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Christine Leah; Rod Lyon

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Three visions of the bomb: Australian thinking about nuclear weapons and strategy

CHRISTINE LEAH AND ROD LYON*¹

This article argues that, over the decades, Australians have held three different, coherent, long-lived ‘visions’ of nuclear weapons and strategy. Those visions—which we have labelled Menzian, Gortonian and disarmar—compete on four grounds: the role that nuclear weapons play in international order; the doctrine of deterrence; the importance of arms control; and the relevance of nuclear weapons to Australia’s specific needs. We believe this ‘textured’ framework provides a richer, more satisfying, and more accurate understanding of Australian nuclear identity, both past and present, than previous scholarship has yielded. Moreover, the competition between the three visions might not be at an end. Changes in international norms, in proliferation rates, in regional strategic dynamics, or even in the deterrence doctrines of the major powers could easily reawaken some old, enduring debates. Australian nuclear identity faces an uncertain future.

In a conference room in New Delhi in 2001, a leading Indian academic patiently explained to a visiting Australian delegation that India did not have a single view of its nuclear strategy. Rather, he said, it had three competing schools, even if he counted only those within the mainstream debate. The relative influence of those schools waxed and waned in response to domestic and international pressures. The schools—broadly, rejectionism, pragmatism and maximalism (Bajpai 2000)—all agreed that nuclear weapons were necessary for India’s security, but differed over the nature of nuclear deterrence, the importance of various arms control agreements, and whether elimination of nuclear weapons was either feasible or desirable.

In this article, we argue that Australians, too, hold three different visions of the bomb. (We use the term ‘visions’ here—rather than ‘schools’ or ‘perspectives’—to reflect the different groups’ focus on ideals and frameworks, rather than on instructive mechanisms or mere relational perceptions.) The visions do not overlap perfectly with their Indian counterparts. Australia, as a US ally, is a direct beneficiary of extended nuclear deterrence, and has no nuclear weapons of its own. But Australians have, over time, indulged in a

*Christine Leah is a doctoral candidate in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra. <christine.leah@anu.edu.au>

Rod Lyon is the Director of the Strategy and International Program at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra. <rodlyon@aspi.org.au>

richly textured conceptual debate about nuclear weapons and strategy. Distilling and separating the visions clarifies our understanding of Australia's nuclear identity. Just as importantly, it may provide us with a more potent set of insights about Australia's possible nuclear futures at a time when Asia is experiencing a fundamental geopolitical transformation, and the existing non-proliferation regime is under stress.

The conflicted nuclear identity

Australia's nuclear identity has proved to be complex and contradictory. That complexity shows up in the variety of roles that Australia has played in relation to nuclear weapons. It has been a beneficiary of US extended nuclear deterrence guarantees, a possible nuclear proliferator, and a promoter of arms control and nuclear disarmament. Since the 1960s, Australia has hosted facilities of central importance to the command and control of the US nuclear arsenal. And it is today—and has been for over 20 years—the only major Western ally to hold formal membership in a nuclear-free zone.

Yet, this conflicted Australian nuclear identity remains one of the seriously understudied aspects of Australia's strategic history. Few major works explore the 'identity' issue in relation to the internal debates about nuclear issues within Australia; the best known of those traces the issue in neat linear phases, concluding that the Whitlam government 'ushered in a lasting sea-change in Australian national identity in the early 1970s' (Hymans 2000: 18). We argue here that Australia's nuclear identity is better seen in the plural than the singular: as a set of different visions of the weapons themselves, their strategic importance, and the role they play in Australia's defence, rather than as one evolving vision.

Separating out those visions has become more urgent, not least because a long period of stability in Australian thinking about nuclear weapons and strategy may be coming to an end. Nuclear issues may well be returning to a degree of prominence in Australian political debate that they have not enjoyed for 20 years, offering further opportunities for the proponents of the different visions to rehearse their competing arguments. Being able to identify the visions accurately should give us a better model for understanding—and 'locating'—those emerging Australian nuclear policy debates.

Methodology and scope

We explore the competing visions here essentially as cross-historical narratives. Our primary databases are parliamentary debates, essentially from the early 1950s onwards, and publicly available government strategic assessments covering the same time period. Those latter sources include declassified government documents from 1945 to the most recently declassified Strategic

Basis Paper (SBP) of 1976, and the government's White Papers on defence since that date. The parliamentary debates offer a rich oral history of Australian thinking about nuclear weapons and strategy, and the declassified and open-source documents provide a supplementary set of insights into decision making. Nuclear issues, like other political issues, swirled in and out of public discussion across that period. Unsurprisingly, and as a natural consequence of this methodological approach, we found the greatest quantities of relevant material at those particular historical junctures when the issues of nuclear strategy were especially prominent in political and public discourses.

The key nuclear policy debates in Australian history can probably be portrayed as debates between the competing visions. But we do not make that case here. Our purpose here is strategic and conceptual rather than historical. We do not intend to provide a historical account of Australian nuclear thinking; readers seeking such detail should examine a range of available sources (Reynolds 2000; Walsh 1997). Rather, our objective is to tease out the 'strategic content' of the different visions, and to explore what each has to say about nuclear weapons and Australian security.

This work sketches out the three visions according to their judgments on a set of key themes, namely:

- What role do nuclear weapons play in international order?
- Does deterrence work?
- What part does arms control play in managing nuclear weapons? and
- What contribution do nuclear weapons make in relation to Australia's specific strategic and defence needs?

We have attempted to identify 'long-lived' visions—those which have a multi-decade pedigree—rather than 'short-lived' ones. We have ignored the artificial historical division between the cold war and post-cold war periods in constructing the visions. So, too, in this initial foray into a rich field, we have forsaken any attempt to further subdivide any of the visions into more specific subsets, although such work might be a necessary precursor to a full understanding of the possible evolution of the Australian nuclear debate.

An overview of the three visions

Briefly, the three visions can be summarised as follows. The first vision believes nuclear weapons can be a stabilising force in international relations, provided they are wielded by responsible great powers. This vision might be understood as the 'internationalist vision': a belief that nuclear weapons and the deterrence they provide are instruments which help to hold global order in place, and thereby serve—albeit indirectly—Australian strategic interests. They are considered primarily as instruments of strategic rather than tactical design; and they serve Australian interests primarily by locking in a pattern of strategic order.

We have labelled this vision ‘Menzian’ because its central tenets were best outlined by Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies back in 1957.

The second vision believes nuclear weapons generate order in a direct and regional sense rather than in an abstract and global one. The corollary of this is that deterrence should be managed nationally and locally, rather than by great powers in distant hemispheres. Nuclear weapons can serve Australian strategic interests only if they are tied directly to Australian defence and security needs. For this vision, an Australian indigenous nuclear arsenal is of considerable importance: the international implications of that arsenal are comparatively unimportant, and there is little faith in any superpower’s extended nuclear deterrence guarantee. We call this vision ‘Gortonian’ after Prime Minister John Gorton, who worked hardest to preserve the Australian nuclear option.

