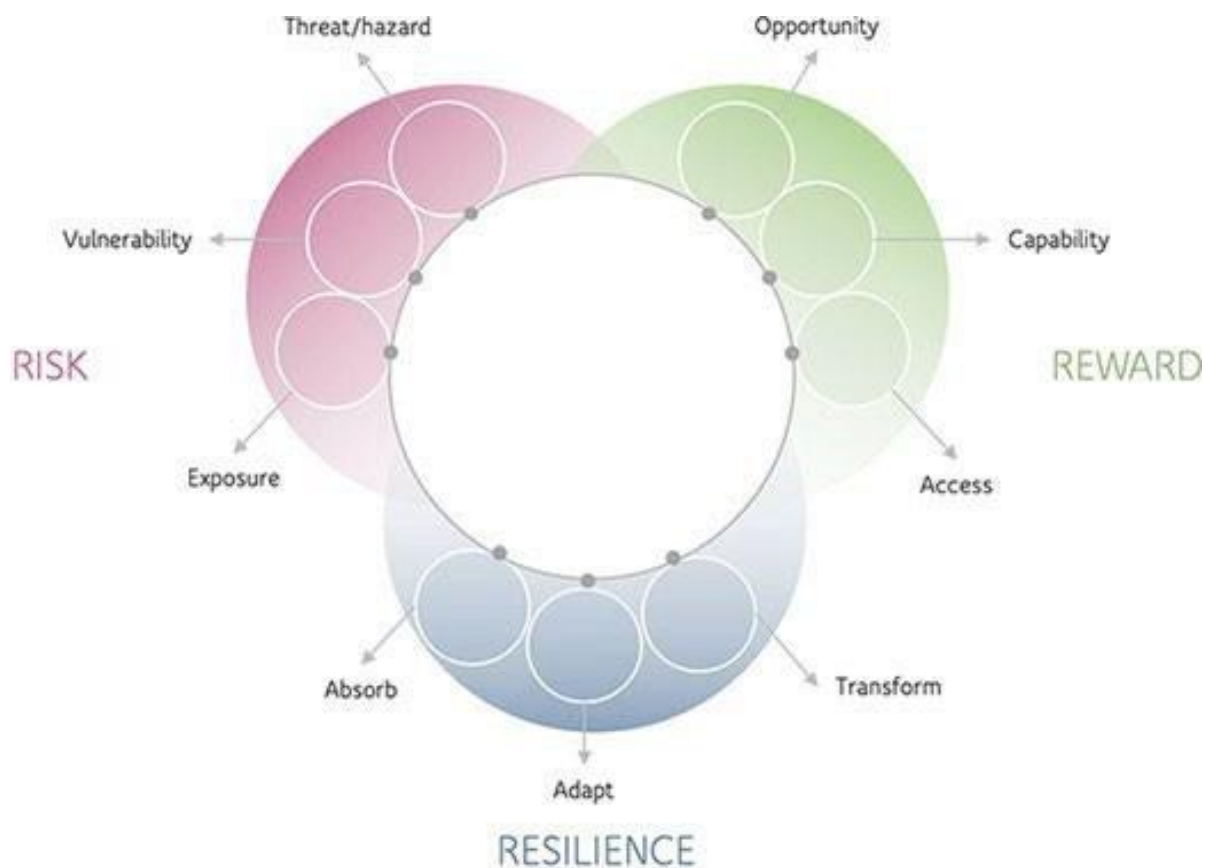
As Professor Anthea Roberts explains, **Risk** is best understood in terms of exposure, and vulnerability to hazards or threats. Risk arises from the interaction of a threat or hazard with an actor's or system's exposure and vulnerability. Weighing up the risk faced by Australia, on a range of fronts is critical for an effective formulation of strategy.

Using this model of risk, geopolitical tensions represent a significant threat, putting Australia in a strategic yet vulnerable position. Australia's location and alliances place it at the nexus of tensions, making it a target for indirect and direct challenges.

Cybersecurity challenges are in the mix as well. We have gone from being web-enabled, to web dependent and, in turn, web-vulnerable, and subject to exploitation by state and non-state actors which have generated significant information breaches, and disruption of critical infrastructure. The cyber security challenge is growing. Continuous reinforcement of cybersecurity measures is necessary in response to current and emerging threats.

Reward is best understood in terms of the overlap of opportunity, access and capability. Here, technological partnerships with leading tech companies, academic institutions, and allies stand out as a significant opportunity to address environmental and broader security challenges. This could lead to innovations in renewable energy, smart infrastructure and cybersecurity.

The drivers of **resilience** represent the dynamic capacities that enable systems to cope with change through absorption, adaptation, and transformation. Australia's resilience could be significantly bolstered, for instance, by reducing reliance on a single market or sector. That way, Australia can mitigate the impacts of global market volatilities and geopolitical tensions. This approach also positions Australia to adapt to fluctuating global demands.

