

Chapter 2

Towards an Australian Marine Corps? Australian Land Power and the Battle between Geography and History

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The role of land power in Australia has always been something of a paradox. The Australian Army has been perpetually caught between playing a minor role in planning for the defence of the Australian continent on one hand; and on the other hand, undertaking its preeminent role in providing forces for far off expeditionary deployments in support of its ‘great and powerful’ allies (Great Britain and the United States) which have been the mainstay of Australian military history. This is reflective of the battle between geography and history in Australian strategic culture.¹ Understanding these two paradigms is the key to understanding the evolution of Australian land power and the roles it will most likely play in Australian strategy in the era of a more multipolar and contested Asian strategic landscape.

Geopolitics: From Terra Australis to Federation

There are many ways to look at Australia but almost all of them start with a geographic lens. From descriptions such as the ‘antipodes’ and the ‘land down under,’ to reflections on its unique flora and fauna and its position as the only ‘island continent,’ it is impossible to escape the importance of a map to Australia’s past, present and future.²

Location reveals many things. Australia’s remote locality led to centuries of speculation and wonder in the ancient civilisations of the Mediterranean and Renaissance Europe. Legends from Hellenistic and Roman times prophesied the existence of a southern mega continent. Aristotle argued that ‘there are two inhabitable sections of the earth: one near our upper, or northern pole, the other near the other or southern pole.’ This was a matter of logic; he stated as ‘there must be a region bearing the same relation to the

¹ One of the key texts to address the issue of geography versus history is T. B. Millar, *Australia in War and Peace*, Canberra, ANU Press, 1978, Chapter 21. See also Paul Dibb, ‘Is Strategic Geography Relevant to Australia’s Current Defence Policy?’ *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2006, pp. 247-264; Hugh White, ‘Strategic Interests in Australian Defence Policy: Some Historical and Methodological Reflections’, *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2008, pp. 63-79.

² Desmond Ball, Sheryn Lee, *Geography, Power, Strategy and Defence Policy Essays in Honour of Paul Dibb*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2016.

southern pole as the place we live in bears to our pole.’³ Claudius Ptolemy (circa 150 AD) argued that the Indian Ocean was in fact an inland sea, wherein a great continent linked Africa to Southeast Asia.⁴ But for centuries Terra Australis Incognita (‘the unknown great southern land’) remained a mystery and during the period of the Middle Ages the Christian Church’s ‘insistence that the earth was flat led to the complete eradication of all belief in a southern continent.’⁵ However its reappearance in the 15th and early 16th Century was driven by sea exploration that ‘confirmed the approximately spherical shape of the earth.’⁶ All such claims would, however, have been news to the oldest continuous human civilisation on earth – the Australian Aborigines – who had learned to flourish on the islands unique and largely desolate landscape.⁷

While European exploration was slow, and largely confined to Western Australia in its early iterations, the Macassans of Sulawesi has been trading with northern Australia since the late 17th Century.⁸ But it took the epic journey to the Pacific of Captain James Cook (Royal Navy) to map and chart the east coast of Australia. It took until 1788 before the First Fleet of British colonists arrived.

Debate is still ongoing in historical sources as to the reasons for British settlement of the antipodes. The main debate lies between a convict goal for Irish agitators and the undesirable elements of the British criminal class and the strategic importance of the conquest of the great southern land in order to enable the continuation of British maritime dominance that had allowed this small island off the coast of Europe to become the world’s preeminent maritime power. As Stuart Macintyre has noted ‘the dispute over the motives for settlement is necessarily difficult to resolve because the official documentary record is so circumstantial.’⁹

A strategic perspective on this debate favours the logic of the strong commercial and international advantages as well as the benefits to British sea power to be derived from

³ ‘Meteorology’ by Aristotle, circa 350 B.C.E., translated by E. W. Webster, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/meteorology.2.ii.html>.

⁴ W. J. Mills, ‘Terra Australis Incognita’, in Andrew J. Hund (ed.), *Antarctica and the Arctic Circle: A Geographic Encyclopaedia of the Earth’s Polar Regions*. Santa Barbara, CA, 2014 (online).

⁵ ‘Terra Australis Incognita’, in I. C. B. Dear and Peter Kemp, *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (2 ed.), Oxford, OUP, 2006 (online).

⁶ Ibid. For an outline of these views in relation to Australian history see Frank Welsh, *Great Southern Land: A New History of Australia*, London, Penguin Books, 2004, Chapter 1.

⁷ See Geoffrey Blainey, *The Story of Australia’s People: Volume 1 The Rise and Fall of Ancient Australia*, Melbourne, Penguin, 2016.

