

Towards an Australian National Security Strategy: A Conceptual Analysis

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This article argues that the complex demands of the new globalised security environment of the 21st century suggest that Australia needs to consider the formal adoption of a national security strategy. Obstacles to developing a national security 'whole-of-government' approach are, in the first instance, conceptual and revolve around contested definitional parameters and the ambiguous relationship between theory and practice. Reconceptualising national security for use in an Australian milieu can be accomplished based around the key notion of protecting the social contract between the state, society and the citizen. The role of theory in Australian national security needs to be conceived as a vital component of policy-analysis. Policy-relevant theory should provide a 'visionary beam' to support national security practice to ameliorate any 'knowing-doing' gap and to ensure that long-term objectives can be integrated with short-term decision making. Finally, the article recommends that the Australian Government of the day should formally review the subject of a national security strategy through the appointment of an official and bipartisan Commission of Inquiry on 21st Century National Security requirements.

There are no experts in national security. There are only experts on aspects of the problem.

Harold Laswell, *National Security and Individual Freedom* (1950)

Since the end of the Cold War, Australian strategic policy has been forced to confront a series of challenges stemming from the changed political conditions of an era marked by globalisation. Australia's response to the 1999 crisis in East Timor, to the attacks on the United States of September 11 2001 and to the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has been pragmatic and incremental. Although extant strategic guidance in the form of *Defence 2000* upholds a geographical focus on 'Defence of Australia', the Howard Government has not hesitated to adjust policy, where necessary, to meet new global requirements.¹ In particular, the Australian Army has been refashioned from a force designed for continental defence towards a mobile expeditionary force capable of serving political interests rather than geographical environments.

Despite policy pragmatism, strategic doctrine has been slow in adjusting to the challenges of a new, globalised security environment. Indeed, the disjunction between strategic theory and military practice has become sharp,

¹ Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Canberra, Defence Publishing Service, 2000.

creating what this author has styled a 'tyranny of dissonance'.² Because the parameters of strategic practice no longer conform to the guidance laid down in *Defence 2000*, any consensus on future direction within the Australian strategic studies community has disappeared. A sharp debate has developed around Australian defence strategy based on two contending schools of thought whose diverse origins can be traced back to the early days of Federation. The first school is that of the defender-regionalists whose main focus is the geographical logic of strategy, the traditional balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region and the impact of the rise of China. The second school is that of the reformer-globalists whose main focus is upon the political logic of strategy, balancing a global-regional nexus and blending the networked challenges of globalised security into a new policy calculus for the 21st century. These two schools of thought differ on the fundamental philosophical issue of the meaning of the 21st century security environment. From this disagreement flows division over strategic priorities, force structure, capability acquisitions and the role of land forces.³

Despite three *Defence Updates* in 2003, 2005 and 2007, which collectively seem to have moved strategic policy closer towards a reformer-globalist position, it is unlikely that Australia's future national security needs can be met within the framework of the Department of Defence.⁴ The character of the globalised security environment is now too complex for mastery by any single government department. The combination of global networks, technological diffusion and social mobility challenge not simply the traditional defence of the state, but increasingly the security of society and its citizens. This deeper reality has led observers such as Fred Brenchley, Allan Behm, Stephan Frühling, and David Connery to call for the creation of a 'whole-of-government' national security strategy involving a reformed bureaucratic structure more capable of integrated activity. Brenchley has argued for the creation of a National Security Council located under the Prime Minister and charged with producing a comprehensive statement on Australia's national security preparedness and of producing regular updates to educate the electorate.⁵

For his part, Allan Behm, an experienced defence policy-practitioner, has recently suggested that an emphasis upon pragmatism in national security affairs has led to a "national security deficit" caused by "the triumph of the

² Michael Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance: Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of War, 1901-2005*, Study Paper, no. 306, Canberra, Land Warfare Studies Centre, February 2005.

³ Michael Evans, 'Overcoming the Creswell-Foster Divide in Australian Strategy: The Challenge for Twenty-First Century Policy-Makers', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 61, no. 2 (June 2007), pp. 193-214.

⁴ See *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003*, Canberra, Department of Defence, 2003; *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2005*, Canberra, Department of Defence, 2005; *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2007*, Canberra, Department of Defence, 2007.