A National Security Strategy for Australia must be able to absorb shock (and be resilient), it must be able to adapt to changing circumstances and be flexible and responsive to likely

and unexpected threats. This model cannot capture the full complexity of how all these different issues interact. Shocks may multiply, interact, and cascade, but the model may clarify analysis of them.

ICEDS - NET ASSESSMENT

Reflecting the magnitude of the scale and urgency of the need to respond to emerging challenges, the Australian National University has established an Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions, or ICEDS, to connect people with climate, energy & disaster-risk research from the ANU. The goal is to advance innovative solutions to address climate change, energy system transitions and disasters. This is done by facilitating integrated approaches to research, teaching and policy, industry and community engagement across disciplines. ICEDS also leads the ANU Below Zero Initiative in research, teaching and engagement. ICEDS is an initiative which points to the kind of inter-disciplinary, inter-agency and inter-jurisdictional coordination and orchestration of national resources needed to adequately respond to the poly-crisis which underpins the urgency in formulation of *An Australian National Security Strategy.* Meanwhile, floods, fires, storms and regional crises are making demands on the ADF as well as state emergency and fore services, which are stretching resources to capacity.

There is a misconception that the ADF is a large organisation. But in relative terms it is small, boutique, even; and the Army is about twice the size of the Air Force and the Navy. Just for comparison, from a population of seven and a half million people ín January 1943, the Australian Army had mustered 14 divisions – each with up to about 10,000 troops. Today, the Australian Army has one full-time (regular force) division and one part time (Army Reserve) division.

This boutique ADF, optimised as it was for the unipolar moment, finds itself squeezed and challenged to retain its tired and overworked people. Meanwhile, emergency services, fire services, police, ambulance workers and more are facing burnout. Something has to give.

AUSNACS & AUSYREP

Over-reliance on the ADF in domestic crisis situations is problematic for both crisis management and long-term combat readiness, and is inappropriate given the current threat environment and the frequency of environmental challenges. To avoid spreading the ADF too thin just when it might be needed most internationally, Australia needs to have a serious debate on the topic of national and community service.

The ADF, while a capable and professional organisation, is not a valid substitute for specialised emergency services that possess the skills and equipment necessary to respond to increasing numbers of natural and human disasters. Furthermore, Additionally, reconfiguring and deploying the ADF on domestic crisis operations is complex and time consuming, and often requires travelling vast distances from their home bases. This risks creating a perception that the ADF is slow to respond, and risks undermining the positive relationship between the ADF and the Australian community.

Some of the units that were deployed to the stairwells of quarantine hotels in 2020, or to the kitchens and laundries of aged care facilities in 2021, were subsequently found shovelling mud in northern New South Wales. Such deployments are not what the Australian

community should expect of the ADF, nor are they what many ADF members expected of their careers.

The current state of affairs means that ADF personnel miss out on important training and career development opportunities. It also prevents the ADF from focusing on its primary task of protecting Australian citizens, territory, interests, and allies from armed confrontation. These skills and capabilities are critically important to generating a force that provides a credible deterrent to a would-be adversary.

Australia, like many other nations, now faces a security environment as challenging as any experienced in 80 years, including environmental, governance, and great power contestation challenges.

- Environmental challenges such as droughts, fires, cyclones, and floods are expected to become more frequent and more extreme.
- Governance challenges are also likely to worsen, especially regarding disinformation, disruption and interference by individuals and groups within Australia and abroad.
- Finally, intensified great power competition is making armed conflict in Australia's neighbourhood more likely. Having a force capable of deterring an advserary in this context is important.

Meanwhile, the United States' appetite for ideational leadership of the post-Second World War international order has faltered, and Russia's threat to Europe is likely to preoccupy the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for years to come.

It is conceivable that an adversary could exploit a crisis in Australia's neighbourhood, presenting a challenge to find the resources needed to respond, mindful of Australia's recent over-reliance on the ADF for domestic crisis management.

These shortfalls point to the need to maintain the security of the nation writ large, both in terms of domestic and broader security challenges, and an Australian Universal Scheme for National and Community Service could be an important part of the solution. Such suggestions inevitably are met with concern given Australia's troubled political relationship with conscription since 1915, and especially during the Vietnam War. However, a voluntary, incentivised scheme that harnesses Australian traditions of volunteer service and mutual assistance would help Australia to respond more effectively to these contemporary challenges. This could be much like the Ready Reserve Scheme introduced in the early to mid-1990s. The scheme would offer school leavers and young Australians a wide variety of service streams with minimum requirements ranging from one to two years, allowing them to choose how they would prefer to serve their community and country. It would only work, though, if it was strongly pushed by the federal government, along with a coordinated campaign alongside a complementary initiative involving the state and territory governments.