⁸ Marshall Clark and Sally K. May (eds.), *Macassan History and Heritage: Journeys, Encounters and Influences*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2013.

⁹ Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 29.

establishment of a colony in Australia. A new British outpost in the south Pacific held out the prospects of expansion, maritime trade, and natural resources.¹⁰ In particular Australia was seen as a source to secure and extend British maritime power by providing an additional ‘source of flax for canvas and ropes, and timber for mast and spars’ and the cementing of Britain’s presence in the south Pacific in an increasingly frenetic scramble by European powers for overseas colonies.¹¹

From the onset of European settlement, the main backstop for the defence of the Australian continent and its surrounds was the Royal Navy and the maintenance of an Anglo-Saxon dominance over maritime Asia. As such Australian land power, from the very begin of European colonisation, planned a relatively minor role in the defence of the continent. This role was primarily given to the Royal Navy, supported from 1911 by the advent of the Royal Australian Navy - Australia’s senior military service.¹² After the Australian Federation in 1901 the role of the Army was confined to coastal defence and debates over its potential role to provide an expeditionary land force of up to six brigades of light horse and three of infantry, ‘remained largely on paper.’¹³

Australian Strategy and the Role of Land Power

From the time of British settlement, the vast distances of the Australian mainland, its small population, location in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, island status and remoteness from its great power protector, meant that Australia’s defence circumstances were relatively exclusive. These strategic drivers gave rise to the Australia defence policy being shaped from colonial times by the ‘ideas of weakness, vulnerability, and isolation.’¹⁴

This combination of geography and history driven by British occupation and settlement of the continent led to a rather unique set of strategic drivers. A reliance on a

¹⁰ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia’s History*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1968, pp. 26-29.

¹¹ G. J. Abbott, ‘The Botany Bay Decision’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 16, 1985; Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, p. 29. See also Jeffery Grey, *Military History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 7-8; Greg Swindon, ‘Australian Naval Defence’ in Craig Stockings and John Connor (eds.), *Before the Anzac Dawn: A Military History of Australia Before 1915*, Sydney, NewSouth, 2013, pp. 125-126.

¹² David Stevens (ed.), *The Royal Australian Navy*, Volume III, The Australian Centenary History of Defence, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 5-26.

¹³ Grey, *Military History of Australia*, p. 71. For a broad overview see David Horner, ‘The Army, the Navy and the Defence of Australia and the Empire 1919-1939’, in Peter Dennis (ed.), *Armies and Maritime Strategy: 2013 Chief of Army History Conference*, Canberra, Big Sky Publishing, 2014, pp. 119-120.

¹⁴ Hugh White, ‘Defence policy’, in Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Politics*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 150-153.

great and powerful ally located on the other side of the globe was one of the consequences of Australia's history combined with its geography. This core element of Australian strategy has resulted in a relatively high degree of continuity in national security strategy making over time. Key factor and the development of Australian national political discourse has seen Australian strategy largely based on:

- An Alliance with a great power – firstly Great Britain and then the USA;
- The promotion of a local defence capability aimed at deterring conventional threats from Asia (mainly through the development of naval and air forces);
- Active bilateral and multilateral diplomacy;
- A liberal internationalist approach to diplomacy;
- A state-based focus for national security policy making;
- A 'realist' (pragmatic) tradition in foreign policy; and
- An 'enduring sense of historical anxiety about Australia's perceived security vulnerabilities' in the world (that leads to) and a sense of 'pessimism and uncertainty'.¹⁵

At the heart of this approach is a paradox, where Australia's geography drives a focus on continental defence in Asia while its reliance on a great and powerful ally and its liberal internationalist approach to diplomacy drives a focus on global engagement. The latter has meant a focus on the commitment of military force to far off distant places in pursuit of its interests with its allies and in the preservation of what has come to be called the 'rules based international order.'¹⁶

The main military tool for the pursuit of Australia's strategic interests alongside its great and powerful friends has been the Australian Army. As the late eminent Australian military historian Jeffery Grey has noted, the Australian Army has been known for 'quality

¹⁵ Andrew O'Neil, 'Conceptualising Future Security Threats to Australia's Security', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 46, no. 1, March 2011, pp. 19-21; Michael Wesley, 'The Rich Tradition of Australian Realism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 324-326; Alex Burns & Ben Eltham, 'Australia's Strategic Culture: Constraints and Opportunities in Security Policymaking', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 35, no. 2, August 2014, pp. 187-191.