⁵ Fred Brenchley, 'False Sense of Security', *The Diplomat*, June/July.2006, pp. 24-25.

expedient over the imaginative, of the short-term over the long-term, of present advantage over more enduring principle". There is, in Behm's view, "a pressing need for an up-to-date and forward-looking Australian national security strategy".⁶ Similarly, the scholar Stephan Frühling argues that if Australia is to successfully balance commitments with capabilities, then, the country requires

new National Security and Defence White Papers that define priorities both within and between the agencies and departments relevant for national security.⁷

Finally, David Connery has called for several measures to improve security co-ordination in such areas as operational planning strategy and domestic security policy, along with the creation of a Crisis Coordination Centre.⁸

While there is merit in all of the above recommendations, they tend to focus on 'whole-of-government' structure and to neglect the conceptual challenges surrounding the subject of national security. Yet, the first matter to be decided in any discussion about adopting a national security strategy is a simple one: what is the conceptual basis for such a policy approach? Accordingly, the aim of this article is not to debate the various organisational structures and administrative arrangements that might comprise a national security strategy, but to focus on the conceptual challenge such an approach presents to policy-practitioners. In terms of policy analysis, unless a basic conceptual rationale can be made in favour of developing a national security strategy, it becomes premature to recommend new security structures and routines.

This article takes as its basic proposition the wise advice of the distinguished political scientist, Arnold Wolfers, namely that if the concept of national security is employed without careful specifications, it "leaves room for more confusion than sound political counsel or scientific usage can afford".⁹ In 21st century conditions, any Australian concept of national security must be consciously designed to serve the ends of policy and theoretical strategic propositions must be linked to practice. While many policy practitioners often tend to disdain theory as meaningless, it remains the case that all strategy-making ultimately depends on a set of theoretical assumptions. Indeed, as the social scientist Kurt Lewin once put it, "there is nothing so

⁶ Allan Behm, 'The Need for an Australian National Security Strategy', *Security Challenges*, vol. 3, no. 3 (August 2007), pp. 9-12.

⁷ Stephan Frühling, 'Balancing Australia's Strategic Commitments', *Security Challenges*, vol. 3, no. 3. (August 2007), p.158.

⁸ David Connery, *National Security Community 2020: Six Practical Recommendations for the Australian Government*, Kokoda Paper, no. 3, Canberra, Kokoda Foundation, April 2007, pp. 36-54.

⁹ Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security" as an Ambiguous Concept', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. LXVII, no. 4 (December 1952), p. 483.

practical as a good theory".¹⁰ Without the underpinning of relevant theory, strategy can easily become overly dependent on short-term incrementalism and crisis-management techniques at the expense of a sophisticated understanding of the demands of long-term security dynamics.

With the above issues in mind, this article develops four themes. First, in order to establish a context for analysis, the main features of the new globalised security environment and the special challenges it presents for Australian policy makers are sketched. Second, against this background, some of the main definitional challenges that surround an understanding of the concept of national security strategy in Australia are discussed. Third, the essay examines the role of theory and practice in national security strategy. It is argued that, despite an emphasis on *ad hoc* pragmatism, theoretical clarity of purpose is vital for successful Australian national security development particularly in an era of distributed threats and risks.

Finally, the paper recommends that the national security of this country needs to be investigated through means of a bipartisan Australian Commission of Inquiry into 21st Century National Security. If a formal national security approach is to eventually replace the current informal approach based on *ad hoc* pragmatism, then investigation must span the boundaries of political difference and operate in the national interest. Ultimately, a bipartisan Commission with members drawn from all political parties, the policy world, the armed forces, academia and the private sector, is the best way of trying to establish a degree of consensus on present and future challenges to Australia's security.

Features of the New Globalised Security Environment

The major strategic trend at work in the new millennium is the globalisation of security, bringing with it changes in strategic agency through the creation of a bifurcated conflict environment. Globalisation is perhaps best understood as a process of interdependence between the global and the local that transforms the operating environment, but without eradicating traditional state-centric institutions.¹¹ The change is well summed up by former British defence minister, John Reid:

From a relatively static [Cold War] world of inviolable national borders, iron curtains and concrete walls that prohibited and limited movement and controlled transport and communications networks, we now live with mass mobility of people and the knowledge that they produce and use on an

¹⁰ Quoted in H. K. Colebatch, 'Mapping the Work of Policy', in H. K. Colebatch, ed., *Beyond the Policy Cycle: The Policy Process in Australia*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2006, p. 19.

¹¹ See John D. Steinbruner, *Principles of Global Security*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, p. 96 and Christopher Coker, *Globalisation and Insecurity in the Twenty-first Century: NATO and the Management of Risk*, Adelphi Paper, no. 345, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002, pp. 20-21.

unprecedented and growing scale. The consequences of this great change are both global and local.¹²

What is occurring under the impact of globalisation is the interaction of what leading US political scientist, James N. Rosenau, calls “the two worlds of world politics”—the symmetric, state-centric world and the asymmetric, multi-centric world. Complexity and unpredictability are caused by the reality that the new multi-centric environment has not abolished the traditional state-centric world order; rather it has superimposed itself upon that order creating a turbulent, bifurcated or two-tier, strategic environment.¹³

What makes the 21st century strategic environment so difficult to manage is not the factor of change itself, but the rapid speed, compression and interconnectedness of change between the state-centric and multi-centric worlds, because of the microelectronic revolution and economic interdependence. The global security system that is gradually emerging has, in turn, brought with it four other important strategic features. The first feature is a shift in thinking away from territoriality towards connectedness. The second aspect is a blurring of the distinctions between state and society and foreign and domestic policies. The third is the rise of risk as a major factor in strategic analysis. The fourth feature is a merging of conventional and unconventional modes of armed conflict into the phenomenon of full-spectrum strategies that embrace peace, crisis, war and post-war situations.