Participants would choose from service options within the ADF – similar to the established ADF Gap Year program – but also from roles within rural fire services, state emergency services, state health services, aged care, national parks and wildlife, federal and state police, Australian Border Force, and the international development focused Australian Volunteers Program.

Calls have also been made for sending young Australians to study languages abroad, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, as part of its engagement strategy. The New Colombo Plan, which enables students to study abroad for months at a time, is one such positive step. But a larger initiative is required. Such a scheme would help improve cultural awareness and overcome Australia's monolingual speech impediment which acts like a ball

and chain on its efforts to engage with and understand its neighbours.

Australia's trade links with the region have been growing exponentially and tens of thousands of students from neighbouring countries have studied in Australia, but there is a dismal record of reciprocity. Many Australian students, of course, would jump at the opportunity to study abroad but cannot afford to do so. The number of Australians venturing to the near abroad to study, live and learn is very small when compared with the number coming to study in Australia. Singapore and Hong Kong are popular for Australian expats, but this is largely because most are comfortable knowing that English is widely spoken. Acknowledging such exceptions, most of Southeast Asia and the neighbouring states of the Pacific remain an enigma. For Australia to capitalise on the growing regional trade and educational links, a more proactive stance is required.

Beyond growing trade and educational links, security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region have been increasing in recent years and calls for greater multi-faceted Australian engagement in the region have informed the debate. The nation must think creatively about how it can better engage with the region and be a respected and valuable partner to countries with which Australia has a strong interest in fostering good relations. Indonesia stands out as the most prominent example, but the range of Southeast Asian countries and the island states of the Pacific would also welcome such engagement.

The United States developed the Peace Corps in the 1960s to enable young Americans to live and learn abroad on two-year placements, and many of those who participated in this program went on to make significant contributions. A number of them came to Australia and helped set up Southeast Asian studies programs at universities around the country. Australia has benefited significantly from their contributions. This provides a pointer to the potential benefits to accrue from expansion of such a scheme.

In addition, DFAT sponsors Australian Volunteers for International Development. This is an excellent program, but primarily targets post-graduate professionals who are already qualified in a field and able to make niche contributions for set periods of time. DFAT also manages the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development program. This program enables young Australians to study and live abroad, but the program is limited in numbers and scope. It doesn't allow participants to stay long enough to get past the initial language hurdles to the point where they could both master the local language and make a useful contribution in their host country and back home.

Australia should aspire to a greater version of this. One scheme which should be part of the proposed AUSNACS arrangements is the establishment of a Peace-Corps-like [Australian Youth Regional Engagement Program](#) (AUSYREP) with two-year placements in neighbouring countries. Such a scheme could be an extension of the Youth Ambassador Program, enabling young Australians to learn more about the region's various languages and cultures and their significance to Australia's future.

The idea of an AUSYREP, consisting of young Australians learning about the neighbourhood and contributing along the way, has great potential. The best approach appears to be to build on the Youth Ambassadors program with greater focus on language learning and deep cultural immersion as a precursor to an understated contribution in return through local development schemes for the host societies. To be sure there are risks, and mitigating strategies would need to be developed to safeguard young Australians. But with risk comes opportunity.

A scheme like AUSNACS and AUSYREP would help prepare Australia to face a spectrum of

environmental, governance and security challenges, while actively fostering national resilience. Participation would need to be incentivised, so participants would receive nationally recognised qualifications and valuable work experience. In addition to a modest living allowance (since food and accommodation would be provided), a trust account could be established for each participant with fortnightly pay proportional to the difficulty of their service stream, and extra pay and public recognition for those deployed on a domestic or international crisis.

This account could then be used for higher education fees, government charges, paid into superannuation, or as a soft loan for commercial purposes on completion. This service model would be optimised for ongoing service in a part-time capacity thereafter regardless of stream, in a manner similar to the ADF's Ready Reserve scheme of the 1990s.

Beyond addressing the current interweaving of challenges, such a program would also have a plethora of benefits in building capacity and community for Australian society, such as bringing young Australians from diverse backgrounds together and instilling self-reliance and resilience in young people.

A likely objection is Australia cannot afford to have such a scheme. The response is that Australia cannot afford not to build a response capability of some kind, and that this scheme is a highly cost-effective contingency against much greater costs that could be incurred if Australia does not step forward to proactive engage with its neighbours and with the compounding issues discussed above.

If the nation lacks the capacity to respond effectively to increasingly frequent crises, it may well pay in Australian lives and sovereignty. But through such schemes, Australians can tackle these crises together.