¹⁶ Nick Bisley, 'Australia's Rules-Based International Order', *Australian Outlook*, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/australias-rules-based-international-order/>. The Australian Defence White Paper (2016) describes the rules-based global order as 'a shared commitment by all countries to conduct their activities in accordance with agreed rules which evolve over time, such as international law and regional security arrangements', Australian Government, *Defence White Paper 2016*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2016, p. 15. This White Paper used the term 'rules-based global order' no less than 50 times in 191 pages.

of its expeditionary infantry, who are usually sent overseas as part of a wider coalition and depend on a larger ally for logistical and other support.¹⁷ Despite early defence policy being based around naval power, supported by limited conscription of a militia for home defence, from the time of the Maori Wars and the Sudan War (where the colony of New South Wales raised an expeditionary force of volunteers in 1895 to fight in support of the British Empire) Australia has consistently used expeditionary land power at the strategic level of war to support its alliances.¹⁸ This trend was continued during the Boer War in the late 19th and early 20th Century when the separate state based colonies in Australia all raised land forces to fight the Boers in South Africa.¹⁹ Thus when Australia emerged as a federalized nation on 1 January 1901 the country was already committed to a war in support of its great and powerful friend.

This approach to the use of Australian land power was cemented in Australian strategic culture in the First World War. In line with its previous commitments to the Maori, Sudan and Boer Wars, as well as the centrality of the British Empire to both national identity²⁰ and to Australia's strategic interests, at the outbreak of the conflict in 1914 the Australian government committed to the raising of an expeditionary land force for the support of the British Empire as its premier military contribution.²¹ As Neville Meaney has noted:

The coming of the [First World] war was the occasion for a perfervid outpouring of national emotion...The Australian people took great pride in belonging to the British race and Empire and reacted accordingly. They were as one with their leaders.²²

With maritime Asia being dominated by the Royal Navy, supported by the

¹⁷ Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Peter J. Dean, 'The Alliance, Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of War', in Peter J. Dean, Brendan Taylor & Stephan Fruhling, *Australia's American Alliance*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2016, pp. 224-250.

¹⁹ See Stockings and Connor (eds.), *Before the Anzac Dawn*, Chapter 6 'Australians in the New Zealand Wars' and Chapter 9 'Australians in the wars in Sudan and South Africa.' See also Craig Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2002.

²⁰ See Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2014.

²¹ C. E. W. Bean, *The Story of Anzac: From the Outbreak of War to the End of the First Phase of the Gallipoli Campaign, May 4, 1915*, Volume 1, Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1940, pp. 20-36.

²² Neville Meaney, *Australia and World Crisis 1914-1923*, Volume 2, A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy 1901-1923, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 2009, p. 21.

Anglo-Japanese alliance,²³ Australia was freed from the need for continental defence to focus on raising an all-volunteer expeditionary land force – the 1st Australian Imperial Force (1st AIF)²⁴ for service in the Middle East and on the Western Front. This force was escorted to the Middle East in 1915-1916 by the Royal Australian Navy, the Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy.²⁵

During the First World War Australia raised six infantry and one and a half light horse divisions.²⁶ Two divisions of these troops saw service at Gallipoli, five infantry divisions on the Western Front and the close to two light horse divisions in Egypt, Palestine and the broader Middle East.²⁷ From a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 Australians enlisted, of whom more than 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner.²⁸

Once of the major consequences of the First World War was the creation of Anzac Day,²⁹ which has evolved into a virtual national day, and the Anzac Legend whereby the soldiers of the 1st AIF came to be mythologised for their battlefield prowess and the idea that the nation was ‘born’ at Gallipoli.³⁰ This powerful mythology is largely associated with the Australian Army and thus from an Australian cultural perspective it came to symbolise Australian military power.³¹ From 1915 land power thus assumed a cultural

²³ For an Australian policy perspective on this alliance see I. H. Nish, ‘Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1901-1911’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 9, no. 2, November 1963, pp. 201-212.

²⁴ The conscripted militia being restricted to home defence led to the requirement to create a special force of volunteers.

²⁵ David Stevens, *In All Respects Ready: Australia's Navy in World War One*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2014, Chapter 5, pp. 68-82.

²⁶ Only five of the infantry divisions saw service, the sixth being broken up due to manpower restrictions before it saw action.

²⁷ Jean Bou & Peter Dennis, *The Australian Imperial Force*, Volume 5, *The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2016. Chapter 1 ‘The Creation of the AIF’ and Chapter 2 ‘The Fighting Organisation’.

²⁸ n.a., ‘First World War 1914–18’, Australian War Memorial, accessed 1 April 2019, <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war>.

