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Since the Vietnam War, Australian defence policy has been based on the concept of self-reliance—the ability to defend Australia without allied combat forces. Self-reliance arose from concerns about US support in conflict with Indonesia. It has implications for Australian foreign policy, force structuring, joint operations and the defence industry, which were most coherently laid out in the 1987 White Paper. Later White Papers adapted this framework, but the 2013 White Paper seems to move towards a new approach to defence policy and strategy, which continued use of the term 'self-reliance' obscures rather than elucidates.

Self-reliance in the defence of Australia has been a core concept of Australian defence policy since the end of the Vietnam War. Although it is most prominently associated with the 1987 *Defence of Australia* White Paper, self-reliance has been used by governments from Fraser to Gillard to justify the shape and size of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The 2013 White Paper is no exception, but it places increased emphasis on regional defence engagement in the context of the US pivot to Asia, and the need to work with other countries to manage strategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific. In this context, it reinterprets self-reliance in a way that seems incompatible with the common, earlier understanding of the concept—to the point that continued use of the term obscures rather than elucidates Australia's defence policy. Although future Defence White Papers may continue to refer to self-reliance, the era in which it was a meaningful determinant of Australia's policy priorities is drawing to a close.

After discussing the importance of concepts for defence policy, this article examines the emergence of the term 'self-reliance' in Australian defence policy. It then analyses the evolution of three aspects of the concept over time: its strategic rationale; the ability of the ADF to operate independently of allies; and its application to force structuring and defence policy decisions. The article reviews the use of the term in the 2013 White Paper, before concluding with some remarks on the need for a new conceptual framework.

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Strategic concepts, defence policy and international transparency

Defence policy is unusual compared to other policy areas, because there is generally no feedback through price signals or voters' experience of government services. Even when the ADF is used on operations, what lessons can or should be drawn from any particular contingency are seldom clear. However, defence organisations are generally the largest employers in a country, operating some of the most complicated equipment and requiring a range of specialised skills and trades that is seldom found in civilian organisations. Aligning all aspects of defence preparations—including the development and acquisition of materiel, personnel, support, facilities, doctrine and training, and the actual use of the ADF—requires far too many detailed decisions to be amenable to direct, detailed decisions by government. Hence, concepts must be the basis for government direction on defence preparations—consistent with the general recommendation to give close attention in public policy to 'clearly defining the problem to be addressed and establishing a *conceptual* framework to guide evidence gathering and interpretation' (Productivity Commission 2010, 5; my emphasis). And yet, perhaps because defence policy and strategic studies are drawn to practical questions of applying force, these concepts often do not attract scholarly attention commensurate with their political and material importance (Ayson 2006).

In practice, the conceptual framework to guide the defence effort is contained in the government's strategic guidance. Until 1983, the highest level of strategic guidance in Australia was provided through a classified *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy* paper, which was drafted by the interdepartmental Defence Committee and submitted to the Cabinet for endorsement every three to four years.[2] Since 1987, Defence White Papers have replaced the *Strategic Basis* paper system. The significance of conceptual frameworks in the publicly available White Papers extends beyond their role in developing good public policy, as the explanation of defence policy in a public document can contribute to international transparency. Calls for increased transparency have become commonplace in the academic and policy discourse on security in Asia in recent years. Assessments of transparency highlight that the description of strategic risks, defence strategy and capability acquisitions in Defence White Papers must be complemented by a discussion of their logical coherence and links between them. Kiselycznyk and Saunders (2010, 6), for example, define 'transparency' narrowly as: 'providing information about military capabilities and policies that allows other countries to assess the compatibility of those capabilities with a country's stated security goals'.

Kang Choi has argued for standardised approaches to the drafting and evaluation of White Papers, stating that:

> contents should be well balanced, logically consistent and mutually supportive. If it deals with certain areas in detail while skipping others, or

> exaggerates minor issues, it will loose harmony and balance and will not serve as an integrated system of information (Kang 1996, 210).

Jon Lindsay concurs, writing that:

> Audience states assess the information's consistency with declared strategic interests and institutional obligations. States actively use the information provided in their own assessment process, which involves interpreting the fit between capabilities, activities, and intentions with what a state says it is interested in doing or worried about (Lindsay 2011, 5).