GAME CHANGER IN THE PACIFIC

As a further aid for regional engagement, the ADF has been making significant progress, particularly since the introduction of more substantial amphibious ships into the fleet. Reasons for developing and maintaining a robust amphibious force as part of the ADF's suite of military capabilities are not hard to find. Such a force can deny third party control and occupation, secure the land shoulders of the vital sea lines of communication to major trading and security partners and which are so vital to Australian security, resilience and prosperity. They are based on sound liberal and realist imperatives for respectful Australian leadership in the Pacific and to foster and maintain regional security and stability. Experience after the Indian Ocean Tsunami and repeated deployments off the coast of Fiji is instructive, but so is Australia's experience dating back over a century. That experience indicates a robust amphibious capability is making a difference to Australia's regional diplomatic influence by providing hard power to complement the government's diplomatic soft power in support of the nation's humanitarian, liberal-democratic and realist values.

From now on, when considering response options in the face of a deteriorating security situation in Australia's region, a more flexible and adaptable capability is available. In the meantime, as Australia looks to engage more closely with Indonesia and other ASEAN and South Pacific neighbours, constructive engagement with engineers, medical and logistic teams alongside local teams through exercises and activities like *Indo-Pacific Endeavour* is proving ground-breaking and bridge-building, literally and metaphorically.

Such a capability is important when weighing up the security and stability calculus of the

region, but it is not enough for a wholistic national security strategy. There is much more to do to foster a closer coordination of interagency endeavours, cultural, scientific, educational and financial connections. Inter-agency work is, no doubt underway, coordinating and fine-tuning initiatives with various federal government departments. More needs to be done in coordinating initiatives with like-minded countries operating in the region.

ON AUKUS

Technically, the trilateral technical agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, known as AUKUS covers multiple 'pillars': the first one covering the sharing of nuclear propulsion submarine, or sub-surface nuclear (SSN) technology with Australia and the second pillar involving collaboration on advanced technology with military and other broader applications. AUKUS looks set to enhance Australia's ability to produce and maintain a supply of precision and long-range missile systems, widely seen as a key missing ingredient in the ADF's ability to generate a deterrence effect.

Meanwhile, the urgency of Pillar I has grown as the proliferation of more, and more sophisticated, air and space surveillance platforms has eroded the degree of stealth of diesel-electric propulsion submarines — especially over longer distances, where they are required to surface to recharge batteries, exposed to detection by would-be adversaries. China has made clear it is unhappy with Australia acquiring SSNs, even though it is building its own fleet of similar submarines at breakneck pace. The strategy should ensure the line is held and access guaranteed to the supply of nuclear propulsion technology. But to give this process more rigour, the aforementioned risk, reward, resilience model provides a useful framework to consider. To be sure, the future of the SSN capability will be tested by emerging technology like the introduction of green laser surveillance that can detect sub surface objects, but such developments rely on direct overflight and reflect an iterative evolution of measures and counter measures that has not prevented the major powers from continuing with their SSN production lines.

What once was considered inconceivable has become not only imaginable but endorsed and legislated by Congress. Australia is contributing to resourcing the US SSN production line, even though its contribution, technologically, is limited by the absence of a civil nuclear power industry.

The Australian government's message on the rationale for SSNs has been clouded in view of the numerous other challenges associated with the scheme. This appears to have been partly the case to avoid the trap of sounding like the previous government – one that had been publicly critical of China, but which was accused, to misquote Teddy Roosevelt, of speaking loudly and carrying a small stick.

The government in Canberra has also avoided focusing on how vulnerable the current ageing fleet of diesel-electric propulsion submarines are. That is an understandable protective reaction to an important capability. But there has been a dawning realisation that, no matter how well maintained and updated they are, such submarines are becoming no longer viable. That is not because of something intrinsic with the Australian 'Collins' class of diesel electric submarines themselves. Rather, it is because of increasingly persistent and almost saturation satellite coverage, coupled with the prevalence of pattern analysis, drones and artificial intelligence which has made the wake of the submarine funnels detectable from above. This is a game-changer.

Persistent AI-enhanced satellite surveillance (much of it operating from Chinese facilities believed to have been established in the Australian Antarctic Territory and elsewhere in southern Africa and South America), is making conventional submarines increasingly easy to find. When they raise their snorkel to recharge their batteries, the wake is detectable. Years of expected Chinese pattern analysis of Australian submarine operations means likely periods and locations of such 'indiscretions' are even more readily identifiable. With stealth the only real advantage of submarines over surface warships, the utility of such submarines sinks quickly. This leaves nuclear propulsion as the only viable path for countries with vast ocean distances to transit even to cover their own EEZs. In Australia, for instance, a transit from any of the capital cities across to the submarine base in Western Australia cannot be undertaken without exposure to the prospects of such detection. In wartime that presents a potentially catastrophic risk which can only be surmounted by remaining underwater for the duration.