²⁹ ‘ANZAC’ / ‘Anzac’ has multiple meanings. It can mean: ANZAC – the military formations of World War I; Anzac – a soldier (an Anzac), originally a member of the AIF that had served at Gallipoli, and later any Australian or New Zealand soldier; a place, such as Anzac Cove, as the site of the landing near Ari Burnu became known; Anzac Day – a day of commemoration to remember those who have both died and served the nation at war; a battle and/or campaign; a fighting spirit; a folklore tradition amongst the soldiers; and a legend/myth/spirit that is endorsed by institutions and governments that has come to personify Australian ‘values’.

³⁰ Carolyn Holbrook, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography*, Sydney, NewSouth, 2014.

³¹ This was also, initially associated with the notion of Australians as ‘natural born’ soldiers – and idea perpetuated by the Official Historian of the First World War, C. E. W. Bean. See Craig Stockings, ‘There is an idea that the Australian is born a soldier’, in Craig Stockings (ed.), *Zombie Myths of Australian Military History*, Sydney, NewSouth, 2010. pp. 93-115.

centrality in Australia while returning to its peripheral role in defence policy in the period between major wars and conflicts.

The Australian Way of War

How military force was used by Australia in the First World War has driven what can be described as the Australian ‘way of war.’³² In this system Australian strategic culture is dominated by the twin needs of a long term strategic alliance with great powers (first Great Britain and then the U.S.) and a regional defence strategy focused on the south Pacific and Southeast Asia that are generally very low priority geographic regions for Australia’s major alliance partner. This means that this way of war has two related streams.³³

The first is based around the use of force in coalition with Australia’s great and powerful friends. This alliance-based approach, as outlined above, is identified by generally small (relative to the great powers), niche and largely single service force commitments, dominated by the presence of Australian land power.

These forces are generally embedded into the forces of the larger ally and integrated into the larger allies’ logistical system. In this approach Australia largely operates overwhelmingly at two levels of war: strategic (decision to use force) and tactical (maneuvers, engagements, and battles).³⁴ This approach, the mainstay of Australian military history, is reflected in the following conflicts:

- Maori Wars
- Sudan War
- Boxer Rebellion
- Boer War
- First World War
- The Second World War in the Middle East, Europe, and in Southeast Asia
- The Malayan Emergency
- The Korean War

³² The notion of a national ‘way of war’ is a controversial part of strategic studies. It dates back to the 1930s and the British military historian Sir Basil Liddell Hart. For this paper the framework used is, in essence, patterns in the use of force in order to explain how countries might use their military in the future. See Dean, ‘The Alliance, Australia’s Strategic Culture and Way of War’, pp. 225-227.

³³ Ibid, pp. 234-235.

³⁴ USAF College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education (CADRE), ‘Three Levels of War’, *Air and Space Power Mentoring Guide*, Volume 1, Maxwell AFB, AL, Air University Press, 1997, <https://www.cc.gatech.edu/~tpilsch/INTA4803TP/Articles/Three%20Levels%20of%20War=CADRE-excerpt.pdf>.

- Konfrontasi with Indonesia
- The Vietnam War
- Gulf War I*
- Gulf War II*
- The Afghanistan War
- The ongoing conflict against ISIS in Syria & Iraq.*³⁵

These wars and conflicts have seen the preponderance of commitments of Australian land power to the Middle East and Europe, but with episodic periods that focus on Asia, such as in the early part of the Cold War. In the process Australian land power established itself as a highly competent tactically force focused around infantry dominated combined arms teams that demonstrated high levels of interoperability. Despite its small size it became a much sought after partner by Great Britain and the United States.³⁶

However, the limitations of these alliance relationships, especially in Australia's near region, has seen the development of a parallel approach to the Australian way of war built around the independent or semi-independent use of joint forces by the Australian military in the South Pacific and parts of maritime Southeast Asia. This second stream approach is identified by:

- A recognition that Australia's two great and powerful friends do not have the same levels of interest in the South Pacific and maritime Southeast Asia that Australia does;
- The far lower frequency of these operations in the past compared to expeditionary deployments in support of alliance partners;
- Arguably strategically more important operations to Australia than alliance operations as they are undertaken in response to a perceived threat to the direct security of Australia and its immediate region, or in relation to Australia's unique strategic interests;
- Australian involvement across all levels of war;
- A heavy emphasis on joint operations, both independently, semi-independently or in coalition.

³⁵ * Denotes a significant promotion of the Australian military efforts, in these conflicts, which at times includes the majority commitment from the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force.