Hence, 'unity of doctrine and capabilities forms a crucial part of understanding the true intentions and preferences of states' (Northeast Asia Defense Transparency Project 2012, 5).

And yet, in practice, the concepts that White Papers use to link intentions and capabilities, and to translate policy intent into practical defence preparations, are often 'essentially contested' (Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006). Because their meaning is not clearly fixed, and because they carry normative implications—and, in the case of defence policy, affect the allocation of very significant resources—contested concepts are subject to different interpretations and dispute. Hence, concepts in strategic guidance can evolve not just in response to changing strategic circumstances, but also through shifts in domestic interpretation of their meaning. 'Self-reliance' is one such essentially contested concept—to the point that, despite its continued use of the term, the 2013 White Paper seems to have abandoned core aspects of the concept, as they were understood in the past.

'Self-reliance' and Australian defence policy

The concept of 'self-reliance' is intricately linked with that of the 'Defence of Australia', as both rose to prominence in Australian defence policy after the Vietnam War. In combination, they meant that the main task for the ADF should be to defend the continent without assistance from major allies' combat forces. In recent years, some commentators have criticised Australia's policy during the 'Defence of Australia' era as having given overdue importance to geography, ignored the link between defence policy and diplomacy, and inconsistent with the actual employment, both past and present, of Australian forces overseas. Its critics often associate it with Labor governments and left-leaning policy orientations in general, and the Hawke government's 1987 *Defence of Australia* White Paper in particular (Evans 2005; Kilcullen 2007; O'Neill 2006).

For the Labor government, which had commissioned a formal review of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) alliance upon coming to office, the 1987 White Paper fulfilled a fundamentally political purpose of proving its defence credentials (Jennings 2013). Then Defence

Minister Kim Beazley (2009, 60) claimed self-reliance as a 'Labor leit-motif', and wrote that both the Hawke and Rudd governments were 'concerned with the elements of discontinuity from a disciplined approach to self-reliance by their predecessors'. For the term and concept of 'self-reliance' were not new to Australian defence policy in 1987: the first strategic guidance document to use the term (once) was the 1968 *Strategic Basis*, which highlighted the importance of interoperability with allied forces, '[n]otwithstanding the emphasis necessary on greater self-reliance' (Defence Committee 1968, 386). 'Self-reliance' was used repeatedly in the McMahon government's 1972 *Defence Review* to describe the future direction of Australia's defence policy. And the Fraser government's 1976 *Australian Defence* White Paper was the first to include a dedicated section on 'self-reliance' as a key policy concept.

In contrast to the public 1972 *Defence Review* and 1976 White Paper, the Defence Committee made only sparing use of the term in its classified *Strategic Basis* papers: it does not appear in 1971, and only once each in 1973 and 1975. Instead, the governments' defence advisors used the term 'independent' to refer to the need or scope for Australian decision making separate from the policy of allies, and to the ability of Australian forces to operate in a self-contained manner. In 1976, the Defence Committee twice referred to 'policy for self-reliance' in the *Strategic Basis*, emphasising the normative connotations of the term (Defence Committee 1976, 605).

The essence of the policy of self-reliance was that governments sought the ability to independently use Australian forces to achieve wider foreign policy aims. Former Labor Foreign Minister Gareth Evans claimed that the 1987 White Paper was a 'conceptual watershed in Australian foreign policy', whose 'intellectual breakthrough was to establish that self-reliance was possible in most of the circumstances likely to confront Australia, short of major war', which 'liberated Australian foreign policy' from its focus on great-power protection (Evans and Grant 1995, 29–30). But the conservative McMahon government's 1972 *Defence Review* had already expressed the same idea, stating that the 'independence of our foreign relations is involved' in the ability to meet lesser challenges unaided (Department of Defence 1972, 14).

The concept of self-reliance was thus rooted in strategic considerations about the independent use of force by Australia that long pre-date the use of the term itself. In the following, this article examines the concept in relation to three complementary, but distinct, issues: the strategic rationale for self-reliance; the ability to use the ADF independently of allies; and the force structuring of the ADF, including decisions about the defence industry. In this perspective, the 1987 White Paper does indeed stand out as a 'conceptual watershed' in that it most consistently applied the concept across all three of these domains. And yet, each of them also followed its own evolution, is influenced by different considerations and can lead to different implications for resource allocation. As a contested concept, the practical meaning of 'self-reliance' was never clearly fixed.