The third vision believes nuclear weapons are order-destroyers rather than order-builders. It sees deterrence as a fallible and unnecessary condition in interstate relations, considers nuclear weapons a threat to humanity and believes all such weapons must be abolished. Nuclear weapons cannot serve Australian strategic interests, regardless of whether Australia possesses such weapons itself or responsible great powers possess them. This vision might be understood as the ‘disarmer’ vision of nuclear weapons. If we were to follow the methodology of the earlier labelling, we might call this the ‘Keating’ vision, given Prime Minister Paul Keating’s apparent conversion to the disarmers’ ranks in the mid 1990s. But we have chosen not to use that label—for reasons that will become apparent later—and so simply call this the ‘disarmer’ vision.

We attempt here a detailed sketch of each of the visions, and a broader analysis of the interrelationships between them. In the final analysis, each vision is merely a set of interlocking ideas. True, the Australian signature and ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) forced the Gortonian vision into long-term political marginalisation. For some decades the vision has had a low profile in public forums. But at its core, that vision—like the other two—is merely a collection of ideas about nuclear weapons and strategy, and we treat it so here. In particular, it is a vision of how Australia’s nuclear identity might evolve abruptly in a high-proliferation world. And echoes of the original vision may yet resonate in an Australia increasingly conscious of the shifting dynamics of the power of Asia, uncertainties over the reliability and meaning of US extended nuclear deterrence in the twenty-first century, and continuing challenges to the NPT.

The Menzian vision

We start first with the vision that has dominated Australian understandings of nuclear weapons and strategy. The Menzian vision is centred upon the idea that nuclear weapons can, in certain circumstances, play a positive role in

international security by being ‘order-enhancers’. The weapons yield one large and immediate advantage in their deterring of great-power war. Arms control becomes an instrument for calibrating and ‘locking in’ the specific circumstances that allow nuclear weapons to play their unique role of managing systemic strategic stability. And Australian security is enhanced by the broader systemic benefits of nuclear arsenals in the hands of specific actors, and would be degraded by the wider spread of the weapons.

Nuclear weapons and international order

Menzies view nuclear weapons as a stabilising force in international relations, provided they are wielded by systemic powers—that is, by those ‘responsible’ great powers which shape the structure of the international system and have an interest in maintaining a stable global order. Such powers, aware of the awesome destructiveness of nuclear weapons, are self-deterred, knowing the horrendous costs of mass warfare. As Menzies ruminated in the late 1950s:

There is an advantage for the world in having nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons in the hands of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, and in no others. These Great Powers ... are sufficiently informed about the deadly character of these weapons to find themselves reluctant to cause a war in which they are used. The possession of these violent forces is, in the case of these great nations, a deterrent not only to prospective enemies but to themselves (Menzies 1957).

Menzies see nuclear weapons as instruments of global security management; a means for the great powers to organise and manage the Westphalian order. They see order-related issues as the primary generators of war:

it is not the large arsenals themselves which cause wars; it is a breakdown in international order ... weapons are a symptom of tension between nations but they are not themselves a cause of that tension or a cause of war (Downer 1986).

And they see nuclear weapons as order-setting: their primary strategic attribute is to codify the upper levels of an international order, and for Menzians that attribute would be diluted by the spread of the weapons into many hands.

This vision of nuclear weapons is a particularly strong one in Australia. It can be traced relatively easily through the long list of ministerial statements that have decorated the pages of the parliamentary Hansard over past decades. A fine example can be found in Paul Hasluck’s ministerial statement on international affairs in 1965: ‘Nuclear power in the hands of a few nations acting with responsibility can be a deterrent. The proliferation of nuclear power will greatly increase the risk that something will go wrong’ (Hasluck 1965). And

almost 30 years after Menzies spoke, for example, backbencher John Spender told the House: ‘The major powers have been living with these great arsenals for upwards of 30 years ... They understand the immense risks that nuclear weapons pose’ (Spender 1986).

The Menzian vision loads substantial burdens onto the shoulders of the nuclear-armed great powers and, in particular, onto their leaderships. It means global stability depends heavily on ‘men with developed minds who can handle nuclear weapons’ (Willesee 1963). Senator Trood argued in 2006 that ‘every US president in the nuclear age’ had been ‘conscious of the dangers of nuclear power’ (Trood 2006). And Kim Beazley argued in 1982 that Australia had ‘a vested interest now in the sanity of two super-powers—not just the one, the two of them’ (Beazley 1982).

Of course, the downside to this vision of great-power responsibility is a complementary obsession about the dangers of nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands. Menzies himself made this clear in 1957: ‘should the manufacture of nuclear weapons be extended to a number of other powers, great or small, the chances of irresponsible action with calamitous repercussions in the world would be materially increased’ (Menzies 1957). In the words of one senator, placing atomic bombs in everyone’s hands would be the equivalent of giving prussic acid to children and then telling them not to be naughty (Willesee 1963). This belief that proliferation would undermine global stability because most nations could not responsibly exercise appropriate control over nuclear weapons is a deeply entrenched one within the Australian body politic. Prime Minister Howard drew upon that belief to justify Australia’s support for and involvement in the intervention in Iraq in 2003.

Deterrence

The notion of nuclear deterrence, as opposed to nuclear defence, is central to the Menzian view of nuclear strategy. Nuclear weapons are predominantly strategic instruments: their function is to deter conflict. That is, they do not have to be detonated in order to have importance in interstate relations:

The conviction of all Western leaders that ‘nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought’ is clear. The government is confident that the US and NATO strategy of flexible response is defensive and reactive; its intent is to deter all war and to minimise the consequences should any conflict occur (Richardson 1989).

Even for the Menzians, though, nuclear deterrence has its limits. It deters great wars rather than small ones. As the foreign minister argued in the mid 1950s: ‘to rely exclusively on atomic and hydrogen weapons would be folly. If a bee lands on your friend’s neck you are poorly placed to help him if your only weapon is a sledge hammer’ (Casey 1956). Moreover, deterrence against a large-scale attack

works best between two cautious, systemic powers. Empirically, the archetypal model was the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Notwithstanding the odd moments of crisis in their bilateral relationship, both states were broadly seen as having responsible leaders, robust command and control systems, and—eventually—secure second-strike arsenals.

If nuclear deterrence has its limits, so too does extended nuclear deterrence. The Menzian vision arose at a time when the cold war provided a specific context for organising deterrence dynamics: a bipolar setting, two risk-averse superpowers, and a set of alliance structures which saw US nuclear deterrence ‘extended’ to allies. That assurance meant US allies were under less pressure to proliferate, and that the US arsenal was specifically tied to strategic outcomes at the theatre level. But the ability of the US nuclear arsenal to determine outcomes in every region was not final. As Menzies himself noted:

It would appear quite obvious that any armed attack upon a NATO country, to take an example, would instantly become a global war, since the NATO powers could not accept the elimination of one of their members by force of arms . . . it is quite possible to conceive of war-like operations in South-East Asia which would not instantly or inevitably involve the use against any great power of nuclear or thermo-nuclear weapons. There would naturally be a great disposition to confine such a war; to make it a limited war . . . Under these circumstances, a clash of conventional forces and arms in South-East Asia is not to be dismissed as improbable (Menzies 1957).