³⁶ See Douglas E. Delaney, *The Imperial Army Project: Britain and the Land Forces of the Dominions and India, 1902-1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018; Christopher Hubbard, *Australian and US Military Cooperation: Fighting Common Enemies*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005.

A number of exceptionally important conflicts and operations in these regions across Australian military history have illustrated this way of war: ‘Papua and New Guinea (1914, 1942, 1944-45), South Pacific (1941-42 & 1944-45), Fiji (1987), East Timor (1941-1942, 1999, 2006), and various deployments from the post–Cold War era through to today in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific for humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) operations and Peacekeeping / Peace enforcement operations.’³⁷

The Collision of History and Geography

As an example, this struggle between history and geography in Australian strategy played out spectacularly in the Second World War. Despite a clear threat and rising tensions in the Asia-Pacific at the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 Australia raised a 2nd AIF for service in support of the British Empire in the Middle East (where the vast majority of the Australian navy and air force were also sent). The decision to support Great Britain and the Empire was not done out of ignorance nor complacency, but a firm belief that Empire Defence and the quick defeat of Axis forces in North Africa would help secure British Empire resources for the defence of Singapore, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the south Pacific.³⁸

However the Japanese attack in late December 1941 demonstrated the weakness of the British Empire in Asia and the period of 1937-1941 had highlighted the rifts in British and Australian policy towards Japan and the limitations of Imperial defence plans.³⁹ Thereafter Australia’s forces were withdrawn from the Middle East, a new coalition was forged with the United States and Australia concentrated on operations in the Southwest Pacific Area.⁴⁰ The conflict in the Asia-Pacific also highlighted one of the most critically important features of Australian strategy throughout its history: the importance, and reliance upon, uncontested maritime hegemony in Asia by Australia’s great and powerful friends.

The absence of uncontested maritime hegemony of Great Britain or the United States in the Asia-Pacific region during 1941-1945 radically changed Australian’s defence posture and policy. Its restoration towards the end of the Pacific War by the United

³⁷ Dean, ‘The Alliance, Australia’s Strategic Culture and Way of War’, p. 242.

³⁸ Craig Stockings, ‘Other People’s Wars’, in Craig Stockings (ed.), *Anzac’s Dirty Dozen: 12 Myths of Australian Military History*, Sydney, NewSouth, 2012, pp. 75-86.

³⁹ Honae H. Cuffe, ‘The Limits of Empire: Australia, Eastern Appeasement and the Drift to War in the Pacific, 1937–41’, *History Australia*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2018, pp. 766-784.

⁴⁰ Peter J. Dean, *MacArthur’s Coalition: US and Australian Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area, 1942-1945*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2018.

States, with whom Australia concluded the ANZUS Treaty in 1951, saw a return of this strategic characteristic; cementing its place as a key foundation of Australian strategic policy since 1945. The deterioration of U.S. power in Asia in the first decades of the 21st century, including the loss of uncontested maritime hegemony in the region being one of the major factors in why Australia's strategic environment and defence policy has become increasingly complex.

Geography and history have also collided for Australia in the Pacific on a number of other occasions: in 1914 with the threat from the German East Asian Naval Squadron that led Australia to conduct a joint expeditionary operation to secure German New Guinea.⁴¹ As with the period of 1942-1945, Australian land power played a very different role in this conflict. To defeat the German forces in New Guinea in 1914 and the Japanese military in the Southwest Pacific Area in 1942-1945 the Australian military had to deploy joint expeditionary forces at the operational level of war. In 1914 and especially during 1942-1945 the Australia Army had to reconceive its role from that of a continental land force focused on providing infantry formations to the British Army, to a joint expeditionary force focused on amphibious operations and jungle warfare in a maritime environment.⁴²

Australia's core strategic interests were also pursued through engagement in its near region in the post-Cold War era. During this period Australia conducted major operations to project force into Melanesia for peace keeping and peace enforcement operations.⁴³ The Australian Army's role in these regional operations is more expansive than is generally realised. From 1972 (end of Australia's commitment to South Vietnam) until 2007 the Army deployed on no less than 80 missions to Australia's immediate region. These operations ranged from small topographical surveying missions to large scale HADR operations, deterrence operations and strategic presence missions. From operations such as Morris Dance off Fiji after the military coup in 1987 to very large-scale peace keeping and peace enforcement operations such as those in East Timor in

⁴¹ See Robert Stevenson, *The War with Germany*, Volume 3, The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, Chapter 2 'A Great and Imperial Service'; Peter J. Dean & Rhys Crawley, 'Strategy and Sustainment: Australia and Amphibious Operations in the Asia-Pacific: 1914-2014', *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Eighteenth McMullen Naval History Symposium Held at the United States Naval Academy 19-20 September 2013*, Newport, Rhode Island, Naval War College Press, 2018.