The strategic rationale for self-reliance

The Fraser government's 1976 Australian Defence White Paper stated that:

> It is not our policy, nor would it be prudent, to rely upon US combat help in all circumstances. Indeed it is possible to envisage a range of situations in which the threshold of direct US combat involvement could be quite high. This is as it should be. An alliance does not free a nation from the responsibility to make adequate provision for its own security, or to help support stability and security in its own neighbourhood, should this requirement arise (CoA 1976, 10–11).

In the classified *Strategic Basis* papers, this consideration was developed in much greater detail than in the public White Paper, and largely focused on a possible Indonesian threat. Concerns about the reliability of US support against Indonesia first arose in the West Papua dispute of the 1950s. They were reinforced in the 1960s during Confrontation, when Indonesia opposed the formation of Malaysia and infiltrated troops into the country, against the opposition of British and Australian forces. Although the 1969 Nixon Doctrine placed greater emphasis on allies' use of their own defence manpower, it was thus more a context for, rather than a major determinant of Australian defence policy in the early 1970s. The basic concern of Australian policy makers was that in disputes which did not directly involve US interests, the USA would be loath to antagonise Indonesia and risk its closer alignment with the Eastern bloc, or might be engaged in higher-priority operations elsewhere. The 1976 *Strategic Basis* thus stated that: 'Regarding developments fundamentally affecting Australia's security or the strategic interests of the US itself … the reliability of US support appears not to be in doubt'. But where Australia's 'essential security would not be threatened', such as in the secession of Bougainville, the defence of Papua New Guinea against Indonesia or Indonesian harassment of Australia, this might not be the case (Defence Committee 1976, 605). Hence, 'the general proposition about Australia's security from major military threat, and the assurance of US combat support, need qualification in respect of Indonesia' (565). Consequently, 'Australian defence planning should ensure a substantial capability for independence in military operations regarding issues assessed as likely to be of lesser consequence to US interests' (605).

Despite the close association of self-reliance and the 'Defence of Australia' in political discourse and public documents, the strategic rationale in the classified domain thus gave a prominent place to Australian defence commitments in the region, especially in Papua New Guinea. The classified version of the 1986 'Dibb Review', whose approach to force structuring is discussed below, considered Indonesia as a potential adversary, and examined Australian strategy and capabilities in such a conflict. Two classified annexes dealt with the defence of the Christmas and Cocos Islands, as well as the defence of Papua New Guinea against Indonesia—the latter based on intelligence information at the

time about Indonesian plans to destroy the Free Papua Movement camps along the border (Dibb and Brabin-Smith 2007).

Laying out the strategic rationale for self-reliance in the public domain was thus always sensitive and never easy to do in detail. Some White Papers managed to do so more coherently and convincingly than others. The 1987 White Paper stated that:

> While it is prudent for our planning to assume that the threshold for direct United States combat aid to Australia could be quite high in some circumstances, it would be unwise for an adversary to base its planning on the same assumption (CoA 1987, 5).

The 1994 White Paper wrote that, on the one hand, Australia could not 'assume others would commit substantial forces to our defence'. On the other hand, Australia 'would expect substantial and invaluable help in a crisis' (CoA 1994, 13, 96). Although the government sought self-reliance in combat forces, Australia never sought (or could achieve) forces that would be self-sufficient— i.e. independent of allied intelligence, logistics and other support, or equipped only with Australian-made materiel. All of the White Papers since 1987 have included explicit comments to that effect.[3]

In 1999, the East Timor operation demonstrated that the limits of US assistance in regional contingencies were still very real. Prime Minster Howard would later comment that, after Washington had declined direct participation, 'we all felt a bit sort of alone on it [sic]' (quoted in Henry 2013, 105). Hence, White Papers and Defence Updates from 2000 to 2009 would include the ability to 'lead' coalition operations in the South-West Pacific as a force-structure determinant for the ADF (CoA 2007, 26–27; 2009, 54; 2013, 25).[4] Whereas self-reliance implies that Australia was willing to act on its own, the ability to 'lead' implied that, politically at least, Australia would only act in concert with others. However, given the limited regional military capabilities—with the partial exception of New Zealand—the consequences of this concept for Australian force structure and defence planning were essentially the same.