Indeed, the apparent obsolescence of conventional boats for Australia does not seem to have stopped other navies, especially with the dramatic improvements in batteries. For an island continent spanning country like Australia, though, the distances to cover are unlike anything with which other SSK-equipped navies must contend.

Through the tri-nation AUKUS scheme, Australia has plunged into an arrangement with the UK and the US. With respect to primacy versus the maintenance of stable order, Australia is pursuing strong deterrence to maintain the status quo. AUKUS is seen as the only model that's politically feasible, for domestic politics and international security.

With our major security partner having the world's biggest SSN fleet, an argument could be made that this was an unnecessary acquisition; that we could just rely on the Americans to do it for us; and that it unbalances the ADF and will further erode national defence industry. That reasoning contends a better strike capability acquisition would be to acquire a fleet of longer range strike aircraft and subcontract the submarine task to Australia's UK and US partners.

To be sure, if the government does not follow through on its commitment to fund the additional costs to be incurred, then the ADF likely would become unbalanced by focusing on SSNs at the expense of other important ADF capabilities. Indeed, this is widely seen as the critical issue with the SSNs – they are being funded within the current budget envelope. So instead of receiving additional funding, as the authors of the Defence Strategic Review envisaged, the rest of the Defence portfolio is being trimmed to fund the SSNs, Effectively, this means that the new Defence Industry Investment Plan (DIIP) with be about one quarter less than the pre-DSR DIIP. Additionally, cuts to logistic funding are likely to drive the same kinds of logistic shortfalls as the ADF experienced in the 1990s in the lead up to the East Timor crisis – which is widely seen as a near run thing. There are genuine concerns that if this approach is maintained and additional funding is not supplied, then the ADF likely will be less ready and less capable in the next few years. This makes all the more important that the government follow through on its commitment with appropriate funding.

Ironically, it is the desire for greater self-reliance that results in Australia leaning in further on its Anglosphere partners to acquire capabilities considered vital for the defence of Australian sovereignty and to bolster deterrence against would be aggressors.

The benefits of a nuclear submarine fleet are considerable. An Australian submarine fleet would need to defend shipping lanes around the Indo-Pacific (although its capabilities exclude the air defence role). SSNs can travel at much faster speeds (about 20 knots on average) compared to conventional submarines (6.5 knots) and stay on station for significantly longer periods of time. The main constraint is not water or air, but sufficient food for the crew. This means that an Australian fleet of six to eight SSNs would give about three

times the effective deployable time that can be achieved from the current fleet of Six Collins Class submarines due to the far faster deployment time, the longer loiter time and the enduring ability to remain undetected, without needing to surface to recharge batteries or suck in fresh air.

Critics further claim the challenge for which SSNs are expected to be useful is expected to peak in the next decade. Yet the interim arrangements, that see US and UK nuclear propulsion submarines as part of a rotational force in Australia, and, increasingly, part of a transition force of SSNs for the Australians, are already starting to have the desired effect. The first Virginia Class submarine visited Australia in the second half of 2023 and that is the start of what is to be the new normal. The Submarine Rotational Force-West, as this grouping is being called, will be supported by advanced SSN maintenance facilities being built at Garden Island, on Cockburn Sound, south of Fremantle on the southwestern coast of Australia facing the Indian Ocean.

History does not repeat, but it sometimes appears to rhyme: Cockburn Sound was where collectively about 170 allied submarines were based during the Pacific War. From there they had ready access to the sea lines of communication across the Indian Ocean, as well as the Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda straits (in modern day Indonesia) and, further on, to the South China Sea and Formosa (now Taiwan), where enemy shipping was crippled by persistent and effective submarine operations.

The future, no doubt, will look different, but the geostrategic significance of those submarine facilities echoes its utility from 80 years back – when the trusted SIGINT connections were in their infancy. What most people may not yet fully appreciate is that the significance of Australia to the pursuit of US interests in the Indo-Pacific echoes the significance of a time now long past. There are, no doubt, more secrets on how AUKUS came to be; but its strategic rationale and the trusted collaboration upon which it builds is now a well-established fact. With fresh geostrategic challenges echoing those from an earlier generation, that trusted collaboration on SIGINT, and now AUKUS, is more important than ever. And the deterrent effect is already kicking in.

NEW ANZAC SPIRIT

There is an understandable concern that by engaging in nuclear propulsion, Australia risks its relationship with New Zealand, particularly given the strong anti-nuclear sentiment there over four decades. Memories of Greenpeace protests are strong over the ditch. Yet the current government in Wellington has made clear it seeks to avoid letting this prevent closer collaboration where it can.