TERRITORIALITY, CONNECTEDNESS AND SECURITY

The first change stemming from the globalisation of security, a shift in strategic thinking away from defending territory, reflects the problem of ensuring security for societies that are increasingly vulnerable to threats from networked non-state actors. In the words of John Steinbruner:

The emerging problems of security, it is prudent to assume, are not merely and not even primarily about the defense of territory; they concern more generally the defense of vital [global] legal standards.¹⁴

Globalisation has created a new supraterritorial space that coexists with older territorial imperatives—what Philip Zelikow describes as “the new geography of national security”.¹⁵ In this sense, much of the developed world has transitioned from an age of deliberate threat monopolised by enemy states into an era of distributed threats emanating from non-state adversaries. The rise of multi-centric adversaries does not, of course, mean that inter-state warfare has disappeared, only that, given present political

¹² John Reid, ‘Securing the Critical National Infrastructure’, *RUSI Journal*, vol 152, no. 3 (June 2007), p. 15.

¹³ James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 249-71.

¹⁴ Steinbruner, *op. cit.*, p.146.

¹⁵ Philip Zelikow, ‘The Transformation of National Security, Five Redefinitions’, *The National Interest*, vol. 71 (Spring 2003), p. 19.

conditions, it is less likely to occur—largely because the traditional link between national sovereignty and national security has been severed.¹⁶

Many contemporary threats to advanced countries are no longer direct but indirect; they are not about territory but projected across territory into permeable open societies. As Lawrence Freedman suggests, the world may be witnessing a rise in complex irregular conflicts alongside a “demilitarisation of inter-state relations”.¹⁷ A major official concern, then, is the growing risk of societal vulnerability stemming from non-state and transnational threats that are facilitated by the diffusion and diversification of electronic communications and weapons technologies. Thus, while traditional inter-state security threats continue to remain important to policy-makers, there is an unmistakable parallel trend in strategic affairs towards multi-centric challenges and the risks these pose to democratic order.

THE RISE OF STRATEGIC RISK-ANALYSIS

If the 20th century was the age of predictable *threat*, the 21st century is the age of unpredictable *risk*. As US President Bill Clinton observed in December 1998, the power of global markets may have set humanity free of the local but the evolving global era brings with it “a world in which risk is endless”.¹⁸ The rise of delocalised risk is yet another outcome of the arrival of a bifurcated, yet interconnected world. In the new millennium both threat and risk must be considered by policy-makers in the formulation of strategy. Strategic threat tends to be measurable and is based on tangibles; it is about assessing the intentions and capabilities of the great military powers such as the US, China and Russia. Risk, on the other hand, is immeasurable and often involves intangibles; it is about the probabilities and consequences that may flow from unpredictable activities of non-state actors empowered by global interconnectedness.¹⁹

In the 21st century a “new risk rationality of strategy” is emerging.²⁰ In many respects, the crisis over Iraq in 2003 was incomprehensible in terms of threat-analysis. However, when examined in terms of strategic risk-analysis the decision-making becomes more comprehensible. The Iraq crisis was shaped by the shock of the September 11 2001 surprise attacks on New York and Washington and was driven by the possible risk—rather than the

¹⁶ See Emil J. Kirchner, ‘Regional and Global Security: Changing Threats and Institutional Responses’, in Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling, eds, *Global Security Governance: Competing Perceptions of Security in the 21st Century*, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 3-22.

¹⁷ Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper, no. 379, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006, pp. 7-9.

¹⁸ Quoted in *The New York Times*, 17 December 1998.

¹⁹ For discussion see Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006 and Yee-Kuang Heng, *War as Risk Management: Strategy and Conflict in an Age of Globalised Risks*, London, Routledge, 2006.

²⁰ Rasmussen, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

imminent threat—of technologies of mass destruction being transferred from Saddam's Iraq to transnational terrorist groups.²¹

A useful illustration of the rise of the phenomenon of risk-rationality is US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's now famous 'known unknowns' speech of February 2002. During this speech, Rumsfeld stated:

There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.²²

Far from being 'Rumspeak', this statement represents a cogent recognition of the importance of risk management in contemporary strategy.²³ In terms of assessing risk, it is not strong states, but rogue and failed states that present serious challenges. Just as the international community cannot risk diseased humans spreading a deadly bacillus without quarantine, so too it cannot risk failed or dysfunctional states incubating potentially deadly non-state threats that can penetrate borders and threaten democratic societies via global mobility. In terms of conventional capabilities, a state such as Afghanistan was less a threat to the US than Haiti. However, in terms of a strategic risk-calculus that concentrates on consequences, Afghanistan was a high risk danger indeed—just how dangerous was demonstrated on September 11 2001.