Once strategic guidance discussed the direct defence of Australia separately from regional interventions, however, White Papers became less consistent, coherent and precise in their justification of self-reliance in the defence of Australia. The Howard government chose not to discuss possible limits to US assistance, confidently stating that: 'We believe that, if Australia were attacked, the United States would provide substantial help, including with armed force'. Instead, it argued for self-reliance because Australia should not develop a 'dependency' on the USA, which would weaken the alliance—an essentially political rather than strategic argument (CoA 2000, 35–36). However, there was no indication that the overall strategic rationale of Australia's defence effort had changed, and the 2007 Defence Update stated that: 'if Australia was ever to be directly threatened, our allies may well be engaged elsewhere, and unable to

assist' (CoA 2007, 26). In 2009, the Rudd government then returned to the limits of US support in a far more explicit and absolute manner than any White Paper before, stating that: 'Australia would only expect the United States to come to our aid in circumstances where we were under threat from a major power whose military capabilities were simply beyond our capacity to resist' (CoA 2009, 50). While this was consistent with the White Paper's comments about the limits to US primacy, the document was also much less tightly edited than earlier papers (Dibb 2009). Hence, it remains unclear whether this sentence meant that the government in fact thought the USA would not support its ally below that threshold, or whether it merely sought to justify Australia's precautionary adoption of self-reliance, in rather ambiguous terms.

Independent joint operations and Australian military strategy

Whereas the political significance of self-reliance arose primarily from Australia's perception of itself vis-à-vis the USA and the region, for the defence organisation the consequences for the composition, doctrine and use of the ADF were even more important. Insofar as threats to Australia after the Vietnam War would not have had the same characteristics as Soviet forces, the equipment and doctrine needs of the ADF began to diverge from those of Australia's traditional partners, the UK and USA. Moreover, if Australia was to be able to meet any threat with its own combat forces only, those forces had to be able to operate jointly and independently of allies. After three decades of 'forward defence' alongside much larger UK and US forces, both of these were a significant change in outlook for the defence organisation in the mid 1970s (Thompson 1988).

However, the requirement for joint operations was not completely new to strategic guidance. Comments about operations for 'home defence' in global conflict were contained as aside remarks in guidance documents of the 1940s and 1950s. In light of the possible failure of 'forward defence' against regional communism, Indonesian contingencies and the aftermath of thermonuclear war, the 1959 *Strategic Basis* explicitly called for forces 'designed primarily for the ability to act independently of Allies' (Defence Committee 1959, 261). The government did not fully endorse this recommendation, however, and, until the end of the Confrontation and the Vietnam War, such considerations held little practical relevance.

After the creation of the ADF in 1976, it only made slow progress towards joint service command and organisation—especially until the tenure of General Sir Phillip Bennett, as Chief of Defence Force Staff and the first Chief of the Defence Force, in 1984–87 (Horner 2001). Progress increased during the 2000s, after the 1999 East Timor operation. It included the creation of Joint Operations Command, now headed by a three-star officer (of the same rank as the Service Chiefs) and housed in dedicated headquarters at Bungendore near Canberra. Whereas debates about force structure and doctrinal priorities in earlier decades had often been between the three services, the ADF as a whole

now also developed a more coherent narrative on how Australian military operations should be conducted, including in the 2002 *Australian Approach to Warfare* and *Force 2020*, the 2007 *Joint Operations for the 21st Century*, and the 2011 *Future Joint Operational Concept* documents.

More recently, the development by the ADF of an Australian maritime strategy has become a focal point of this activity. The term 'maritime strategy' was introduced in the 2000 White Paper, on a par with the concepts of 'self-reliance' and 'proactive operations', as the basis for Australia's military strategy. In that document, the term was used to highlight the use of air and naval forces in the defence of Australia, with the Army's primary role being the defence against any incursions that might occur—essentially similar to the 1987 White Paper's strategy of 'defence in depth' (CoA 2000, 47). Over subsequent years, and following the acquisition of two large landing helicopter dock (LHD) ships that will enter service in coming years, the ADF has developed 'maritime strategy' into a more detailed concept and document (Jones 2013). The amphibious role of the Army beyond the shores of Australia itself is now of central importance in that strategy, and the concept has received strong support from the current Chief of Army (Morrison 2013). In the 2009 White Paper, the Rudd government endorsed this development and expanded the role of

> conventional land forces to control our approaches, to secure offshore territories and facilities, to defeat any incursions onto Australian territory, to protect bases from which our naval and air forces operate, and potentially to deny the adversary access to staging bases (CoA 2009, 54).