Collaboration with New Zealand in Pacific affairs has been a high priority since Federation. In the past, New Zealand has been a pivotal partner in helping resolve regional crises in Bougainville, East Timor and Solomon Islands.

New Zealand also remains a key partner in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA)– with Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom. These FPDA ties facilitate significant opportunities for networking, benchmarking and honing of skills, while also ensuring that Australia and New Zealand make and are seen to make a positive contribution to Southeast Asian defence and security initiatives. In light of the multi-faceted challenges faced as part of the poly-crisis, the importance of deep, trusted and functional collaboration with New Zealand in the region is greater than ever.

Furthermore, and in light of the Royal Australian Navy's Surface Fleet Review, the

government has decided to embark on a major build-up of warships, expanding the shipyard manufacturing capabilities in South Australia and Western Australia. New Zealand was a key partner when Australia last embarked on such a large-scale project – with the manufacture and operating of the ANZAC Class frigates. As the New Zealand Government considers its options for replacement of its now ageing ANZAC Class frigates, it should look to work in with the Australian program – and Australia should be supportive – both to enable New Zealand as a critical security partner in the Pacific and to ensure compatibility and mutually beneficial investments. New Zealand should also look to lift its ban on new Australian submarines being given port access.

SWEETER INDONESIA, AND BROADER REGIONAL, TIES:

Beyond these ties, other regional mechanisms are important. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, for instance, has struggled to demonstrate why participating nations should continue to pay due deference to their insistence on its centrality for Indo-Pacific affairs. Australia still recognises its significance and utility, hosting an Australia-ASEAN Special Summit, affirming it and seeking to bolster its effectiveness. As many broader international forums struggle to gain traction, though, sub-regional forums have emerged as a viable alternative.

Indonesia is the most important neighbour with which Australia needs to deepen collaboration across a broad range of economic, security, social and education fronts. The ADF is already engaged on this in various ways, across the maritime, air, land and special forces domains. Some of that has to happen bilaterally, but there is scope for greater, deeper and broader collaboration in a multilateral setting as well. Educational ties are being deepened and broadened and the Indonesia Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IACEPA) is helping lay the groundwork for broader and deeper ties as well. Yet more can be done.

Manis is the Indonesian word for sweet. Australia should look to work with Indonesia to make it an acronym for a "sweet" regional maritime cooperation forum including Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Singapore. Potentially it could be expanded to MANIS-TTPP (by including Timor-Leste, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines). This would not replace ASEAN, but it would include the original ASEAN five members who formed the grouping in 1967 (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines), and it might help these maritime Southeast Asian nations work through some regional challenges more closely together that are otherwise stymied by ASEAN demands for consensus decision making.

A MANIS regional cooperation forum could address a vast range of concerns for the member countries. Topics on which regional states could consult, share experiences and cooperate cover illegal fisheries, natural resources, smuggling and transnational crime, including trafficking in drugs, endangered wildlife and weapons. MANIS could also address region-wide challenges such as illegal immigration and terrorism. It could improve search and rescue and natural disaster coordination. Ultimately, it could serve to maintain sovereignty and the integrity of international maritime borders. In the process, it could take regional cooperation beyond the levels achieved through the Bali Process and help to better address the implications of a new security agenda centred on environmentally vulnerable communities and climate change.

A MANIS Regional Cooperation Forum could be organised in a number of ways, depending on consensus reached. Ideally the political leadership of participating states would see the utility of gradually building up the forum and associated networks of contacts and issues covered, establishing working groups on a range of concerns including illegal fisheries and natural resource smuggling, people smuggling, other illegal trafficking and the security implications of climate change. This would involve collaborative government, university and think tank teams from the participating countries meeting to discuss a range of possibilities including police, immigration, border security, legal, judicial, environmental, intelligence, financial and other working groups. Such meetings could examine shared issues of concern, and other information exchanges, including on operating procedures. They also could consider possible collaborative activities to facilitate closer engagement and cross-pollination of personnel, ideas and sharing of experiences. Maritime security measures could be workshopped, and collaborative activities developed. Efforts could be made to help regional coast-watching aerial surveillance patrols to be coordinated, more information exchanged, and additional police and other liaison and exchange positions established. These arrangements would then enable the participating nations to consider coordinated and shared activities.

Critics may argue there are too many forums already. But existing forums have great difficulty reaching consensus: a smaller grouping like MANIS could be expected to find this more achievable. It could be empowered to strengthen regional stability in and around Indonesia and the areas governed by the affected neighbouring states, circumventing consensus-driven constraints.

