

 **THE AUSTRALIAN**

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Call to submerge our naval force

Patrick Walters | July 04, 2008

AUSTRALIA needs a larger and more potent submarine fleet armed with land-strike missiles and should consider a historic shift away from big surface warships.

In a new study, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute argues that the emerging build-up of navies throughout the region, which includes growing numbers of submarines and the deployment of supersonic sea-skimming missiles by Russia, China and India, is making surface ships more vulnerable.

ASPI's Andrew Davies says that rapidly evolving technologies are calling into question the survivability of warships such as the navy's \$8billion air warfare destroyers, which will enter service from 2014.

"While the air warfare destroyers about to begin construction will provide a measure of protection against even the most sophisticated missiles, a simultaneous attack with multiple missiles has the potential to overwhelm the defences," he says in the study of Asian military trends and their implications for Australia.

Australia's technological edge in relation to its neighbours is increasingly being called into question and together with the rising maritime capabilities of larger powers, led by China and India, should dictate a major review of the existing force structure of the ADF, the study says.

"The defence white paper currently in development will need to factor our narrowing capability advantage into its calculus. Rather than simply perpetuating a force structure that has served us well for the last four decades, it may be time to think hard about change."

Dr Davies recommends the army should increase the size of the elite special forces, which would undertake future war-fighting in conjunction with allies, while other army units should specialise in stabilisation and assistance missions.

"The traditional combined arms approach of infantry, armour and artillery is less relevant for near regional stabilisation and assistance missions and has not proven to be required in recent coalition operations," he argues.

Dr Davies expressed confidence that Australia could not be directly threatened, in the conventional military sense, by any Southeast Asian state.

"While our near neighbours are acquiring newer and more sophisticated capabilities, the ability to project power across the sea-air gap to the north of Australia and defeat the ADF will remain beyond them for decades to come," he says.

The RAAF's planned combat force consisting of F/A 18 Super Hornets and the F-35 joint strike fighter were well placed to meet any regional challenge.

But Australia did not have such a clear-cut advantage in naval power and the RAN had an "Achilles heel" under water.

The navy's anti-submarine warfare capability was in poor shape, which, when faced with the proliferation of submarines in the region, could "seriously affect the freedom of action of the RAN's surface fleet".

Further afield, the great power relationships of the region were shifting after 50 years of stability.

"If the current growth patterns continue, our advantage will be further eroded. Access to advanced US technologies may keep us ahead of European- and Russian-sourced equipment, but the capability differential will narrow."

Dr Davies said Australia should not expect to be able to unilaterally defend itself against a major power.

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Australia losing its military advantage: defence expert

By Kathryn Roberts

Posted Thu Jul 3, 2008 12:28pm AEST

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A conference in Canberra has been told Australia's military advantage in the Asia Pacific is coming to an end and the country needs to rethink its military structure.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute conference has heard from its director of operations and capability, Dr Andrew Davies, who says countries in Asia are acquiring more high end military equipment as their economies grow.

"Australia has over the last few decades had an economic advantage over the nations of Asia which we have used to build up a military advantage as well," he said.

"But with the economic growth we've been seeing in Asia, that means that countries are simultaneously both richer and internally more stable ... which means that they've turned their attention to buying high end military equipment which they haven't in the past because they've been more concerned with internal stability forces.

"So what that means from Australia's point of view is that the days where we've had a very clear advantage in terms of the equipment we have are coming to an end."

Submarine spending

Dr Davies says as a result, defence spending needs to be redirected.

He says if Australia is to maintain its advantage, it needs to focus more effort and expenditure on submarines rather than surface ships.

"The Australian Defence Force we have today looks remarkably like the Australian Defence Force that the Menzies Government put in place back in the 1960s in terms of the number of aircraft, ships and submarines," he said.

"I think we need to think very hard about those relativities and move towards an ADF that's structured to maintain its relative advantage in the region."



New direction: Andrew Davies says Australia needs to spend more on submarines and anti-submarine warfare.

- [Map: Canberra 2600](#)

Dr Davies says there will be 40 new submarines in the region in the next decade as Asian countries move to acquire more equipment.

"One of the things that Australia has a glaring deficiency in is our ability to conduct anti-submarine warfare," he said.

"So as well as concentrating more on Australian submarines we need to do more to be able to counter other people's submarines."

Military structure

Dr Davies says although Australia's military structure was well suited to deal with Asia in the past, it is not well-equipped to deal with Asia in the future.

He says the structure of the Army needs to change.

"The Army tends to send Special forces - SAS and Commando units - to Coalition operations and I think we need to formally recognise that that's the most valuable thing the Army can contribute to alliance operations," he said.

"But we also need light weight army forces for stabilisation and peace-keeping operations in the South Pacific and local countries.

"So I think the Army could usefully move towards a two level structure."

While there are no impending threats to Australia, Dr Davies says if relations sour Australia will be in a more vulnerable position and reliant on its alliance with the United States.

However he says data show South East Asian nations are scaling back their defence spending as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product.