Still, during the cold war, Menzians retained their faith in extended nuclear deterrence as an important contribution to Australian security, despite the different dynamics of Australia’s regional neighbourhood. As the 1975 SBP² states: ‘The US could not afford to fail to support Australia in the event of a major assault without seriously undermining its strategic position in the Pacific and Indian Oceans’ (SBP 1975: para. 158). Indeed, a series of Australian governments believed a nuclear strike against Australia would probably not occur outside the context of a global war between the superpowers.³

Even after the conclusion of the cold war, Menzians still believe that the dominant superpower, the United States, has an inherent, structural interest in maintaining the extended nuclear deterrence guarantee. Extended nuclear deterrence is wrapped up not simply in the context of ideological rivalry, but underpins global order in a structural manner that goes beyond ideological rationales; it was, and remains, an inherent component of the hubs-and-spokes system of US bilateral alliances which sustains order in the Asia-Pacific.

Menzians accept that extended nuclear deterrence comes with a cost to its credibility—a cost imposed by their desire to keep ownership of nuclear weapons tightly constrained. For them, extended nuclear deterrence has to jump only a limited hurdle: Is it sufficiently credible that an adversary might have to think seriously about a US nuclear response before attacking a US ally? For the Menzians, extended nuclear deterrence has to be credible

enough to allow the benefits of deterrence to be disseminated to non-nuclear powers while not putting at risk the primary objective of order enhancement. Bringing extended nuclear deterrence into question—advertising its credibility problems—would only accelerate the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Arms control and disarmament

The principal tasks that Menzians set for arms control derive directly from their view of nuclear weapons and order. They favour two sorts of arms control: great-power negotiations which show the small number of nuclear weapons states responsibly managing their strategic differences and adversarial relationships, and accords which limit the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons. By contrast, they are not much drawn towards a vision of arms control that attempts to promote a broader agenda on international peace and disarmament. As one senator observed drily in 1962, drawing upon a piece of Red Indian wisdom: ‘All the nations of the earth smoke the pipe of peace but very few of them inhale’ (Maher 1962).

That is not to say the Menzians cannot envisage a non-nuclear world: they can and do. But they see that world as distant and certainly not as one immediately available through arms negotiations (MacGibbon 1988). They are brutally dismissive of starry-eyed idealism and reconciled to living ‘carefully and vigilantly’ with nuclear weapons (MacGibbon 1984). Foreign Minister Hayden made a similar point in 1983, arguing that ‘phasing out’ deterrence in favour of international law ‘presupposes ... a measure of cooperation amongst states which is not, in fact, discernable’ (Hayden 1983a).

Aside from this important objective, a key priority for this vision is that arms control constrains horizontal proliferation: if it does not do this, the Menzian logic cannot hold. Gough Whitlam argued this line when he supported Australia’s signing and ratifying of the NPT in the late 1960s:

The treaty is not a nuclear disarmament treaty. It is designed to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to nations not now having them and to reduce the risks of nuclear war inherent in the possession of nuclear weapons by a large number of nations ... Every nation which signs it reduces the inherent risks (Whitlam 1969).

By contrast, Menzians see vertical proliferation as somewhat less important. That judgment is based, of course, on the notion that if nuclear weapons are in the hands of responsible great powers, then numbers are ‘almost irrelevant’ (Crichton-Browne 1987). But it is also based upon the cold war calculation that large force levels are a form of strategic ballast against any possible technological surprise disturbing the nuclear balance (SBP 1975: para. 9).

Historically, there has been an important nuance within the Menzian vision regarding the role, impact and purpose of disarmament. It is a question of the need to strike the right balance between working towards the eventual goal of total disarmament while maintaining strategic stability between nuclear-armed states and the United States retaining an arsenal that provides credible extended nuclear deterrence to Australia. Indeed, finding this appropriate point of balance has been the policy of most Australian governments, which have remained fairly pragmatic and centrist on the relationship between disarmament and deterrence. The statement made by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke neatly encapsulates successive governments' attitudes towards this balancing act: 'The risk of nuclear war [is] remote and improbable, provided effective deterrence is maintained. Australians cannot claim the full protection of that deterrence without being willing to make some contribution to its effectiveness' (Hawke 1984). That contribution has typically been made through both infrastructural contributions—the joint facilities—and doctrinal support.

In its hardest sense, as Andrew Peacock pointed out, the 'fit' required that deterrence be the regulating principle for disarmament: that each successive step towards a final goal needed to be undertaken while maintaining a stable deterrence relationship between the nuclear powers (Peacock 1984, 1986). Amongst Labor parliamentarians, the tendency was to peddle a softer version of the fit. As one member put it: 'the principal advantage of deterrence is that, properly managed, it can provide us with the time to find a more lasting and less dangerous solution to our nuclear predicament' (Charles 1986).

These 'soft' and 'hard' forms of the supposed 'fit' between arms control and deterrence often underpin arguments within the Menzian camp—and did so over the design of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, for example. But such divisions should not obscure the broader principle: that for Menzians, nuclear deterrence and arms control are inseparable; obverse sides of the same coin.

In essence, so long as nuclear weapons exist, grand designs for nuclear disarmament must be tailored according to the deterrence requirements of the day. Indeed, it is tempting to think that the Menzians' conception of common security is merely deterrence managed at the systemic level:

The system can operate at a magnitude of weapons several times removed from the present one, and that of course is the goal of this Government, of the Liberal Party and of the Western alliance when we talk about the need for mutual, balanced and verifiable reductions of nuclear weapons (MacGibbon 1988).

Australian defence in the nuclear world

Although they reject an indigenous nuclear weapons capability, it would be misleading to believe that Menzians considered nuclear weapons and nuclear

deterrence as irrelevant to Australian security. A careful examination of the language contained in successive Defence White Papers since the 1970s shows policy makers contemplating the prospect of nuclear attack upon Australia:

the use of nuclear weapons remains possible ... although it is hard to envisage the circumstances in which Australia could be threatened by nuclear weapons, we cannot rule out that possibility. We will continue to rely on the extended deterrence of the US nuclear capability to deter any nuclear threat or attack on Australia (Department of Defence 1994: 96, para. 9.7).

But for Menzians, the big game in town is the *indirect*, and not the direct, contribution that nuclear weapons make to Australian security. Menzians typically do not see a need for nuclear weapons use in relation to Australia's more immediate defence needs—rather, nuclear weapons contribute to Australian defence insofar as they contribute to a stable international order. An excellent example of this thinking is contained in Senator Gareth Evans' comment in the late 1980s on Australian commitment to the Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) alliance:

That commitment to the United States alliance is not, however, born solely of purely in-house considerations—concerns for Australia's immediate physical security; our commitment to the Western alliance is part of our commitment to larger global security issues, not only in the context of the maintenance of an effective nuclear deterrence strategy but also because alliances of the kind in which we participate with the United States are an important element in the stabilisation of the whole global order (Evans 1988).

The development of an Australian bomb would reflect not a confirmation of that order, but its breakdown.