One issue over which cooperation is required is in response to the crisis in Myanmar. The idea of a regional response to crises has a strong Australian pedigree, with Australia's then foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, being a significant driver of the Paris Peace Accords leading to the rehabilitation of Cambodia in the 1990s. Similarly, Australia's leadership, albeit reluctantly at first, under Prime Minister John Howard, generated a 22 nation coalition in response to the East Timor crisis of 1999. For some time now, the Rohingya crisis has pointed to the need for Australia to stand up and help as the situation worsens. That predicament has deteriorated with the deepening civil war between the Burmese military and forces aligned with the National Unity Government that won the last election before being overthrown in a coup d'etat. The time is approaching for a Paris Peace Accord-like initiative to break that deadlock. Australia, Indonesia, and Japan, alongside countries neighbouring Myanmar, like Thailand and India, can play a constructive role. With Australia's former Foreign Minister and ANU Chancellor, Julie Bishop, recently appointed UN Special Envoy on Myanmar, the opportune moment may well be approaching.

GRAND COMPACT: ASEAN-EU HYBRID?

Looking now to the Pacific, pressing environmental and regional governance challenges loom. Challenges in Solomon Islands, for instance, point to a range of factors unsettling domestic politics including concerns over corruption, the influence of the China-Taiwan rivalry, and competing interests more than environmental concerns. But elsewhere in the Pacific, Australia's sharp-edged domestic debates over climate policy have reverberated negatively. There is a sense that Australia has not been sufficiently respectful of Pacific Island environmental sensibilities, leaving an honour deficit.

Honouring of Pacific religious sensibilities capitalizes on strongly felt views in many Pacific Islands. Yet that faith is one of not just words but deeds. Although Australia is considered an increasingly secular and cosmopolitan, or post-Christian society, it is still heavily influenced

by its Judaeo-Christian roots. Yet to an extent such initiatives can be undermined by the perception of Australia as being an environmental laggard.

The Pacific Islands Forum itself has been strained by rival visions and competing influence. The temporary departure of Kiribati from the Forum coincided with its acceptance of Chinese investment deals and an evident decline in Australian influence on developments there. Australia has reached out on a bilateral basis with several of the Pacific's microstates to offer assistance and streamline government-to-government and people-to-people connections, but more needs to be done.

One way to address the needs of Pacific island communities while addressing some of Australia's concerns would be to offer a grand compact to the small Pacific nations: a Pacific Island Federation. Such a compact would give Islanders citizenship in return for partnerships covering management and policing of their vulnerable exclusive economic zones and territories. Australia's "compacts of association" could be with countries such as Kiribati (population 115,000), Tonga (107,000), Tuvalu (11,000), and Nauru (11,000). Such an arrangement could be akin to the relationship the United States has with Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia, and New Zealand has with Niue and the Cook Islands. Tuvalu has already agreed to a security and climate pact, known as the Falepili Union, which goes quite some way in the right direction.

The Grand Compact proposal goes further, though. It would see Australia offer residency rights and potentially citizenship to over 244,000 people and help administer and guarantee sovereignty to a cumulative exclusive economic zone of over 5.1 million square kilometres. Australia would gain economically and politically from bolstering security and stability in the region, while also helping to limit the prospect of destabilizing external interference.

Critics have suggested this is too neo-colonialist, but such views caricaturize the notion of a compact of association that has worked well with New Zealand, Niue, and the Cook Islands, and which is intended to ensure mutual benefit, not one-sided exploitation. To be sure, for the scheme to work, it must be about honour, dignity, and mutual interests and benefits to avoid being seen as "a neo-colonial land grab." The proposal would be to offer a compact that is substantive, respectful, inclusive, and voluntary.

Anote Tong, Kiribati's former president, told the ABC in February 2020 that a grand compact of association would be difficult for small island countries to turn down. Indeed, closer relationships would bring enormous benefits to the Pacific nations, helping them monitor their seas, which were being exploited dramatically by foreign fishing and seabed exploration.

The islanders are inclined to work with Australia and would be comfortable with a trusting, two-way relationship with Australia. They would warmly welcome the idea if Australia were big-hearted enough and clever enough to meet their needs on the environment and climate change, and if Australia changed its attitude of flittering between haughtiness and disengagement. For this to work it would have to be framed as a proposal they may like to consider, rather than a "here's what you need to do" one.

A similar but more limited arrangement also should be considered for the larger Pacific states, including Vanuatu (population 270,000), Solomon Islands (600,000), and Fiji (898,000). To begin with this could involve additional assistance in patrolling their seas and in the provision of residency rights in Australia and employment opportunities, including through mechanisms such as the AUSNACS scheme.

For this scheme to work, the Australian federal government will need to take a more visionary and less transactional approach to engagement with the neighbours. It must take felt needs into account, it must honour commitments and act honourably, respecting local sensibilities.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper outlines the need for Australia to weigh up its strategic options, mindful of its history and its geography, as well as the ways and means available with which to achieve its desired ends; that is, a stable, prosperous and healthy nation, free to pursue its liberal democratic ways in association with the security and economic partners it chooses. The nation has long been regarded as the land of plenty. Its resources are enormous and diverse, but as many Australians forget, they are finite, and the abundance experienced so far has generated a degree of complacency. With crises emerging on numerous fronts, that approach can no longer stand.