"Now the conventional wisdom is that, that tells you something about how they see their threat situation and so the picture's actually a pretty comfortable one - the nations of South East Asia are quite comfortable with the status quo," he said.

Tags: [defence-forces](#), [australia](#), [act](#), [canberra-2600](#)

Comments (28)

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• dragon:

03 Jul 2008 1:18:45pm

Did we ever have an advantage ?
Other than having the US as an ally !

[Agree](#) (2) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ Bruzz:

03 Jul 2008 1:31:54pm

Having the USA foist all it's old equipment on us including billions of dollars worth of almost defunct jets contracted by the naive Dr Nelson.

Asia are buying aircraft that are "twice as good and half the price" as Dr Nelsons Hornets. Hornets might be ok if Aus had aircraft carriers but are virtually useless to us as is.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **rob1966:**

03 Jul 2008 3:13:43pm

The F/A-18 A/B, C/D and E/F models are some of the most capable fighter/bombers available today.

The E/F model, or 'Super Hornet', is not defunct technology, and will provide a necessary Defence capability for the RAAF.

The future acquisition of JSF, assuming it proceeds, will provide the RAAF with a leading edge technology aircraft that will out-perform anything our immediate neighbours are purchasing.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Pete:**

03 Jul 2008 2:01:13pm

Whilst not the largest force, the ADF is certainly the most advanced and well trained in the entire SE Asian area.

The article is correct that a lot of nearby countries are upgrading but this should be seen in a positive sense.

Despite the threat of terrorism however we still need a large robust force to act as deterrent from any rogue state that may decide to have a go at us or our assets such as the gas on the North West Shelf.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **dragon:**

03 Jul 2008 2:24:56pm

Apologies to any armed forces people. My response is not meant to belittle anyone. Just pointing out that it is unrealistic to think we can defend ourselves with the current resources we have. And that it is good to have a front row forward like the US (Qld State of Origin pun intended).

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Tony:**

03 Jul 2008 1:18:49pm

Not mentioned in the article is the South East Asian regions poor record of maintenance and serviceability. High end equipment poses little threat if it's not ready to use if and when needed. This is where Australia does, and will continue to have, the advantage.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **James:**

03 Jul 2008 1:53:34pm

Wealthier countries can just buy the expertise they need to support their high-tech gear.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **AverageJo:**

03 Jul 2008 1:56:51pm

Not so sure about that Tony.

Have you checked to see how many of our six Collins Class subs are operational?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **SW:**

03 Jul 2008 3:05:03pm

All six are operational but there are only three full crews. As the new combat systems are installed not only will they be operational they will be a lot more capable than any other conventional sub. The Navy and DoD really need to focus on crewing these boats

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **emh:**

03 Jul 2008 2:03:43pm

The idea that SEAsian nations maintain a poor record of maintenance is self-delusional. As with other elements of growing economies their investment in military equipment has in airlines has brought about improvements in maintenance and to believe that Australia enjoys an advantage here just dangerous.

First world countries like Australia have for many years been moving skilled manufacturing and maintenance jobs into these very countries and our own economy has come to depend more on service industry jobs; jobs that produce no real wealth.

For Australia to regain and keep a military advantage we would have to bring back manufacturing and the creation of real wealth and I do not see any chance of that happening until it is too late. Australians would complain too much in the short term about expensive manufactured goods and would vote out any government that tried to put Australia's survival ahead of mere expedience. That's the downside of the globalisation of our economy.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

• **Bruzz:**

03 Jul 2008 1:21:39pm

So after 11 1/2 years of warmongering government we find that they had no idea about how to provide a defence force. Instead, they wasted billions on buying outdated second hand equipment that was never going to make the grade.

Thank God the incompetent Liberal government has been confined to the dustbin of history.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **rob1966:**

03 Jul 2008 3:21:03pm

What outdated second-hand equipment are you referring too?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

• **SW:**

03 Jul 2008 1:25:16pm

I agree totally, Australia needs to concentrate on the things our forces do well and things we have always excelled at. Submarines and Special Operations are two of these. These are the things that give us the edge and allow other units to capitalise.

The Submarine force needs more investment and more concentration on crews.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Dave:**

03 Jul 2008 1:49:29pm

One thing I will say is that the Asian countries tend to buy off the shelf stuff, which amounts to less expenditure compared to us. Our government always wants to fart around with local input into big-ticket items all the time, and it comes at a huge financial cost. As such there is little left in the Defence budget for other projects.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Canberra Observer:**

03 Jul 2008 2:15:17pm

Australian Strategic Policy Institute provides another interesting position and station and is one body to which I respect. Having a friend that works within the Institute, their comments can't be ignored and secondly, we know that other countries within Australia's region are moving more quickly with equipping their forces than previous years. We have seen reports where China wants to expand its naval/submarine fleet - operations down closer to this country and yet, it appears that the ADF is again experiencing staffing levels. I note that a commercial radio station here in Brisbane is to have a look at the wastage of \$300,000 per day re recruiting personnel. We also have to await the new Defence paper and the previous government was told or informed us that our ADF - Army would move towards a smaller response force to mount international operations - along side of others. Not being a expert in defence staffing/equipment issues, I do keep a eye on defence compensation issues. Australia can't ignore the growing military forces within our region.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **chris:**

03 Jul 2008 2:20:32pm

Our natural advantage was always the sheer size of Australia. Has this changed? To some extent yes as the potential for a missile strike has to be factored in but does anyone really believe we are in danger of invasion from any SE Asian nation? Emerging nations may acquire new weapons but are they thinking of invading Darwin and then traversing the entire country?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **Realist:**

03 Jul 2008 3:03:28pm

If a country wanted to take us, they could do so by lobbing a few nukes over to our capital cities, which would take out the majority of the population, leadership and infrastructure.