⁴² Peter J. Dean, 'To the Jungle Shore: Australia and Amphibious Warfare in the SWPA 1942-1945', *Global War Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2014, pp. 64-94.

⁴³ John Blaxland, *East Timor Intervention: A Retrospective on INTERFET*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2015.

1999, and again in 2006, and the Solomon Islands.⁴⁴

The ‘End of History’: The Future for Australian Land Power

In the current strategic environment, the traditional foundations of Australia’s strategic doctrine have quickly eroded. No longer can Australia rely on its current major power ally, the United States, to maintain uncontested maritime hegemony over the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁵ No longer is the global centre of gravity in Europe and the northern hemisphere. Asia is no longer free from strategic competition and great power rivalry.⁴⁶

In the past factors such as support for liberal democracy, a commitment to open global trade (including free markets), a rules based global order under U.S. hegemonic leadership and uncontested U.S. hegemonic power over maritime Asia had seemingly created a fixed nature to the ANZUS relationship. The U.S.-Australian Alliance (often referred to in Australia as ‘the Alliance’) had thus demonstrated a fixed nature and a changing character as it adjusted over the decades to fit fluctuating strategic circumstances. This fixed nature allowed the character of the Alliance to change and adapt at key points in its history, such as British retrenchment from Asia, the Nixon Doctrine and the end of the Vietnam War, the end of the Cold War and the onset of the Global War on Terror. Since the end of the Cold War the fixed nature of the alliance had allowed Australia’s land forces to spend most of their time in far off distance wars of political choice in support of the United States—most recently in the Middle East, especially Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, this all changed with President Barack Obama’s address to federal Parliament in 2011. Obama’s ‘Pivot’ (later Rebalance) to Asia not only heralded the latest change to the character of the Alliance, but it also laid bare some major cracks in its underlying foundations that had been in train for a number of years. Most significantly it reflected the shift in the power dynamics of Asia and the rise of China as well as revealing the reality of the expiration of uncontested U.S. hegemony in the Asia-Pacific that had been in place since the end of World War II and had persisted throughout the decades, even after the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ John Blaxland, *The Australian Army: From Whitlam to Howard*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2014, Appendix Operations, 1972-2007, pp. 366-377.

⁴⁵ Michael J. Green, Peter J. Dean, Brendan Taylor and Zack Cooper, *The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia*, The Centre of Gravity series, no. 23, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 2015, http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2015-12/COG_%2323_Web_4.pdf.

⁴⁶ Parag Khanna, *The Future Is Asian*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2019.

⁴⁷ Hugh White, *The China Choice*, Melbourne, Black Inc., 2013.

Since 2000 the relative decline of the United States and the emergence of a more multipolar global power structure has been of increasing significance. The rise of countries such as China and Iran and the increasing resistance to the U.S. dominated rules based global order by these countries and others such as North Korea and Russia has recast the global strategic order.⁴⁸ The drawdown of the Australian Army from conflicts in the Middle East and its corresponding increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific is synonymous with the changing strategic landscape of Asia. In addition the inward turn of U.S. politics and the rhetoric of President Trump are helping to undermine what's left of the rules based international order. All of this means that Australia's contemporary strategic environment is radically different from any time since the signing of ANZUS in 1951. This means that not only is this era driving yet another change of the character of U.S.-Australian alliance, but its underlying nature is being fundamentally recast.⁴⁹

In many ways these changes have reversed Australia's perception of the classical dilemma in alliances politics: abandonment and entrapment.⁵⁰ For over a century Australia feared abandonment by its great and powerful friends as it struggled to keep its major power ally engaged in the security of the south Pacific and Southeast Asia. This initially manifested itself with concerns over the British Empire and the rise of Japan, subsequently the United States and the threats to Southeast Asia from communism and the rise of Indonesian power in the period of the 1960s to 1990s.⁵¹

The recent commitment to a joint naval facility on Manus Island (last used by the US and Australia in the Pacific War) notwithstanding,⁵² most contemporary strategic

⁴⁸ For an example of changes in the Asian region as a result of these power shifts and its impact on Australia see Nick Bisley, *Integrated Asia: Australia's Dangerous New Strategic Geography*, Centre of Gravity Series, SDSC, Canberra, 2017, <http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/5330/integrated-asia-australias-dangerous-new-strategic-geography>.