Unlike threat-analysis then, risk-analysis often emphasises consequences not capabilities. The interconnected processes of globalisation mean that strategy must now focus not only on inter-state threats but also on managing an array of non-state risks. The latter may range from unstable rogue states to refugee flows from crumbling nations and from viruses to nuclear devices—all of which may be dangerous, or even catastrophic, if left to fester and spread.²⁴ Some analysts see the rise of such transnational risks as symbolic of fundamental global change. As The French security analyst, Phillippe Delmas put it, in his disturbing 1995 book, *The Rosy Future of War*:

Today's world is without precedent. It is as different from the Cold War as it is from the Middle Ages so the past offers no basis for comparison ... Tomorrow's wars will not result from the ambitions of States; rather from their weaknesses.²⁵

THE BLURRING OF THE NEAR AND THE FAR AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The third change arising from the phenomenon of globalised security is the blurring of distinctions between local and global and between state and

²¹ Heng, *op. cit.*, chapter 6.

²² 'Transcript of Defense Department Briefing, 12 February, 2002' at <<http://usinfo.state.gov>>.

²³ 'Rumspeak', *The Economist*, 14 December 2003.

²⁴ Sandra Bell, 'The UK's Risk Management Approach to National Security', *RUSI Journal*, vol 152, no. 3 (June 2007), pp. 18-22

²⁵ Phillippe Delmas, *The Rosy Future of War*, New York, The Free Press, 1995, p. 213.

society. Liberal democratic governments face the reality that many security challenges are seamless and transcend domestic, foreign and defence policies. Moreover, such challenges are characterised by complex interactions that link, rather than divide, streams of events from the local to the global—from Bali and Birmingham to Basra and Baghdad. Ours is an age which, in the words of James Sperling, security establishments must learn to deal with “the vertices of conflict and the interstices of cooperation”.²⁶ This blurring of distinctions has led many advanced countries to begin a process of melding their foreign, defence, intelligence and domestic policies into more cohesive national security strategies in order to meet diverse threats and risks.²⁷

Because the security of post-industrial societies has become global as well as regional and national, the 21st century security environment increasingly places a premium on Western liberal democracies possessing a mixture of joint expeditionary task forces and agile homeland security measures to secure their interests at home and abroad. Under globalised security conditions, the strategic equation that must be met by policy-planners is the need to reconcile ‘the near and the far’ through an effective and multi-dimensional planning matrix. Given the transformation of the security environment,

the effective protection of any society against various forms of violent assault and the broader defense of its interests will involve more than the deployment of standard military forces to perform traditional missions.²⁸

Frequently the need in liberal democracies is for a ‘networked approach’ to national security. Such an approach is increasingly characterised and shaped by greater consultation and interdependence among the mosaic of official departments and agencies. The aim is to improve the possibilities for innovation and collaboration in the face of local and global, multi-centric and state-centric challenges.²⁹

THE CONVENTIONAL AND THE UNCONVENTIONAL: THE NEED FOR FULL-SPECTRUM STRATEGY

The fourth change, stemming from the rise of globalised security conditions, is the blurring of conventional and unconventional modes of armed conflict creating the need for full-spectrum strategy. As the 2005 US *National*

²⁶ James Sperling, ‘Conclusion: Regional or Global Security? The Vertices of Conflict and Interstices of Cooperation’, in Kirchner and Sperling, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-86.

²⁷ For example Government of Canada, *Securing an Open Society: Canada’s National Security Policy*, Ottawa, Privy Council Office, April 2004; and *Securing an Open Society One Year Later: Progress Report on the Implementation of Canada’s National Security Policy*, Ottawa, Privy Council Office, April 2005; *Canada’s International Policy Statement—A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, Ottawa, Privy Council Office, April 2005.

²⁸ Steinbruner, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁹ Charlie Edwards, ‘A Blueprint for Reform: The Case for a National Security Strategy’, *RUSI Journal*, vol 152, no. 3 (June 2007), pp. 24-28.