As the focus on the megatrends and the SWOT analysis demonstrates, the challenges faced are beyond the remit of any one jurisdiction, government agency, academic or scientific discipline, or field of human endeavour. In fact, careful management of available resources, the means, is necessary if we are to achieve the ends this paper presents as ideal. Many of those resources, though, still remain untapped.

The nation needs a domestic political and social re-awakening to face the challenges presenting themselves to avoid damaging societal upheaval and brace for the fallout of a spectrum of emerging issues. A national institute of net assessment, akin to the productivity commission, should be established on a statutory basis to consider the full spectrum of challenges, drawing on the breadth of research expertise in the university sector, as well as industry, think tanks, government and beyond. Such an institute could be housed at Australia's national university, building on the innovative collaborative research undertaken within the context of ICEDS. It would develop viable options to address the challenges holistically, including examining further the recommendations made here.

The post-Cold War unipolar moment has passed and the political and economic upheaval underway globally is matched by wide-ranging environmental concerns. Increased capacity and endurance are required for Australia to be self-sufficient. This should increase deterrence in order to make Australia an unattractive target for coercion or aggression and help foster resilience in the face of human-induced or natural disasters.

Australia should strengthen and deepen ties with ASEAN member states, especially Indonesia, as well as others who are willing to work closely with Australia to enhance security and stability. The Rohingya and broader Myanmar refugee crisis presents a challenge for the region and an opportunity for collective leadership to prevent the crisis from worsening and before another wave seek to flee on boats. Failure to act could see the regional order further undermined. Julie Bishop is well placed to play an instrumental role, rallying resolve, political will and resources to make headway.

A compact of association with South Pacific countries, or a Pacific Island Federation, is needed for shared governance, akin to the Compact of Free Association arrangements the United States and New Zealand have with several Pacific micro-states. In return for residency rights, Australia, along with New Zealand should respectfully offer closer

partnering arrangements to assist with management, security and governance of territorial and maritime domains. Service as part of a scheme like AUSNACS should feature in the mix.

After three quarters of a century of close security ties with the United States, the nation is heavily invested in that bilateral relationship, with the US being not only Australia's principal ally but its greatest foreign direct investor and two-way economic partner. Most of the regional neighbours also still look to retain US security and economic engagement. Australia should maintain and strengthen its economic and security ties with the United States and other closely aligned states, capitalising on interoperability, access to advanced technology and intelligence networks. Using its trusted access, Australia should counsel against adventurous US initiatives that undermine international institutions, but support initiatives that reinforce the rules-based order. Australia's US engagement also has a demonstration effect in the region, being closely scrutinised by, and largely, although often quietly, supported by the neighbours. Australia should actively engage the United States to encourage the US to remain constructively connected in the neighbourhood.

Australia currently has limited sovereign capacity to respond to the growing range of threats. This means investing further in the capacity of the ADF as well as the state police and emergency response services and related government instrumentalities and infrastructure.

All of the proposals outlined in *An Australian National Security Strategy* require adequate resourcing. For this to happen, the nation must brace to face the reality of the challenges emerging and the urgency of visionary engagement in response. Nuclear propulsion submarines are in the mix but must not come at the expense of other capabilities required to increase resilience and preparedness for the full spectrum of challenges on the horizon.

Such investment requires some tough decisions by the federal government, in concert with its state and territory counterparts. This is needed to be able to endure prolonged natural and human-induced security challenges, including those posed by advanced technology threats and possibly even war. In terms of military capacity, for instance, one hundred fighter aircraft, a dozen or so warships, three combat brigades and some special forces are no longer enough. The plan to expand the surface naval fleet and acquire advanced submarines is a positive step, but this requires more than a shuffling of internal defence funding priorities – it requires a substantial increase in resourcing in the short, medium and long term. It is not something which we can afford to delay. Given chronic personnel shortfalls, let alone the benefits of helping foster a common sense of identity amongst such a cosmopolitan community, a universal national community service scheme should be considered.

The 'she'll be right, mate' approach of recent decades – with a just-in-time, rather than a just-in-case approach to managing challenges – may have worked when such problems emerged consecutively, but they are starting to emerge concurrently. That means that the old approach is no longer viable.

This attempt at *A National Security Strategy for Australia* points to the need for a steely focus on security for the nation, writ large; encompassing the range of challenges – great power contestation, looming environmental catastrophe, a spectrum of governance challenges, all accelerated by the fourth industrial revolution.

The time to act is now.

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