Still, the Menzians—on both sides of Parliament—accept, in the words of an Australian Labor Party senator, that 'there is not much future for this country unless we come under the protection of the nuclear deterrent of the United States of America, unless we are under the umbrella of American protection' (McKenna 1963). Menzians see engagement with nuclear deterrence as a means to tie Australia to wider global security considerations by the great powers:

Australia's own security is intimately bound up with the security of the Western alliance and the viability of deterrence. The most menacing threat to Western security is weakness. Any scheme for dealing with the nuclear balance that would disarm, even in part, only one side or upset the balance between the two sides would leave us more, not less, exposed (Peacock 1986).

It is our considered view that we cannot expect to be influential in the crucial issues of arms control, arms reduction and disarmament initiatives both at relevant international fora and through appropriate bilateral contact if we 'cop-out' completely on such an important matter as nuclear deterrence (Hayden 1983b).

The ANZUS alliance, and its associated extended nuclear deterrent, has always been seen as a bedrock of Australian security, providing an assurance against extreme contingencies. If such arrangements did not exist, some Menzians make it clear that a more serious alternative—Australian proliferation—would come into play (Halverson 1988). It is clear that most Menzians would countenance such a drastic step only in the face of more immediate threats. As Gough Whitlam noted in 1962:

If any country in this hemisphere manufactured or acquired or received nuclear weapons, admittedly Australia would have to consider its position; but Australia should not be the first country in the southern hemisphere to manufacture or acquire or receive nuclear weapons (Whitlam 1962).

Other Menzians might draw differently the geographical boundaries of Australian strategic nuclear interest but, like Whitlam, they would share the idea that Australia should proliferate only if forced to do so.

The Menzian world view

From the preceding analysis, we would argue that the core of the Menzies vision is built upon the following:

- a belief that nuclear weapons, concentrated in the hands of a small number of responsible actors, play an important role in global security;
- a belief that nuclear deterrence is an important barrier to major war;
- a belief that the principal objectives of arms control are to enhance stability in great-power relationships and to prevent horizontal proliferation; and
- a belief that an indigenous Australian arsenal is unnecessary and would risk inflaming horizontal proliferation.

This vision is a comparatively modest one, more modest, in fact, than either of the competing visions. It sees Australia's role as not to upset a global order that works to its long-term advantage, leaves its major partners as members of a relatively exclusive club, and carves out a defence policy that sees Australia supporting its ally and building a more stable South-East Asia.

The Menzian vision has always been the dominant one in Australia. The end of the cold war did not bring about any fundamental shifts in either the nuclear or strategic orders in the Asia-Pacific. Before the publication of the 1994 and 2000 Defence White Papers, Australian defence officials travelled to

Washington to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to providing extended nuclear deterrence to one of its major allies. The commitment was indeed reaffirmed. The fact that reassurances on this issue were needed suggests that nuclear weapons, or more appropriately nuclear *deterrence*, continue to be integral to Australia's sense of security.

The Gortonian vision

Whereas the Menzian world view is well articulated in Australian history, the Gortonian world view is rather less so. It tends to appear as a set of scenarios rather than as prescribed policy; as glimpses of a more dire future rather than as a succession of ministerial statements. The principal themes of the vision are therefore more derivative, and need to be distilled from a mixture of parliamentary speeches and declassified government texts. But, essentially, the vision turns upon a set of judgments concerning the same range of issues that are of importance to Menzians—the issues of order, strategy, arms control and Australian defence.

Gortonians tend to have a narrower view of the role of nuclear weapons, a view shaped by a set of judgments about the relationship between international order and Australian security, the conceptual dilemma of extending nuclear deterrence, and the limited ability of conventional forces to defend Australia against a potential adversary. For the Gortonians, nuclear weapons still serve an order-building role, but the role is more localised, and more closely tied to Australia's immediate defence requirements.

Nuclear weapons and the locus of order

Unlike the Menzians, Gortonians do not accept that international stability can be ensured by the possession of nuclear weapons solely by a few responsible states. They do believe that some states are more responsible than others, but they anticipate proliferation beyond that small core of global leaders. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, they spoke openly of likely proliferation not only by France and China, but also by Indonesia, Japan, Egypt and others. Even the 1975 SBP canvassed possible nuclear proliferation in the Asia-Pacific by India, Pakistan, Iran, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (SBP 1975: para. 39). The 1976 paper also alluded to this possibility, and noted the 'possible requirement' to maintain an acceptable 'lead time' with 'relevant countries', bearing in mind the possibility that Australia 'might be forced to consider turning to them [nuclear weapons] for protection at some indeterminate time in the future' (SBP 1976: paras 96, 382). In short, Gortonians expect to find Australia living in a world of many nuclear states. In that world, the question of whether some states can be trusted to exercise 'international responsibility' is obviously less relevant than it is for the Menzians.

But they also differ from the Menzians in their understanding of the role that great powers play in international order. They believe that even great powers tend to focus first on their own interests, and that many issues are of only peripheral importance to them. See Senator Cole's statement in 1963: 'In a show-down the United States naturally would look after itself first; it would defend its own shores. Australia is only on the outer fringe of its defence line' (Cole 1963). In short, great-power interest in the grand issues of order attenuates over distance, and great powers engage and disengage from other regions as their needs and priorities shift. It is that attenuation of interest that ultimately spurs nuclear proliferation by other states taking more direct control of their own strategic destinies.

And in that proliferated nuclear world, order is created by a set of more localised arrangements. In some sense, it might even be possible to say that the Gortonian view of international order is 'spatial' where the Menzian view is 'positional'. In that spatial dimension, the Gortonians typically see a set of rising threats in Asia. See, for example, Senator Byrne's comments in 1971:

It is a matter of national suicide if we do not at least develop a nuclear capacity so that in an emergency we can provide our own deterrents ... It is quite possible that the whole confrontation of the great powers may be passing from the European mainland to the basin of the Pacific, which may well be the cockpit in which the great powers will confront one another in years to come (Byrne 1971).

Gorton himself believed in the late 1950s that South-East Asia might 'have a war of the kind we saw in Korea' and that Australia must therefore have troops available at 'a moment's notice'. Since such a war could go 'from worse to worse', Australia would require its own atomic deterrent, 'and other forces that could be brought into being more slowly as the danger develops' (Gorton 1957).

Deterrence

Like their Menzian counterparts, Gortonians value nuclear deterrence. But they believe that threats to use nuclear weapons will be credible only in instances where they are tied to vital national interests—which is, of course, why offers by the United States to 'extend' nuclear deterrence to their allies are inherently implausible. Gortonians pursue the idea of Australian proliferation for the very reason that an Australian nuclear arsenal could underline Australian vital interests, and allow deterrence to work to protect those interests, in a manner that extended nuclear deterrence never could: 'We should not return to the philosophies that I knew of when growing up in the 1930s about having strong and powerful friends. We are only as strong as we can make ourselves' (Little 1969).