And yet, it is difficult to make the case that amphibious forces would be a high-priority capability in a defence-of-Australia contingency. As Pallazzo wrote:

> What is missing … is a sense of how the LHDs will contribute to the attainment of a defined national strategic end. The 2009 Defence White Paper recognises that Australia's regional geography requires the ADF to have an expeditionary capability but is mute on the question to what strategic purpose (Pallazzo 2011, 44).

The challenge here is that interpreting self-reliance with a narrow focus on the ability to conduct joint operations does not answer against what level of threat, and to what end, Australia should be self-reliant—and hence it can ultimately be used to justify almost any kind of military capability. For example, the current Chief of Army tends to refer to the defeat of an unnamed 'peer-competitor' army as a justification for a heavier Army (Morrison 2012), but Australia is quite unique in its strategic circumstances, and it is far from clear what other country or adversary could credibly be described as a 'peer'—especially in Australia's region of primary strategic interest in South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific. There can be little doubt, however, that the Army's 'peer-competitor' is part of a deliberate discourse to contest

alternative interpretations of 'self-reliance', which had placed regional countries' defence capabilities at the centre of decisions about force structure for self-reliant operations.

Force structure and defence industry for self-reliance

Since 1987, government consideration and endorsement of the defence capability portfolio—both existing and planned for acquisition—has been a major part of the White Paper process. Before, the *Strategic Basis* papers and associated Cabinet decisions laid down policy principles, but they did not extend to decisions about the maintenance or acquisition of specific capabilities. In that situation, arguments about how to interpret strategic guidance to set force-structure priorities contributed to a situation where '[f]rom all accounts almost a civil war then raged in the organization' (Andrews 2001, 213).

That Australian forces should be prepared to operate without allied assistance was largely uncontested. The core problem was, however, how to determine the credible contingencies that the ADF should be able to handle self-reliantly, and what warning and reaction time could be assumed for them. This required judgments about the capabilities and intentions of countries in Australia's immediate neighbourhood, about the credibility of a direct threat to Australia from great powers further afield, and a clear definition of 'low-level' contingencies. Whereas some senior civilian public servants argued that only capabilities for very low-level harassment were required in the force in being,[5] the services preferred to deal with such contingencies with a force that was structured for high-intensity conflict. In the mid 1980s, for example, the *Army Development Guide* was based on an 'Objective Force in Being' of 94,000—far above the actual number of regulars as well as reserves—which could expand to an army of 270,000 personnel overall (Dibb 1986).

In 1985, Defence Minister Kim Beazley commissioned a review of Australia's defence capabilities in light of existing strategic guidance. The resulting 'Dibb Review', after its author Paul Dibb, formed the basis of the 1987 White Paper, and both documents in combination remain the only time that a clear top-down justification for the ADF's force structure as a whole was provided in public documents. The review used existing Indonesian capabilities—although the public version did not identify them as such—to postulate a notional threat to Australia, which the ADF should be structured, postured and exercised to defeat. The maximum level of threat that the ADF thus had to meet from within the existing force in being was 'set at any one time by the military capabilities that could practically be brought to bear against Australia's interests' (CoA 1987, 25). This defined an objective standard that could be used to assess and track strategic risk, even if it was not based on any actual information about hostile intentions. The review then developed a strategy of 'denial' of how the ADF would meet the postulated threat without allied combat forces, and

derived requirements for the size of the regular Army and reserves, Navy combatants and fighter aircraft.

Through these considerations, the 1987 framework resulted in a defence policy setting that was far more coherent than before, but also narrow in focus. And yet, no other White Paper has detailed the necessary assumptions and judgments to explain how the application of self-reliance to Australia's strategic circumstances would justify the specific capability priorities and force structure they contained. Within the Department of Defence, the abolition of the Force Development and Analysis division in the late 1990s eliminated an institutional mechanism to evaluate the services' capability proposals against the government's policy guidance (Brabin-Smith 2010). In preparation for the 2000 White Paper, the Howard government directed that existing capability was to be maintained or replaced (White 2005). The Rudd government's decision in 2009 to double the future submarine fleet was also made without any justification of the new (or old) number of boats.