⁴⁹ Peter J. Dean, 'Donald Trump and the Changing Nature of ANZUS', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November 2016, <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/donald-trump-and-the-changing-nature-of-anzus-20161111-gsnm97.html>.

⁵⁰ Stephen Walt, 'Why Alliances Endure or Collapse', *Survival*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1997, pp. 156-179.

⁵¹ See Peter Edwards, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*, Volume 1, The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts 1948-1975, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1992; James Curran, *Unholy Fury: Whitlam and Nixon at War*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2015.

⁵² Natalie Whiting, 'Joint US-Australian Naval Base on Manus Island a 'Significant Pushback' against China's Pacific Ambitions', ABC News, 18 November 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-18/us-pushes-further-into-pacific-with-png-manus-naval-base-deal/10508354>; Ben Wan Beng Ho, 'The Strategic Significance of Manus Island for the U.S. Navy', *Proceedings*, vol. 144, December 2018, US Naval Institute, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2018/december/strategic-significance-manus-island-us-navy>.

questions in the region have been focused around the United States commitments to Asia regions in the face of rising Chinese power. These factors have meant a rise in concerns in Australia over possible entrapment through the Alliance with the United States in a conflict with China in northeast Asia and concerns in the United States over abandonment by Australia in any such conflict as well as in the pursuit of U.S. interests in the region such as freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.⁵³

All of these factors mean that in the contemporary strategic environment history and geography have collided for Australia with a force that now seems irreversible. The current era of an unsettled geo-strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific, the end of uncontested US maritime hegemony, the rise of China and the growing multi-polarity of the region makes the strategic environment fundamentally different to any other time in the history of Australia since European occupation and settlement. Thus we are now seeing the 'end of history' for the traditional basis of the use of Australian strategy: raising questions as the importance and capacity of Australia to continue to deploy forces that are expeditionary at the strategic level, single service focused, globally orientated and in support of Australia's great and powerful friends.⁵⁴ As Australia's strategic environment continues to shift deployment using this historical strategic vein will trend smaller, for shorter periods of time and with much more government discretion and reticence.

This changing Asian security environment represents major challenges for Australian land power. Over the last 20 years the Australian Army has divided its time between conducting and supporting U.S. operations in the Middle East while also maintaining Australia's interests in its immediate region. The high risk and often kinetic nature of the Middle East deployments has meant that the Australian Army invested heavily in raising, training, deploying and sustaining forces for these operations. This was the Army's main effort.

However regional operations in the Asia-Pacific were concurrent features of the Army's operations. This strategic driver has seen the adoption into service of three new amphibious vessels by the Royal Australian Navy, included two large Landing-Helicopter Dock ships and the organisation of parts of the Army around amphibious and maritime

⁵³ Green, Dean (et al.), *The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ The 'end of history' concept relates to Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, however in this context is used in the postmodern sense, whereby in the words of historian Keith Jenkins the phase signifies that the 'peculiar ways in which the past was historicized (was conceptualized in modernist, linear and essentially metanarrative forms) has now come to an end of its productive life'. Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 57.

capabilities.⁵⁵ This move has, however, been slow to emerge as the main effort for Australian land power and it has often come at the opportunity cost of other areas of development – for example the abandonment of work on doctrine and concepts such as ‘Maritime Operations in the Littoral Environment (MOLE)’ (2004) for (amongst other things) a focus on programs such as ‘Hardening and Networking the Army (2005),’⁵⁶ which instead focused the Army on ‘increas[ing] the size and firepower of the land force, improv[ing] the protection provided to our troops, and allow them to communicate better on the future battlefield.’⁵⁷ Thus time and focus on creating a maritime force for operations in the Indo-Pacific was lost while supporting and sustaining strategic deployments to the Middle East; the major positive trade off here being important benefits to the Army’s combat capabilities and operational experience.

In parallel to the changing strategic environment has been the emerging recognition of the different operational landscape as Australia is refocusing on operations in the Indo-Pacific. In this region the terrain is now dominated by an urban-littoral operating environment; one where land power is highly dependent on maritime capabilities. Thus the Australian Army needs to further commit to organising, training and equipping itself for sealift and amphibious warfare operations; especially in order to provide access to close in urban centres, peri-urban terrain and hinterlands via the sea and air from the littoral zone.⁵⁸

As such Australia’s land force must continue to refocus its operational thinking in terms of its ability to manoeuvre in the littoral zone, the type of threats it will face and the types of operations it will be called on to undertake including: the role of land forces in maritime security operations; in sea-based military exercises and diplomacy; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations; non-combatant evacuations operations; regional security missions as well as traditional amphibious raids,

⁵⁵ Peter J. Dean, ‘Amphibious Operations and the Evolution of Australian Defence Policy’, *Naval War College Review*, vol. 67, no. 4, 2014, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1350&context=nwc-review>.