So, Gortonians value nuclear deterrence closely tied to key interests. As a corollary, their vision of nuclear deterrence is more 'localised'; deterrence does not travel well. Nuclear deterrence also suffers another weakness: even in its localised form, it is vulnerable to relatively higher rates of failure than Menzians suppose. It is for this reason that nuclear weapons must actually have a practical, warfighting focus; in Australian history, advocates of an indigenous nuclear arsenal have usually wanted nuclear weapons to be able to offer practical, tactical advantages to Australian forces who might find themselves fighting in defence of Australian vital interests. For the Gortonians, those vital interests are typically found close to Australia's shores.

The corollary is that Gortonians are highly sceptical of extended nuclear deterrence within any context; they subscribe to the Gaullist school of thought which says that extended nuclear deterrence is a strategic oxymoron—by its nature, nuclear deterrence cannot be extended. For the Gortonians, the credibility test for extended nuclear deterrence is typically much harder than it is for the Menzians: Would extended nuclear deterrence be credible in actual hard cases? Here, the answer is generally 'no':

Are we to note the advice of the father of the American atomic weapon, Professor Teller . . . that no United States administration would expose the west coast cities of the United States to atomic destruction because a nation in South East Asia was threatened itself with atomic destruction? (Cairns 1969).

After all, in the event of an attack upon us, involving the use of atomic weapons, before the Government of the United States of America would come to our assistance it would have to make a decision, with the welfare of 180,000,000 Americans on one end of the scales and the welfare of 11,000,000 Australians on the other end . . . Therefore, if we run any risk of atomic attack, I believe it is in our interests to have the weapons with which to reply (McManus 1962).

Even some Menzians accept that if extended deterrence is required to jump a higher hurdle, it might well fail. See, for example, Kim Beazley (Senior)'s observation in 1969:

frankly, I do not believe that any country will expose itself to the possibility of a war of annihilation for the sake of any of its minor partners . . . I personally do not believe that the United States would subject itself to nuclear annihilation for anybody else . . . That is why France decided to have its own independent nuclear deterrent. If I believed . . . that this country is teetering on the brink of invasion . . . I would believe that this country should mobilise its scientists to develop its own nuclear weapons. If Australia is in the danger which the honourable member for Perth believes it is in, then in my opinion he, or anybody who holds that view, is logically committed to the development of nuclear weapons . . . [But] who can invade Australia? How will they do it? What must we do to stop them? (Beazley 1969).

Historically, the Gortonian vision has been less interested in deterrence *sui generis* as an instrument of order than in what happens when deterrence fails. Some might think that the Gortonian vision is one sketched by mere warfighters. But that diminishes them. The early Gortonians certainly believed that Australia faced a set of strategic problems that could not be solved by conventional weapons alone. While they spoke often of particular tactical scenarios that they thought would require an indigenous nuclear arsenal, it would be wrong to think them mere tacticians. They thought that nuclear weapons were destined to spread relatively quickly and, even after the conclusion of the NPT, had no faith that the treaty would attract the appropriate membership or prove effective.

Because of their view that extended nuclear deterrence is not credible in relation to hard cases, the Gortonians believe it cannot serve as a reliable basis for Australian defence policy. This judgment is, of course, sharpened by the sense that nuclear weapons themselves might become the dominant weapons in future warfare. More conscious than the Menzians of the local costs of the failure of deterrence, the Gortonians naturally see nuclear weapons as instruments of actual defence. Indeed, this vision is typically driven by a sense of urgent defensive need. As one senator claimed in 1957:

I think we must turn to America for what I might call ... tactical atomic weapons ... It fills me with dread and horror to think of fighting countless hordes of Asiatics in the jungles of South-East Asia in the old-fashioned style. That would be sheer suicide (Wordsworth 1957).

Arms control and disarmament

Gortonians share with Menzians a belief that great-power arms control agreements would serve to enhance international stability, although as a group they tend to have a more jaundiced appreciation of such agreements. But they separate from the Menzians in relation to the prospects for bounding horizontal proliferation via arms negotiations.

In the late 1960s, this was the group that opposed the signature of the NPT, complaining that Australians would live to regret it if they 'tied their hands' with the treaty (Gair 1968). The only clearly identified member of the Gortonian vision who favoured the signature of the NPT in the late 1960s, for example, was Senator Reginald 'Spot' Turnbull: he argued that signature would secure international assistance for Australia's civil nuclear energy program, and that it was 'only one step further from that to make an atomic or nuclear bomb' (Turnbull 1969). Similarly, prominent members of the Gortonians opposed the notion of arms control limitations on nuclear testing (Turnbull 1964) for similar reasons, fearing to close off an avenue that Australia might need to access at some future point.

More generally, Gortonians favour power over institutions and accords. They do not believe that arms control agreements prevent the spread of atomic weapons, nor are they optimistic about the prospects for even the gradual achievement of a non-nuclear world.

Australian defence in a nuclear world

Gortonians tend to see an Australian bomb as a means of ensuring continental defence rather than as an instrument of global security management. John Gorton himself, in 1957, was a vociferous advocate of an Australian bomb:

I realise that a potential attacker of this country might be deterred by the possession of hydrogen bombs by the United States of America or Great Britain, but I think we should be trusting very much indeed to the help that those great countries could give if we put our faith solely in a deterrent held by them. After all, should there be an attack on this country, the government in office at the time in either Great Britain or the United States of America would have to come to a grim decision on whether it would retaliate, and thereby lay its own country completely open to devastation and, in the case of Great Britain, to almost certain destruction. To relieve them of that dilemma, if for no other reason, I should like to see us have inter-continent [*sic*] missiles of our own and have our own bomber aircraft, capable of delivering our own bombs should we find that necessary (Gorton 1957).

Gortonians are drawn to the notion that an increasingly isolated Australia must learn to depend upon itself in an Asia of shifting strategic relativities. As Senator Byrne noted in 1971:

The developing isolation of Australia must cause grave concern . . . With the retraction of the interest and the identification of our friends we are left alone in this part of the world—in South Eastern Asia and in this part of the Pacific (Byrne 1971).

They tend to see less of a relationship between contributions to overseas military theatres and a systemic stability that contributes to Australian defence and security: '[an atom bomb] would ensure the defence of Australia far more than will the sending of troops to Vietnam' (Turnbull 1966).

That 'linkage' of nuclear weapons and national needs is both a strength and a weakness of the Gortonian position; a strength because it keeps nuclear weapons tied to specific Australian interests, but a weakness because it makes it much harder for Gortonian supporters to retail a coherent narrative about how Australian proliferation might contribute to international stability. Most Gortonians would probably admit that Australian proliferation would excite Indonesian proliferation, for example. So there is an implicit logic that might follow this observation: that interest in Gortonianism as a doctrine grows in direct proportion to a judgment that international (and especially regional)

instability is increasing regardless of Australian actions. In such circumstances, the promotion of Australian security through the enhancement of international stability becomes secondary to more immediate national security concerns. Hedging, in short, trumps shaping.

General circumstances in the Asia-Pacific therefore determine the degree to which nuclear weapons are seen by Gortonians as desirable to defend Australia, including the strength of Australia's conventional capabilities vis-à-vis other regional powers, and the extent to which nuclear weapons become central to regional security issues. Successive SBPs until at least the 1970s recommended the possession of a tactical nuclear weapons capability as a useful strategic asset in the event that US military assistance would not be forthcoming—especially where Australia faced a significant conventional military threat from either China or Indonesia.