A similar situation pertains in relation to the size of the Army, and the level of ambition for the stabilisation operations Australia wants to be able to lead in the South-West Pacific. In the 2000 White Paper, intuition rather than analysis led to the guideline that one brigade and one battalion should be available for operations—a level that seemed doable within existing constraints (White 2006). The Howard government expanded the Army by two battalions in 2006, but the 2009 White Paper also did not provide any information to justify the size of Army—despite explicitly ruling out participation in future large-scale counter-insurgency operations of the kind that had bound significant numbers of Army personnel during the 2000s.

Related to force structuring was the use of self-reliance to make arguments about the type of defence industry required in Australia. After the Vietnam War, these focused on the role of domestic industry in expansion or mobilisation, on the one hand, and the capacity to adapt and sustain ADF equipment in low-level conflict, on the other. In general, however, Australian strategic policy attention was focused on broader questions, so that the application of policy principles to stockholding and domestic production of war materiel for the support of ADF operations received less detailed conceptual and practical attention than it deserved (Minchin, Robinson, and Long 1996; Wylie 2007). Support to self-reliance was still referred to as one criterion for the determination of 'priority industry capabilities' in the 2009 White Paper. However, 'there is a sense that defence industry segments have been accommodated simply because they currently exist', and the claimed strategic benefits of the shipbuilding industry in Australia, in particular, arguably do not hold up to close scrutiny (Davies, Thompson, and Ergas 2012, 18).

More coherently derived from self-reliance was the development of systems specific to Australia's capability needs. For many years, for example, the USA refused to release to Australia a functional electronic countermeasures system for the F-111 bombers, and the source code for radar warning receivers on the

F-18 fighters (which was required so they could detect Western-made aircraft of South-East Asian countries). Australia therefore developed, with limited success, its own system—the ALR-2002 (Brabin-Smith, personal communication; Hall and Wylie 2010). Given Australia's geography, over-the-horizon radar was particularly useful for air and maritime surveillance in the northern approaches, and Australia turned to its own industry to develop the Jindalee system. Similarly, unique requirements arising from geography were behind the design of the Collins-class submarine, and the Future Submarine that will replace it. If Australia did not want to rely on allies for surveillance and submarine operations, self-reliance required it to find its own technical solutions.

Continuity and change: self-reliance in the 2013 Defence White Paper

Despite changes in emphasis over time, several implications of self-reliance can thus be traced through all White Papers from 1976 to 2009: limits to the extent of allied assistance; concern about the possibility of conflict with Indonesia; the need for joint ADF operations; force structuring against regional capabilities; a domestic defence industry focused on specifically Australian requirements; and a political statement of Australian independence and the ability to make its own strategic judgments and decisions. As such, self-reliance was a coherent strategic concept that did help guide, understand and explain the main thrust of Australia's strategic policy of recent decades.

This does not mean that particular aspects and implications of self-reliance were not contested or even strongly disputed—how to determine force-structure and force-posture priorities and the importance of the domestic defence industry continue to be the subject of very different views. And not all considerations were always fully developed or explained by all of the White Papers. The 1987 *Defence of Australia* document stands out not only for its overall importance in the Australian defence and foreign policy discourse, but also for defining a force-structure concept to underpin ADF development that found bipartisan support. Later White Papers never fully explained how their capability decisions flowed from this or a similar framework, although it is arguably only with the 2009 White Paper's endorsement of an amphibious role of the Army in the defence of Australia that there was a significant deviation from the 1987 strategy.