⁵⁶ Peter Leahy (Chief of Army), ‘Towards the Hardened and Networked Army’, *Australian Army Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, Winter, 2004, pp. 27-36.

⁵⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *The Hardened and Networked Army*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2005, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a481036.pdf>. This is not to argue that this program of works is not critical to the future of the Australian Army’s ability to fight and operate in a maritime environment, rather is about illustrating priorities and focus.

⁵⁸ Peter J. Dean, *The ADF and the Indo-Pacific Operating Environment*, Indo-Pacific Insight Series, Perth USAsia Centre, 6 November 2018, <http://perthusasia.edu.au/the-adf-and-the-indo-pacific-operating-environment>.

withdrawals and assaults. Such a focus will also drive a further need for investment in doctrine and capabilities for operations in the middle to the higher end of the conflict spectrum where land forces can play a central role in providing effects such as a joint maritime area denial capability. For the Australian Army this means a new generation of ground-based air defence capabilities and a long-range land-based missile capability.⁵⁹

The focus for operations at the higher end of the conflict spectrum must also be on the role that land power can play as part of distributed amphibious forces who aim to ‘dilute enemy attacks, gain access to contested areas and deny [them] to the enemy.’⁶⁰ In this context, Australian land forces need new operating concepts and doctrine that account for and integrate military systems that take advantage of new technology, greater lethality and longer ranges including: increased cyber capabilities, autonomous systems, hypersonics, direct energy weapons, constellations of satellites, as well as expanding and evolving ‘unmanned systems, sensors, communications and [precision guided] weapons.’⁶¹ In this modern battlespace Australia’s land forces need to be fully fused with air and naval capabilities to create a truly integrated joint force.

For Australia’s land forces to function in the Indo-Pacific littoral operating environment across the full spectrum of conflict it needs to think, evolve and develop doctrine that fits more in line with marine corps-style operating concepts than continental land army doctrines that have been the mainstay of the Australian Army’s approach to operations for over 100 years. This does not mean that the Australian Army has to cast off all of its traditions, history, values and experience. It just needs to draw more heavily on those elements which have driven their past operations in the immediate region, across the spectrum of conflict, as well as providing a focus for doctrine, operations and capability development into the future.

Moves in this direction will require a major doctrinal, and some cultural shifts for the Australian Army. It will also mean reappraising many of its decisions around capability development. For instance Project Land 400, the Army’s next generation armoured fighting vehicles, which is ‘expected to delivery 675 military vehicles over 15 years... at the cost of \$20 Billion dollars...[and is] the biggest and most expensive acquisition

⁵⁹ Chris Smith and Al Palazzo, *Coming to Terms with the Modern Way of War: Precision Missiles and the Land Component of Australia’s Joint Force*, Australian Land Warfare Concept Series (vol. 1), Canberra: Australian Army, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Bryan Clark & Jesse Sloman, *Advancing Beyond the Beach: Amphibious Operations in an Era of Precision Weapons*, Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2016.

⁶¹ Kim Beazley, ‘The Alliance—dependence grows as our options narrow’, *The Strategist*, 1 May 2018.

project in the history of the Australian Army.⁶² So far, this project has been focused on the acquisition of vehicles more suited to its historical use of land power in continental operations rather than being optimised for joint maritime and amphibious operations in the Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion

The big question for the Australian Army is how far will it need to adapt to this new strategic environment and how will the Australian government continue to conceive the strategic use of Australian land power? Australian land power has proven its adaptability over more than a century of operations, it has a strong tradition of aligning to the nation's needs and delivering on joint, integrated maritime operations in its immediate region as it did in the First and Second World Wars in 1914 and 1942-1945, as well as the peacekeeping and HADR operations that have been a mainstay of the ADF's deployment in the south Pacific and Southeast Asia since 1987. This challenge is, however, unprecedented. Many of these changes run counter to the dominant alliance based strategic culture and the major focus in the way of war that has dominated Australia's approach to the use of land power for over 100 years. Recognising and adapting to this challenge by evolving the nation's strategic approach and the Army's doctrine, culture and capabilities is one of the biggest challenges that Australian land power has ever faced.

⁶² Land Vehicle Combat System, Land 400, <http://www.defence.gov.au/dmo/EquippingDefence/Land400>, accessed 4 April 2019; Project LAND 400, <https://www.army.gov.au/our-future/modernisation-projects/project-land-400>, accessed 4 April 2019.