Menzian policy makers simply outsource deterrence to the United States. But the Gortonian vision sounds a warning about the limits of such outsourcing. And many of the SBPs until 1976, while not all advocating the development of an actual bomb, warned of the need to hedge against the growth of increased nuclear latency, especially in Asia, and recommended that Australia retain the capacity to reduce the lead time to build nuclear weapons should the need arise (see, for example, SBP 1971: para. 192; 1973: para. VII-40; 1975: para. 264; 1976: para. 382).⁴

The Gortonian world view

The core of the Gortonian vision is thus built upon:

- a belief that nuclear weapons are effective instruments for both deterrence and defence and, for that reason, likely to spread to a large number of states;
- a belief that nuclear deterrence is a more limited commodity than the Menzians pretend, with deterring 'threats' plausible only in relation to a nuclear weapon state's own vital national interests;
- a belief that arms control which enhances great-power stability is valuable, but that a non-proliferation regime would be both ineffective and might prevent Australia from constructing its own arsenal as required; and
- a belief that Australia's Asian setting requires it to have its own arsenal in order to benefit from policies of deterrence and to offer practical warfighting options should deterrence fail.

The disarmar vision

For the followers of the disarmar vision, nuclear weapons are separate from other weapons; worthy of special attention in comparison to all other weapons

in the world's armouries. The nature of the weapons themselves renders them entirely inappropriate as the basis for strategic policy. Disarmers take the issue of nuclear weapons terribly seriously. William Wentworth from the seat of Mackellar gave an idea of just how seriously when he addressed the House of Representatives on 15 October 1953:

It is of no use for us to turn our attention to the things that happen on the world stage when the things that are happening in the atomic sphere are likely to dissolve the whole of that stage and to make un-necessary all the plays that are being performed upon it . . . In the history of mankind there are only two events of major significance. One of them was the spiritual event of nineteen and a half centuries ago, the other of them is the material event of today (Wentworth 1953).

The disarmer vision counters the dominant Menzian vision on its key pillars. Where the Menzians believe that nuclear deterrence is an important strategic asset, the disarmers claim that deterrence does not work. And where the Menzians claim that weapons are safely held by responsible great powers, the disarmers deny that great powers are responsible. Disarmers are attracted to a world of institutions and law, and not to one where international order is shaped by power and nuclear weapons. Similarly, they argue against the Gortonian notion that nuclear weapons can serve national ends:

Nuclear warfare cannot advance any national policies. Therefore, nuclear weapons are not weapons in the traditional sense of the word. They are not weapons of war because they cannot advance the policies of any individual country no matter how many weapons that country may have (Mason 1984).

Nuclear weapons and the locus of order

The disarmer vision is unwilling to cede decisions about the appropriate use of nuclear weapons to responsible great powers, not least because it challenges the notion that there are responsible great powers at the core of the existing nuclear arrangement. Much of the disarmer effort is devoted to dismantling the idea that responsible great powers are fit and proper wielders of nuclear weapons for global benefit. Their attack typically falls most heavily upon the United States, in part because that is the great power most closely tied into Australia's own defence and security relationships.

The notion of great-power responsibility comes under attack on several fronts. Some of the disarmers simply point to great-power behaviour to make their case. Senator Wilkinson, for example, argued in 1967 that nuclear powers tend to be more self-centred in their behaviour than weaker states: they shun collective strength and refuse to be dictated to by bodies like the United Nations

(UN) (Wilkinson 1967). Nuclear weapons, in short, seem to decrease a state's sense of systemic stakeholdership rather than increase it.

Considerable disarmament attention falls on the five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council, and their nuclear arsenals. Mr Kerr, the Member for Denison, argued in the late 1990s that it was merely a Eurocentrist folly to believe that the P5's possession of nuclear weapons was a positive factor in global stability:

There is no case to be made for the fact that the world is a safer place because a number of nations possess nuclear weapons ... The possession of nuclear weapons by the big five has not prevented major conflicts which have had significant regional and international consequences (Kerr 1998).

While Kerr argued that P5 nuclear arsenals had done no good, most disarmers are keen to assert a stronger claim: that P5 possession of nuclear weapons actually harms global security. Harsher critics of great-power behaviour could frequently be found throughout the 1980s and later decades, when the disarmers believed the cold war superpowers to be more directly engaged upon the narrow pursuit of national objectives at a direct cost to global stability. Those criticisms usually turned upon arguments that the superpowers had ceased to be responsible wielders of nuclear deterrence. Typically, Senator Sanders: 'deterrence is dead. The military policy of the United States, and perhaps Russia, is, and always has been, pre-emptive military strike' (Sanders 1986). Even amongst the nuclear great powers, the senator claimed, military planners lived 'in a never never, fantasy land of winnable nuclear wars' (Sanders 1987b). Rather than seeing a safety mechanism in the responsibilities of great powers, the disarmers believe the nuclear great powers are their enemies:

So in a sense we must come to the point that the five nuclear powers and the rest of the world are indeed opponents because the five nuclear powers ... are placing the rest of the world ... at risk (Mason 1984).

Deterrence

The disarmament vision offers a much more sweeping rejection of the concept of nuclear deterrence than the earlier visions. Whereas deterrence is the foundation of globalised order for the Menzians, and the foundation of localised order for the Gortonians, the disarmers find the entire concept deeply repugnant.

Some of the disarmers believe nuclear weapons are inherently evil and can support neither deterrence nor defence. Their problem with deterrence is not the Gortonian problem—that threats can be credible only when tied to vital interests. Their problem is that they think it immoral to threaten adversaries

with nuclear destruction (Sanders 1987a); that deterrence is just a pretty word that disguises the gross and brutal nature of the weaponry. Some argue that the term ‘deterrence’ is itself devoid of meaning; that ‘when governments use the word “deterrence” they could be meaning nuclear war-fighting ... the public has been conned and deluded by governments over 20 years’ (Chipp 1984).

Some have more specific problems related to the supposed effectiveness of deterrence. They point, for example, to the series of conventional conflicts that have occurred since the invention of nuclear weapons to argue that nuclear weapons do not deter conventional war. Senator Allison, a typical representative of the disarmers vision, insists that:

nuclear deterrence is and always has been a myth ... Those weapons did not prevent wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, the Falklands and Iraq, and they certainly did not prevent terrorists from attacking the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001 (Allison 2005).

Senator Vallentine argued that point back in the 1980s: ‘The statement that nuclear weapons have kept the peace since 1945 ignores the 130 small wars which have taken place since then and in which 20 million people have died’ (Vallentine 1987). Senator Chipp believed that ‘talk of having a nuclear umbrella ... is pathetic make-believe. There is no defence against nuclear weapons’ (Chipp 1984).