The big threat is China - massive population hungry for resources, communist government with low regard for human rights and human life and they have nukes. Now that the USA and rest of the world is so dependent upon China for manufacturing, we need to ask the question if our allies (USA, UK, EU) would nuke China in retaliation to them nuking us?

Let's not have any delusions of grandeur about our importance to the world. We're only around 20 million people in an incredibly resource rich and spacious country. China has a number of cities with more people than live in this entire country.

In a way, we are similar to Israel. They don't admit that they have nukes, but it's widely regarded that they do. If they didn't, Israel's neighbouring countries with much, much larger populations would have annihilated it by now. It's the fear of total annihilation that keeps them at bay.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

- **David Turner:**

03 Jul 2008 2:21:57pm

Why the panic? Asian nations may well be able to afford the same type of year. Butas is usually the case their training leave a lot to be desired. Would it be fair to say that our Colins class subs and professionally trained crew would equal 3 or 4 of the same class of sub used by our norther rivals? no good having top notch gear if all you got using them are inadequately trained personnel.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **aardvark:**

03 Jul 2008 3:02:25pm

Royal Malaysian Air Force (TUDM) front-line fighters are the MiG 29 Fulcrum and the Sukhoi Su-30 Flanker. The last time the RAAF went up against them in war games, they repeatedly shot down the RAAFs F/A 18 Hornets. No contest.

Oh, by the way, the TUDM also has their own squadron of Hornets! And some Airbus A400 heavy lift transports on order.

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **Dave:**

03 Jul 2008 3:23:01pm

Problem is David, that currently the Navy only has enough personnel to fully man 2 subs at a time...

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

• **Anon:**

03 Jul 2008 2:26:33pm

Why not spend all the war budget on important things like health care and education!

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **Alan:**

03 Jul 2008 2:54:18pm

Great idea but not great in the practical application.

The way I see it is that a strong defence force is a deterrent that makes other States think very carefully about making aggressive moves on where and how we live. Yes, we do have a natural defence in that we're huge and an island but that advantage is declining in the face of modern weapons.

Having external stability provided by the military and internal political stability is what sets the scene for the mutually supporting expenditure on education, followed by spending on health care

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **Glen from Sydney:**

03 Jul 2008 3:00:45pm

Yes imagine if the hundreds of billions spent slaughtering people from all sides in Iraq had been spent on cancer research...

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **Mick:**

03 Jul 2008 3:14:36pm

how is health care and education going to help us when indonesia invades us? we can throw books at them?... Libs made a grave mistake buying the outdated and obsolete equipment off the states, waste of tax payer money, and gives us no advantage at all, how many more armed forces personnel have to die for no reason due to these outdated and beyond repair planes, helicopters, boats, subs etc... can someone please answer this? how many armed forces personnel have DIED due to faulty equipment in the

past 5 years? i dare say it would be between 50 and 100, just take this into account around 16 men can be in a helicopter at one time and how many of those have gone down due to poor maintenance or lack of spare parts... THANKS DR NELSON!!! TRUE LEADER YOU AREN'T!!!!

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

▪ **rob1966:**

03 Jul 2008 3:23:00pm

We already spend more on health and education than we do on defence, a whole lot more!

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

• **beattie:**

03 Jul 2008 2:47:33pm

Will submarines save us from climate change too?

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

• **Cliff Knight:**

03 Jul 2008 2:49:50pm

Defence advises government in regards to equipment etc regardless of the political party in power, certainly any new advice coming from defence should recognise that the present government is a powder puff with no knowledge whatsoever of matters military and knowledge of international relationships restricted to that of a previously useless member of the diplomatic corps which, by it's very nature, always has been and always will be a department of words put together to maintain international relationships regardless of the underlying truths.

The geographical advantage of Australia does not call for more ships for defence, nor submarines, but aircraft and a powerful infantry and mobile artillery the roll of which is to hold ground against an enemy stupid enough to attempt to occupy our country.

We should protect ourselves from the dreamers who occupy chairs in ' Think tanks ' and other similar academic like nit wits

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)

• **virgil:**

03 Jul 2008 3:05:34pm

Can't we just be friends with everyone and use 'defence' money on important things? Some countries have abolished their armed forces constitutionally (eg. Costa Rica).

[Agree](#) (0) [Alert moderator](#)