Defense Strategy puts it: *traditional* inter-state conflicts, *irregular* conflicts, *catastrophic* threats from weapons of mass destruction; and *disruptive* threats from adversaries who may possess break-through technologies are increasingly merging into a deadly cocktail.³⁰

For example, the global Islamist *jihadist* movement emanating from the Middle East may be cellular, non-state and irregular in its methods, but its objectives compel it not only to use roadside bombs, but to seek to acquire catastrophic capabilities. Moreover, a state such as Iran has the military potential to present a medley of traditional, irregular and catastrophic challenges simultaneously. Again, in the future, it is possible that reviving or emerging great powers such as Russia or China may develop into traditional or disruptive threats because of a conjunction of growing economic success and geopolitical ambition. The new millennium is an age of deadly cocktails in which post-modern, modern and pre-modern modes of conflict may interact as they did in Afghanistan in 2001-02, when cavalry and cruise missiles co-existed and when the old battlefield met the new battlespace. Increasingly, then, strategists must consider the interactive character of local and global conflict through a blend of multinational cooperation, multilateral effort and burden-sharing.³¹

Understanding the Concept of National Security: An Approach for Australia

For Australia, the type of globalised security environment outlined above with its discontinuities and distributed threats and risks does not lend itself to the deductive, deliberate and single-dimensioned strategic planning approach of the Cold War 'Defence of Australia' paradigm. Under the latter, the main focus was on the military defence of the northern sea-air gap against a conventional adversary. In the 21st century, Australia requires an integrated concept of national security that encompasses the conventional and the unconventional and the direct and the indirect in both threat and risk.

Australia must consider an interactive global-regional nexus in its security calculation embracing commitments from Afghanistan to Iraq and from East Timor to the Solomons with possible future contingencies in Papua New Guinea and the Southern Philippines. To this already heady strategic brew, it is also necessary to add the demands of homeland security. Until recently, however, the subject of national security in Australia attracted little serious

³⁰United States of America, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington DC, Department of Defense, 2005, pp. 2-3.

³¹ Kirchner, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-22; Steinbruner, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-97.

attention and has been marked by what Allan Dupont has called “a profound absence of clarity and understanding”.³²

This situation is, of course, not peculiar to Australia. Indeed, the concept of national security has long suffered from a lack of consensus and rigorous analysis that makes it unattractive to policy-makers. In the West, the notion of national security has long been viewed both as an “ambiguous symbol” and as an “essentially contested concept” with its practical use bedevilled by contending ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ schools of academic thought.³³ Those who advocate a narrow approach to national security tend to view the subject as being synonymous with military defence against a foreign attack. As the realist scholar, Stephen Walt has put it, attempting to expand the concept of security beyond the use of military force only threatens to “destroy its intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions”.³⁴ In contrast, those who advocate a broad approach to national security are often focused on an array of diverse global threats. Such advocates often extend the concept to cover every destabilising tendency from economics through health to the environment—both internal and external—irrespective of the role of human agency and the demands of intellectual coherence.³⁵

In 21st century conditions, these unreconstructed narrow and broad approaches are both conceptually inadequate. A purely military-centric definition in the realist tradition of international relations excludes too many indirect societal threats. Yet viewing security through too broad a lens robs the subject of any practical conceptual parameters for policy-makers. What is required is a reconceptualisation of national security to encompass a continuum of state, societal and systemic threats and risks that accurately reflect new 21st century conditions.³⁶

In order to accomplish such a reconceptualisation, this article employs an updated version of the definition of national security developed by the American scholar, Robert Mandel, in the early post-Cold War years. Writing in 1994, Mandel defined the concept of national security as entailing

³² Allan Dupont, *Australia and the Concept of National Security*, Working Paper, no. 206, Canberra, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, May 1990, pp. 1-16.

³³ For a comprehensive introduction to the comparative literature on the concept of national security see the nineteen essays in Michael Sheehan, ed, *National and International Security*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Company Limited, 2000; and also Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, second edition 1991.

³⁴ Stephen M. Walt, ‘The Renaissance of Security Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 2 (June 1991), p. 212.

³⁵ For discussion of broader approaches to national security see Richard H. Ullman, ‘Redefining Security’, *International Security*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Summer 1983), pp. 129-53; and Jessica Tuchman Mathews, ‘Redefining Security’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol 68, no. 2 (Spring 1989), pp. 162-77.

³⁶ Kirchner, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

*the pursuit of psychological and physical safety, which is largely the responsibility of national governments to prevent direct threats primarily from abroad endangering the survival of these regimes, their citizenry, or ways of life.*³⁷

This article retains the essence of Mandel's formula but adds indirect challenges and the rise of risk-rationality to the definition as follows:

National security entails the pursuit of psychological and physical safety, which is largely the responsibility of national governments, to prevent both direct and indirect threats and risks primarily from abroad from endangering the survival of these regimes, their citizenry, or their ways of life.

Central to this modified definition are three ideas. First, there is the idea of protecting the social contract between people and government alongside the pursuit, rather than the attainment of, the safety and survival of both state and society. Second, there is the idea that national security problems mainly stem from human, not natural agency, and this reality helps to define the subject's conceptual parameters. Finally, the notion of national security employed here encompasses both direct and indirect and deliberate and distributed threats and risks—whether emanating directly from nation-states or indirectly or from sub-national, trans-national or supra-national groups.