Moreover, deterrence is typically seen by most disarmers to carry an intolerable cost. Mr Milton, the Member for La Trobe, spoke in 1985 about ‘the lunacy of deterrence policies’ (Milton 1985), which exposed the world to accidents and malfunctioning computers. And they worry that the great-power nuclear arsenals are becoming ever more dependent upon computers and, thereby, prone to technical error. John Langmore told the House that the planet had been ‘wired to explode’ (Langmore 1988). And the Democrats worried about the potential open-endedness of deterrence’s supposed requirements: ‘If deterrence was a reliable concept in the 1960s with only 1,000 bombs, why has it suddenly become necessary to have 50,000 in the 1980s?’ (Chipp 1984). This was also a thought echoed in an intervention by Senator Georges in 1985: ‘There is no end to that sort of thing; it just goes on and on. It just goes up and up’ (Georges 1985).

The disarmers are typically less interested than the Menzians or the Gortonians about the issue of extended nuclear deterrence. Indeed, they think that the question of whether extended nuclear deterrence is credible essentially misses the point. Since nuclear weapons are immoral, illegal and self-destructive—regardless of whether they are indigenous or not—and deterrence itself is a lie, a Trojan Horse intended to smuggle nuclear weapons into the world, questions about the credibility of extended nuclear deterrence are irrelevant. Deterrence is a myth and so, too, is extended nuclear deterrence.

Arms control and disarmament

The disarmers have always been robust advocates of negotiated arms control. They demand that Australia not merely live up to its existing arms control commitments, but play its part in promoting the absolutist vision of nuclear disarmament. They have therefore been—partly—attracted to policy initiatives such as the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and, more recently, Rudd's International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. But they are not content, as Menzians are, to see value in the process of arms control itself: they insist upon grand outcomes.

In what they see as a context of overwhelming danger, it is unsurprising that the disarmers feel a call to action:

It is no wonder that international prejudice and distrust are so rampant when we approach delicate international problems, not with the conciliatory wisdom of Solomon . . . but with the dove of peace perched precariously on our shoulder and the menacing snub of an atom bomb protruding threateningly from our hip pocket . . . Today, in the face of our new problems, there is tremendous scope for Australia to lead again—not to gain the futile, nerve-wracking race for supremacy in the field of nuclear means of mass murder, but to lead the crusade for lasting peace through the outlawing of atomic and hydrogen bombs and the total abolition of war (Johnson 1956).

This picture of an Australian leading the world towards nuclear disarmament is an enduring component in the disarmer vision. It speaks to a foreign policy vision in which Australia can lead in contests of diplomatic activism and 'crusading' rather than contests of power. Some disarmers speak of building 'a bridge' to a world of international law, and believe that small states have to lead the way (Langmore 1988; Mason 1984).

Where the Menzians worry most about horizontal proliferation—because the bomb would spread into less responsible hands—the disarmers worry about vertical proliferation, and want arms control to focus on that part of the puzzle. For them, the numbers of weapons in great-power arsenals matter. They are keen to have the P5 live up to their NPT obligations to disarm, and focus on the failure of the recognised nuclear weapon states to move in that direction. Indeed, with that objective in mind, many disarmers tend to see arms control as a crusade primarily *against* the great powers.

Australian defence in a nuclear world

The disarmers see no value in nuclear weapons for Australian defence. Because nuclear weapons are order-destroyers rather than order-builders, Australia maximises its own security by disengaging from the nuclear world: by closing the joint facilities, by not permitting nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed

warships in Australian harbours, and by forgoing its own sales of uranium. It is a typical disarmer argument that ‘successive Australian governments have provided little but lies and disinformation about Pine Gap and the other bases and have allowed Australia to become entangled in a dangerous nuclear web’ (Jenkins 1987).

Some disarmers believe that disentangling Australia from the ‘nuclear web’ might even require leaving the ANZUS alliance because a nuclear war between superpowers would have direct consequences for each side’s allies. According to Senator Macklin:

The possible launch of strategic nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union would lead almost certainly to a response in kind which would inflict unacceptable damage on Europe, the United States, Australia and our allies . . . Yet we support an alliance, the only result of which can be an act of suicide (Macklin 1984).

Even complete disentanglement, of course, would be no guarantee of ultimate security, since a large-scale nuclear war would have global repercussions from which Australia would not be immune. Australian security in its broadest sense therefore demanded nuclear disarmament by the existing nuclear weapons states, and not merely a forsaking of nuclear connectivity by Australia itself.

The disarmer world view

The core of the disarmer vision is built upon:

- a belief that nuclear weapons are a recipe for global catastrophe, that no form of strategic ‘corralling’ can ultimately dilute;
- a belief that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence—including extended nuclear deterrence—is immoral, illegal, ineffective and duplicitous;
- a belief that arms control must aim at grand outcomes in order to achieve the desired condition of complete nuclear disarmament; and
- a belief that Australian defence is maximised by disconnecting the country from the nuclear strategy of its key allies, and insisting upon the denuclearisation of the world.

The three visions in the post-cold war world

Although they were initially founded and formed during the cold war, each of these long-lived visions retains significant contemporary relevance. Indeed, although it is often convenient to employ the terms ‘cold war’ and ‘post-cold war’, those reference points are misleading and suggest that Australian defence strategy has been guided primarily by thinking about the overarching structure

of the international system. The three visions depicted here exist beyond such frameworks and draw upon more fundamental geopolitical concepts such as power, order and stability. As such, they continue to provide interpretive value in the post-cold war world.

They provide particular insight into the thinking of the Keating government about the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, for example. Paul Keating's statement to the House upon the establishment of the Canberra Commission in 1995 is probably the best-known Australian statement on nuclear disarmament (Keating 1995). This speech, though, is a somewhat confused one for genuine disarmers—and that confusion is the principal reason why we have not dubbed this vision the 'Keating' vision. In his speech, Keating rehearsed, in detail, the core of the disarmer vision:

Reflecting on the history of nuclear strategy, the American writer Fred Kaplan says that nuclear strategies were contrived to disguise the real nature of the nuclear bomb. It is, he writes, 'a device of sheer mayhem, a weapon whose cataclysmic powers no-one really had the faintest idea of how to control. The nuclear strategists had come to impose order—but in the end chaos still prevailed' . . . we will soldier on in one of the greatest causes of all, and that is to finally clean the world of these shocking weapons which have presented a tyranny to two generations of the world (Keating 1995).

But he also argued, in a typically Menzian vein: 'We acknowledge the need, as we always have, for a system of stable deterrence to be maintained while the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is being achieved' (Keating 1995). Similarly, he made no effort to disavow the US provision of extended nuclear deterrence to Australia. Genuine disarmers, as we noted above, believe nuclear deterrence does not work—and so they have no interest in maintaining 'a system of stable deterrence' while disarmament takes place. After all, if nuclear weapons have held two generations in 'tyranny', and deterrence is merely a 'disguise', what purpose is there in arguing for a continuation of the system? In short, the Canberra Commission attempted to harness the grand arms-control objective of the disarmer vision alongside deterrence. The Commission can be seen either as Menzians bidding uncharacteristically high or disarmers bidding uncharacteristically low, but in either case it is a relatively rare and somewhat uncomfortable attempt to straddle two of the visions sketched above.