At first glance, the 2013 White Paper seems largely consistent with its predecessors. With a greater focus on the ability of the ADF to operate in and from the north of the continent, in line with the recommendations of the 2010 Force Posture Review, and greater prominence given to warning and reaction considerations, it is in some regards even closer to the 1987 White Paper's priorities than those of the 2000 and 2009 White Papers. Like the latter two, it sets the defence of Australia and stabilisation operations in the South-West Pacific as the 'force structure determinants' (CoA 2013, 24). It confirms that the 'highest priority ADF task is to deter and defeat armed attacks on Australia

without having to rely on the combat or combat support forces of another country' (28). The following paragraph then introduces the term 'self-reliance'—without explicitly identifying it with the principle enunciated above:

> Australia's defence policy is founded on the principle of self-reliance in deterring or defeating armed attacks on Australia, within the context of our Alliance with the United States and our cooperation with regional partners. A commitment to self-reliance does not reflect any lack of confidence in our Alliance or partners. We would seek and expect help from our friends if Australia came under direct attack. But we should not rely on the combat forces of others to defend Australia (28).

A first point of note is that this continues the diminishing attention drawn to the principle from White Paper to White Paper. In 1976 and 1987, the first sections in the chapters on defence policy were entitled 'Self-Reliance'.[6] In 2000, 'Self-Reliance' had become one subsection of three that enunciated the Australian military strategy for the defence of Australia. In 2009, self-reliance did not merit its own heading any more, but the section on 'Australia's Defence Policy' began with the following sentence, which conveyed both the importance of and the government's purpose with regard to the concept: 'The Government has decided that Australia's defence policy should continue to be founded on the principle of self-reliance in the direct defence of Australia and in relation to our unique strategic interests' (CoA 2009, 48).

A second, related point is that the 2013 White Paper is the first one ever not to provide a justification for self-reliance. Of course, self-reliance has been a core part of Australia's defence policy for the last four decades, and the term itself has perhaps become firmly ingrained in the thinking of defence officials and politicians. And yet, Australia remains the only formal US ally in Europe or Asia to adopt such a policy. That the government did not think it necessary to justify this is an indication that the concept itself has lost, over the years, the centrality in defence policy thinking that it once had.

Moreover, past explanations clearly would not have sat all that well with other considerations in the 2013 White Paper: a case based on burden-sharing in the alliance would have invited derision, given the quite significant cuts to the defence budget that preceded the White Paper. The argument for self-reliance as a part of sovereign independence and of how Australia as a nation sees itself would have jarred somewhat with the prominence that the Gillard government gave to common security. The section on 'Australia's Defence and Security Policy' does not even mention self-reliance, but instead states that: 'Australia's strategic policy needs to be geared towards building security by seizing the opportunities and managing the risks within the Indo-Pacific. Shaping the development of the Indo-Pacific is critical to our objective of long-term regional security and prosperity' (CoA 2013, 23).

The 2013 White Paper also does not contain any reference to the strategic reasoning that has underpinned self-reliance over the past decades—that Australia might face situations where its allies might not be willing or able to support it to the extent that it wishes. There is no mention any more of any 'unique strategic interests', which the 2009 White Paper mentioned in the paragraph quoted above and when it stated that: 'we must have the capacity to … act independently where we have unique strategic interests at stake, and in relation to which we would not wish to be reliant on the combat forces of any foreign power' (CoA 2009, 48). Consistent with this, but still remarkable given the historical importance of Indonesia for Australia's concept of self-reliance, is that the 2013 White Paper is the first such document without any hint at the possibility that Indonesia could at one time pose a strategic challenge to Australia.[7]

But if there are no uniquely Australian interests worth mentioning, and Indonesia is not a strategic concern any more, there is little reason to plan for self-reliant operations in the defence of Australia—a fact that is also reflected in the 2013 White Paper's discussion of Australia's military strategy. Like the two White Papers before it, the 2013 version discusses a 'maritime strategy' for the self-reliant defence of Australia. However, it now also lists as one of the aims of that strategy to 'project power by deploying joint task forces in the Indo-Pacific region and support the operations of regional partners when required' (CoA 2013, 29). While it confirms the expanded role of the Army in the strategy, it now states that the strategy: 'would use conventional land forces to control our approaches, protect bases, defeat any incursions onto Australian territory, secure offshore territories and facilities and, *most likely in partnership with others*, deny the adversary access to staging bases in our neighbourhood' (30; my emphasis).