In 21st century conditions, threats and risks to state and society embrace military, economic, political-cultural and resource-environmental sectors.³⁸ Because of this complex multidimensionality, any Australian concept of national security must be based on a rigorous analysis to establish conceptual parameters that reflect linkages between the ideas of social contract, human agency and deliberate and distributed threats and risks. In an age of connectedness, linkages and interactions between the four key sectors of military, economic, political-cultural and resource-environmental security must be clearly identified in terms of both traditional and non-traditional threats and risks. For example, the role of military force in national security embraces a series of traditional operations both conventional and unconventional. However, military establishments must also prepare for more non-traditional missions to meet a range of growing responsibilities in homeland security.³⁹

Similarly, in the economic dimension of national security, an analyst or practitioner does not need to become a student of John Maynard Keynes and Friedrich A. Hayek in order to achieve the necessary understanding. Exploration of economic security should to be defined by the need for

³⁷ Robert Mandel, *The Changing Face of National Security: A Conceptual Analysis*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, chapters 3-6. See also Michael Sheehan, *International Security: An Analytical Survey*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, chapters 5-7.

³⁹ For a good discussion of these issues see John L. Clarke, *Armies in Homeland Security: American and European Perspectives*, Washington DC, National Defense University Press, 2006.

security officials to comprehend the interlocking processes of market interdependence and to the consequences of a disruption of the domestic economy from a crisis involving either local or global mass-casualty terrorism.⁴⁰ In terms of the political-cultural dimensions of national security, unprecedented societal interpenetration and increased migration flows require greater public understanding by policy-makers of the principles of civic identity and liberal-democratic values in preserving social cohesion.⁴¹

It is the resource-environmental sector of the national security mosaic that is arguably the most complex and speculative field for non-specialist policy-makers to master. While much scientific research suggests that the world is facing a future of planetary warming caused by human agency, there is no scientific consensus over the time spans involved or about the exact ramifications of climate change for individual countries and regions.⁴² In many ways, it is simply too early for policy-makers to try to translate environmental issues into national security planning. Thus even if there is an awareness of environmental problems amongst policy-makers, it is not matched by any corresponding ability to prioritise environmental security within a workable matrix of threat and risk. The truth is a simple one: because of uncertainty over cause and effect, governments and intelligence agencies are yet to place environmental issues into the mainstream of national security planning.⁴³ Realistically, then, until the scientific community can provide better detail on scenarios for the policy world, the Australian Government's capacity to deal with security challenges emanating from climate change is likely to be confined to consequence-management.

For Australia, the main lesson to be drawn from the above analysis of the 'vertices and interstices' is the need for clarity in conceptual analysis when dealing with the notion of national security. It is clear that, when it comes to developing an Australian concept of national security, a greater, not a lesser, theoretical context for policy analysis is required. Theory and practice are not separate but related, and it is to this intimate relationship that this article now turns.

Theory and Practice in National Security Strategy: Some Implications for Australia

In the future, sophisticated policy research must provide the theoretical basis for a pragmatic Australian national security strategy. Unlike much scholarly

⁴⁰ Mandel, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² For the problems of consensus on environmental security see Marc A. Levy, 'Is the Environment a National Security Issue?', *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 35-62; and Alan Dupont and Graeme Pearlman, *Heating Up the Planet: Climate Change and Security*, Lowy Institute Paper, no. 12, Sydney, Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006, especially introduction and chapter 1.

⁴³ Dupont and Pearlman, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-89.

inquiry, policy research and analysis is normative and prescriptive and seeks engagement and relevance. In national security development, the essential task of theoretical research is to support practice and to ameliorate any 'knowing-doing gap'—to ensure that long-term objectives can be blended with adaptive short-term decision-making. Forward thought and integrative reasoning need to be developed by using three key areas of policy analysis: strategic evaluation, systems analysis and operations research.⁴⁴

However, in an environment that may be driven by media-fuelled events rather than ease of reflection, the role of theory in national security strategy is more easily stated than accomplished. Most national security professionals are practitioners rather than theorists. They tend to possess a toolkit mentality and an 'in-box' outlook to their responsibilities in which 'learning and doing' are regarded as combined activities.⁴⁵ Such approaches have been predominant in Australia in the new millennium. Australia has eschewed formal strategy in favour of a pragmatic 'in box' approach in national security in which policy co-ordination through the valuable work of the National Security Division in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has taken precedence.