Similarly, the arguments advanced by the Howard government to support American troops in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, for example, illustrate the enduring strength of the Menzian vision. The prime minister's comments about the particular danger of allowing 'a country such as Iraq' to possess weapons of mass destruction capabilities, 'particularly in light of its past aggressive behaviour', illustrate distinct Menzian preferences for only great and responsible powers to be allowed to possess such weaponry. And

Howard was explicit about the systemic implications of continued horizontal proliferation:

We cannot walk away from the threat that Iraq's continued possession of weapons of mass destruction constitutes to its region and to the wider world. In the final analysis, the absolute conviction of the Government is that disarming Iraq is necessary for the long-term security of the world and is therefore manifestly in the national interest of Australia (Howard 2003).

The Howard government's initial reaction to Indian and Pakistani nuclear testing in 1998 was predicated upon the Menzian notion that it would be worrying for nuclear weapons to be caught up in an enduring strategic rivalry that might result in their use in war (Department of Defence 2000: para. 3.18). Those concerns waned in the years following, as government ministers came to accept the idea that India was a responsible great power, fitting rather than disrupting the classic Menzian vision. By 2006, Howard was defending India's 'very good record in relation to non-proliferation' (Lyon 2008: 443–4).

The last three Defence White Papers (1994, 2000 and 2009) also show the durability of the competing visions. If we might 'colour' them with a somewhat broad brush, each of the documents differs in subtle ways. The 1994 White Paper, for example, is Menzian in its cast, but 'soft' Menzian in its acceptance that nuclear deterrence is merely 'an interim condition until a total ban on nuclear weapons . . . can be achieved' (Department of Defence 1994: 96, para. 9.7). The 2000 White Paper says nothing about nuclear deterrence being an interim condition, and indeed little about deterrence at all, but restates Australian reliance upon US extended nuclear deterrence, and our concern about nuclear proliferation (Department of Defence 2000: paras 5.15, 3.52).

The 2009 White Paper illustrates the dynamics of Menzian thinking within a somewhat more volatile regional security environment—indeed, the sort of regional security environment that most preoccupied the Gortonians of the 1950s and 1960s. The document posits a more multipolar setting in Asia, characterised by rising powers, expanding regional military capabilities and increasing 'breakout' potential as a growing number of states become capable of rapidly producing weapons of mass destruction (Department of Defence 2009: para. 4.57). It judges that stable nuclear deterrence will be a feature of the international system 'for the foreseeable future', and that extended nuclear deterrence will remain viable (Department of Defence 2009: para. 4.59). It also notes that extended nuclear deterrence 'has over the years removed the need for Australia to consider more significant and expensive defence options' (Department of Defence 2009: para. 6.34), an elliptical phraseology that might portend a range of policy options were extended nuclear deterrence judged to be less credible in future decades. The overall tone of the document is one of uncertainty and hedging. That line of thinking contains resonances of the

Gortonian school, which argues that an increasingly isolated Australia must come to depend upon itself in an Asia of significant power fluctuations.

At the same time, Australia continues its push for global nuclear disarmament, highlighting its cooperation with other like-minded countries—namely Japan. In June 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said both countries were ‘uniquely placed’ to contribute to strengthening the NPT, noting Japan’s experience of the consequences of nuclear weapons, and our significant uranium reserves. But both countries are also ‘uniquely placed’ in the fact that both benefit from US extended nuclear deterrence. The announcement of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament came at a time of renewed regional concerns about the credibility and feasibility of US extended deterrence in Asia, and against the backdrop of an increasingly powerful China. The report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament is an example of the disarmer vision attempting to re-empower itself at a time of shifting geopolitical relativities in Asia and international attempts to repair and sustain existing global non-proliferation regimes.

Australian nuclear identity—an uncertain future

In essence, the three visions outlined above are all conceptions of different nuclear orders, and they tell us that nuclear order is—and long has been—a contested concept in Australia. At their core, they are three separate strategic plans for Australia’s continuing security in radically different nuclear worlds. The Menzians have a plan for Australia to live in a world of few, great-power nuclear states; the Gortonians have a plan for Australia to live in more highly proliferated world; and the disarmers have a plan for Australia to live in a world that puts aside nuclear weapons.

The dominant Australian nuclear identity has long been defined by the Menzian vision: that having nuclear weapons in the hands of a small number of self-deterred great powers is an ‘advantage’ to the world. This view has been dominant not only in the 1950s but in every decade since. In this sense, no ‘sea-change’ occurred in the early 1970s. Alongside that Menzian domination of the nuclear policy space, the other two visions have essentially existed as minor influences in Australian political history. The core of the Gortonian vision derives from the right-wing mavericks of the 1950s and 1960s; the core of the disarmer vision from the left-wing mavericks of the 1980s and later decades.

But the dominance of the Menzian vision might—gradually—be coming to an end. In part, that might be the result of a pattern of broader shifts within Australia about nuclear issues (Lyon 2008). But the Menzian vision itself is built upon two empirical conditions: firstly, that the number of nuclear weapon states in the world is small and, secondly, that the possessors of nuclear weapons are responsible and self-deterred actors. In essence, the vitality of the

Menzian vision is intimately linked to horizontal nuclear proliferation. In a world of more extensive nuclear proliferation, the Menzian vision collapses from its own internal logic: in that world, Australians would not be able to tell themselves reassuring narratives about nuclear deterrence, about the weapons being concentrated in a few, responsible hands. In a world of more vigorous proliferation, the Gortonian vision and the disarmament vision would both recontest the space vacated by a receding Menzian tide, making for a divisive and difficult strategic debate across the Australian political community.

Indeed, the emerging debates between the three visions are more likely to be driven by external rather than internal events. Changes in international norms, in proliferation rates, in regional strategic dynamics, or even in the deterrence doctrines of the major powers could act as the catalyst for a fresh burst of Australian thinking about nuclear weapons. But we believe that the three visions we outline above are likely to serve as framing mechanisms for those debates. Japanese nuclearisation, for example, could lend credibility to Gortonian thinking. A demonstrated commitment to disarmament by North Korea and greater transparency by Iran would favour the disarmament viewpoint. Still, the Menzian vision has remained robust and resonant throughout most of Australia's existence in the nuclear world, and it would take a significant upheaval in Australia's present strategic circumstances for either of the other visions to become dominant.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Dr Brad Roberts, Professor William Walker and Professor David Yost, as well as two anonymous reviewers, for comments upon an earlier draft.
2. Strategic Basis Papers (SBPs) were guidance documents prepared by the defence establishment and endorsed by the defence chiefs of staff or defence committees. They would outline the environment, challenges and opportunities informing Australian defence policy and provide recommendations to the government of the day. The subsequent SBP citations in this article are taken from Frühling (2009).
3. See, for example, SBP 1968: paras 123, 157. Indeed, the rationale was that 'a major military threat against Australia would be the final stage in a long series of developments' (SBP 1975: para. 4).
4. This recommendation was also reportedly contained in the SBP of 1983 (see Toohey and Wilkinson 1987: 241–2). Even Bob Hawke's foreign minister, Bill Hayden, noted that Australian research should provide a nuclear weapons potential (see Hayden 1996: 422–3).

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