The distinction between self-reliant operations and coalition operations is thus being blurred—a defence-of-Australia contingency is conceived of less as a conflict in which Australia might have to stand alone and more as one where it will be partnered with other countries. The same trend is also obvious in the 2013 White Paper's section that discusses the ADF's 'contributions to military contingencies in the Indo-Pacific'. Like the 2009 White Paper, which first introduced this consideration, the 2013 White Paper warns that an opponent might conduct limited attacks on Australia or Australian shipping in retaliation for Australia's support to its partners in the Indo-Pacific, and that some ADF capabilities would have to be kept in reserve for the defence of Australia itself (CoA 2009, 55; 2013, 32). From a strategic concept in response to limits to US assistance, 'self-reliance' now seems to be morphing into a statement of Australia's geographic priorities in a coalition conflict in Asia—in the 2013 White Paper's formulation, 'self-reliance … within the context of our Alliance with the United States *and our cooperation with regional partners*' (CoA 2013, 28; my emphasis).

Conclusion: moving on from self-reliance

The 2013 White Paper was drafted by a government that has since lost power. It seems, however, likely that the reinterpretation of self-reliance and its overall decline in importance for Australian defence policy will continue. The general analysis of Australia's international environment, the priority on defence engagement and the focus on greater cooperation with Indonesia are likely to endure. Increased and closer engagement with the US military in the region also has bipartisan support, and is likely to increase under the Coalition government. Indeed, the Abbott government may focus even more on Australia's contribution to stability in North-East Asia than its predecessors.

Self-reliance was a useful strategic concept to prepare for the defence of Australia (and Papua New Guinea) against Indonesia in the absence of direct US support. That this is not the main concern of Australian defence any more is not surprising, nor would it be problematic if there was a new conceptual framework to underpin the new evolving policy. Instead, the term 'self-reliance' was still trotted out by the Gillard government to justify Australia's defence acquisitions and force structure, but the concept itself has been hollowed out as strategic concerns increasingly focus on engagement with the region, including the US pivot.

Force structuring requires a way of assessing sufficiency and determining priorities. While the latter may to some extent be determined by consideration of Australia's particular geographic situation, the former is impossible without a specific level of threat for planning purposes—presuming that the aim, indeed, remains an ability to conduct self-reliant operations. Where previously the 1987 framework could guide decisions about the structure and size of the ADF, the 2013 White Paper contains no indication any more as to how the government approached such decisions. In coalition operations, the sufficiency of Australian contributions is largely dependent on the political judgments and actions of partners and allies—considerations that are quite different from those that dominated Australian strategic policy of the last decades, and which the concept of self-reliance is ill-suited to address.

Continuing to frame Australian defence policy as 'self-reliance' thus distracts from a clear articulation of how Australia intends to work with its partners and allies—in particular, the USA—in the defence of itself and the region. Now that US Marines are based in Darwin for significant parts of every year, the political and strategic context of any operation in the north of the continent would be far different than that envisaged even in 2009, let alone in the 1970s and 1980s, when US forces were rarely visiting or training in Australia. The era in which Australian defence policy could be described as 'the search for self-reliance' (Cheeseman 1993) is over. If the next White Paper were to lay out a new conceptual framework to replace it for the future, it would be doing a great service not only to the development of Australian defence as good public policy, but also to defence transparency and the understanding of Australia's policy in the region.

Notes

1. The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.
2. Although the series is generally known as the *Strategic Basis*, some—including in 1964, 1976 and 1979—had different titles (Frühling 2009). The 1976 Defence White Paper complemented but did not replace the *Strategic Basis* paper series.
3. This is not to say that confusion between 'self-reliance' and 'self-sufficiency' is uncommon. From the author's personal experience, this is especially the case among many ADF personnel, who focus on the necessity of US logistics support to ADF operations. The 2007 Future Joint Operations Concept even states that: 'our deepening interdependence with the forces of our allies and the global military–industrial system means that self-reliance will increasingly not mean self-sufficiency' (ADF 2007, 7).
4. The 2000 White Paper did not yet use the term 'lead', but it stated that Australia should 'be prepared to be the largest force contributor' (CoA 2000, 48).
5. See, for example, the recommendations for a 'militia' organisation in Wrigley (1990).
6. The 1994 White Paper did not contain 'self-reliance' in a heading or subheading, but gave the concept prominent and long discussion as the conceptual basis of Australia's defence policy.
7. There is no equivalent in the 2013 White Paper to paragraph 4.33 of the 2009 White Paper (CoA 2009, 36).

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