While there is much to recommend such qualities as pragmatism, experience and intuition in national security affairs, by themselves they are not enough. The Australian policy expert, Hal Colebatch, has noted that:

Any attempt to separate the practical and the theoretical in accounts of policy is misplaced. It is simply not possible to construct an account of policy that does not have an underlying theoretical base.⁴⁶

Moreover, as, Henry Mintzberg, one of the leading analysts of strategic planning has warned, "assumptions of detachment" by practitioners in which

thought is detached from action, strategy from operations, ostensible thinkers from real doers, and, therefore "strategists" from the objects of their strategies⁴⁷

represent highly superficial approaches. To develop and manage strategy is a process of blending in which thought and action, control and learning and stability and change must be balanced and rationalised.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See Richard L. Kugler, *Policy Analysis in National Security Affairs: New Methods for a New Era*, Washington DC, National Defense University Press, 2006, pp.14-22; and Clark A. Murdock, *Improving the Practice of National Security Strategy: A New Approach for the Post-Cold War World*, Washington DC, The CSIS Press, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006, pp. 11-25

⁴⁵ Murdock, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22.

⁴⁶ Colebatch, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners*, New York, Free Press, 1994. pp. 227-33; and 'Crafting Strategy', *Harvard Business Review*, no. 4 (July-Aug 1987), pp. 66-75.

Ultimately, there is much more to national security strategy than a reliance on practical skill in crisis-management. An essential unity between theory and practice is important simply because of the volatile manner in which diffuse threats and risks can interact with a relentless twenty-four hour media cycle. In an era of saturation images, reactive and reflexive actions are never enough and carry with them the danger of a retreat into spin doctoring and faulty decision-making under the pressure cooker of events. A national security strategy approach requires a forward process of integrative reasoning in which theory must provide principles of clarity, vision and synthesis for security practitioners. Above all, theory must help in the process of innovative thinking to identify a range of strategic patterns and discontinuities in order to avoid the fallacies of orthodoxy, group think and spin methods. In national security affairs, contingency planning can benefit from a range of theoretical approaches—notably the use of careful scenario-planning to assist in mapping alternate futures.⁴⁹

A theory of national security for security practitioners is akin to a lighthouse in the dark for seamen. Like the lighthouse, a theoretical security edifice provides the 'visionary beam' that illuminates direction on objectives, so providing the milieu in which practical planning and rational decision-making can occur. The importance of theoretical clarity has been outlined by the US analyst, Clark Murdock:

For the NSS [national security strategy] practitioner, clarity about ends serves as the functional equivalent of vision. From this perspective, a formal NSS statement should focus on the objectives, desired end states, and priorities being sought, rather than the strategies for pursuing them.⁵⁰

Knowledge of objectives and priorities represent the 'strategic component' of a practitioner's actions. In short, theory drawn from policy analysis ensures that decision-making has a sense of both strategic consistency and purpose.⁵¹

Creating a Australian National Security Strategy: The Need for a Commission of Inquiry

Any future Australian national security strategy needs to reflect the co-ordination and correlation of instruments of state and a seamless understanding of the interaction between foreign and domestic issues. An understanding of networked linkages between the four security sectors of the military, the economy, politics-culture and resources-environment is vital. Harold Lasswell's famous emphasis on developing a holistic approach to

⁴⁸ Mintzberg, 'Crafting Strategy', pp. 73-74.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-28.

⁵⁰ Murdock, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

national security is as relevant today as it was when he first enunciated it in 1950:

Caution is needed against conceiving of national security in terms of foreign divorced from domestic policy; and so far as foreign policy is concerned, against confounding defense policy with armament. Our greatest security lies in the best balance of all instruments of foreign policy, and hence in the coordinated handling of arms, diplomacy, information and economics; and in the proper correlation of all measures of foreign and domestic policy.⁵²

The benefits of seeking to develop an Australian national security strategy are fourfold. First, a holistic security strategy can be seen both as a mirror of the nation's liberal values and democratic beliefs and as a roadmap of its vital policy interests. Second, a unified vision of the strategic environment would facilitate a government-wide framework that promotes integration, synergy, strategic focus and anticipatory methods. Third, a national security strategy would allow the Australian Government to arrive at an accurate and informed political assessment of the threats and risks to which priority and resources must be afforded. Fourth, the publication of a declassified version of any future Australian national security strategy would represent, in 21st century conditions, an act of responsible government policy aimed at educating the electorate.

To arrive at a situation where the above benefits are available Australia needs to undertake a formal review the subject of national security. In order to facilitate such a review, Australia needs to form a bipartisan Commission of Inquiry on 21st Century National Security. One useful model for such an Australian commission might be the bipartisan United States Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, set up by the Clinton Administration, which operated between September 1999 and July 2001. The American Commission was co-chaired by former Democratic Senator Gary Hart and former Republican Senator Warren B. Rudman, and undertook the most comprehensive and politically bipartisan review of American security since the Truman Presidency in 1947.⁵³ Another American model worthy of consideration by Australian policy-makers might include the working group system adopted by the 2006 Princeton Project on National Security.⁵⁴

⁵² H. D. Lasswell, *National Security and Individual Freedom*, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1950, p. 75.

⁵³ See especially United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, *New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century*, Phase 1 Report on the Emerging Global Security Environment for the First Quarter of the 21st Century, Washington DC, September 1999. For a discussion of all three reports see Evans, 'Overcoming the Creswell-Foster Divide in Australian Strategy: The Challenge for Twenty-First Century Policy-Makers', pp. 209-10.

⁵⁴ G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, Co-Directors, *Forging A World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century*, Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security, Princeton Project Papers, Princeton, NJ, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 2006.

Ultimately, however, any Australian Commission of Inquiry on 21st Century National Security needs to be an indigenous effort that reflects Australia's political culture and parliamentary system. Consequently, it should be composed of commissioners nominated by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and be co-chaired by two retired political or judicial figures. Because of the many complexities involved in protecting networked critical national infrastructure, any Commission should also include a number of senior representatives from the private sector. The Commission's charter should aim at defining Australia's role and purpose in the first quarter of the 21st century through an integrated analysis, with the objective being to identify the main elements of an appropriate national security strategy based on ends, ways and means supported by an appreciation of national values. Finally, the Commission should be mandated to produce three phased reports involving an initial global security assessment, a national security strategy plan and, finally, a roadmap for any recommended institutional redesign.

Creating an Australian national security strategy will be a daunting task, but it represents a vital step forward in understanding how to respond to the complex threat and risk environment of the new millennium. In confronting the national security maze, the need to blend many ideas and the requirement to reconcile the views of multiple constituencies can present an intimidating prospect. Yet, we can be sure of one thing: the bifurcated global strategic environment of state-centric and multi-centric challenges will not disappear in the future. On the contrary, it is only likely to grow more complex and demanding. For this reason, the quest for a coherent Australian national security strategy in the early 21st century should not be deferred on the grounds it is too difficult to undertake. Indeed, from the perspectives of 'knowing and doing' and from theory and practice, the very process of creating a strategy may be as important as the final product. In Steinbruner's words, "thinking forward under unchartered circumstances is risky, confusing, and contentious but must nonetheless be attempted".⁵⁵

The continued absence of an integrated Australian national security approach risks a future of institutional fragmentation, lack of coherent policy development and may contribute, over time, to deficient threat-risk analysis and resilience planning. In the long term, operating an *ad hoc* national security system without a unified strategy is a recipe for an ill-coordinated response to future challenges. As the British analyst, Sandra Bell, has noted:

Without a broad understanding or overarching strategy [of national security challenges] individual strategies will fail to be compatible with—and the capabilities acquired will fail to be interoperable with—other elements, both

⁵⁵ Steinbruner, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

vertically with central government strategy and horizontally with other vulnerability and consequence management elements.⁵⁶

An Australian national security approach needs to begin with conceptual analysis with organisational change subordinate to policy ideas. To employ a travel metaphor, the road to be identified is more important than the vehicle to be designed. In addition, any subsequent system of 'joined-up government' should not seek change through bureaucratic consolidation or gargantuan new agencies. Instead, an 'open enterprise' approach to problem-solving should be adopted—one that is nimble and which permits networks, 'tiger teams', dual-hatting, and cross-agency training to flourish throughout the national security architecture.

Conclusion

In 1997, the scholar David Baldwin, referring to the fractured academic debate over the meaning of the concept of security, wrote that "no social science concept has been more abused and misused than national security".⁵⁷ While it is difficult to disagree with this judgment, it is a useful counterpoint to remember Harold Laswell's view—as quoted at the beginning of this essay—namely, that there are no experts in national security; there are only experts on aspects of the problem. This is the beginning of wisdom in national security affairs. While 'securocrats' may provide specialised advice, no class of individuals possesses a monopoly on questions of security. Ultimately, the formulation of national security strategy is about political judgment rather than technical expertise and it is this reality that makes security a field of endeavour that is subject to the intellectual discipline of policy analysis.

Despite the many procedural difficulties that surround it, crafting an integrated national security approach has been described as representing "the highest order task of strategic evaluation".⁵⁸ For Australia, this high order evaluation is a responsibility that cannot be shirked indefinitely in the new millennium. Without a clear comprehension of the bifurcated dynamics of the 21st century globalised security environment and the special challenges the latter poses to the country, Australia will face growing difficulty in defining its strategic priorities and in allocating resources for their pursuit in the years ahead. A national security strategy that expresses the country's vision, values and aspirations remains a compelling objective for Australian policy in the early part of the new millennium. Possession of such a strategy is vital and would reinforce the capacity of the Australian Government of the day to fulfil its most fundamental responsibility – the safeguarding of the social contract between state, society and citizen.

⁵⁶ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁵⁷ David A. Baldwin, 'The Concept of Security', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1997), p. 26.

⁵⁸ Kugler, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

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