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A new agenda for national security

by Carl Ungerer

Executive summary

Preserving national security is a fundamental duty of government—there is no higher national interest. But defining national security priorities in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world is a difficult and complex task. Australia’s security interests involve a broad and growing list of internal and external pressures and risks.

National security concepts that focus predominantly on military threats and responses are no longer sufficient to deal with the range and complexity of contemporary security risks. To continue to muddle through in this way is not an option. But recent conceptual innovations such as human security have so far offered limited practical guidance in the conduct of a national security policy.

In order to illuminate the challenges ahead for the Australian Government, this paper addresses a number of critical questions in the national security debate:

- *What is national security?*
- *Why do emerging international security issues such as organised crime, pandemic diseases and climate change pose a national security risk?*
- *How have other countries such as Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom approached national security planning?*

- *What bureaucratic changes are necessary in Australia in order to deal with the contemporary security environment?*

In answering these questions, the paper argues that non-traditional security risks only become a national security priority when they meet the benchmarks of scale, proximity and urgency. The paper also recommends changes to the Office of National Security (ONS) including the consolidation of a single national security budget and the publication of an annual security risk assessment.

What is national security?

In its 2008 *National Security Strategy*, the UK Government identified climate change as potentially the greatest challenge to global stability and security. This judgement follows a recent report by retired US army and navy commanders who recommended that the consequences of climate change should be fully integrated into national security and national defence strategies.¹

The focus on environmental security in both London and Washington represents an important paradigmatic shift in the conceptualisation of national security, which, during much of the Cold War, was primarily concerned with the threat, use and control of military force.

The climate change issue illustrates most clearly the extent to which Western governments have been engaged in a broadening and deepening of the concepts related to national security. In addition to the potential consequences of climate change, issues such as transnational crime, illegal migration, pandemic diseases and global terrorism have been elevated to the forefront of national security debates.

Many of these challenges are not new. Non-traditional and non-state threats have long been folded into concepts such as ‘comprehensive security’ which underpin security doctrines in many parts of Asia, including institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The key task for security planners in Australia is to understand how and why these non-traditional issues and concepts are incorporated into national security policy. The push of globalisation over the next fifteen years will bring more of these issues to the attention of governments. At the same time, old nationalisms, particularly in East Asia, will pull in the opposite direction. The balancing of these ‘old’ and ‘new’ security dilemmas requires a more rigorous metric for deciding which issues are core national security priorities and which issues are less consequential ones.



At its core, the concept of a national security policy requires governments to think about three interrelated questions; the trajectory of the international and domestic security environment and its implications for the modern democratic state; judgements about the likely probability and consequences of events across the emerging threat spectrum; and the range and combination of policy instruments needed to meet those risks today and into the future.

Since 2001, Australian government statements on national security have been dominated by counter-terrorism initiatives and regional threat assessments. Currently, the Australian Government’s national security website is almost exclusively devoted to counter-terrorism policies. And the work of the Attorney-General’s Department and the Office of National Security (ONS) in the Prime Minister’s Department are focused heavily on countering the possible domestic manifestations of global terrorist networks. Although preventing terrorism remains a top national security priority, it is just one of a number of global pressures and risks that a comprehensive national security policy must address.

The definition of national security must begin with a clear sense of priorities. This is essential if governments are going to make sensible decisions about the allocation of resources and longer-term strategies. As a continental power facing three oceans, Australia’s economic and security interests are broad. Our interests are directly tied to economic and political developments in the Asia–Pacific region. And we have global interests in a rules-based international order. But setting national security priorities is necessary to ensure that we give due weight and adequate resources to those interests that are most important.

As the security agenda widens to incorporate new risks and problems, governments will need specific criteria for deciding which issues are central to national security planning and which are not. Such criteria should include:

- scale—the problem is large enough that it engages the government at a national level or overwhelms local and state government responses
- proximity—the closeness of the threat to Australia
- urgency—the immediacy and timing of the threat.

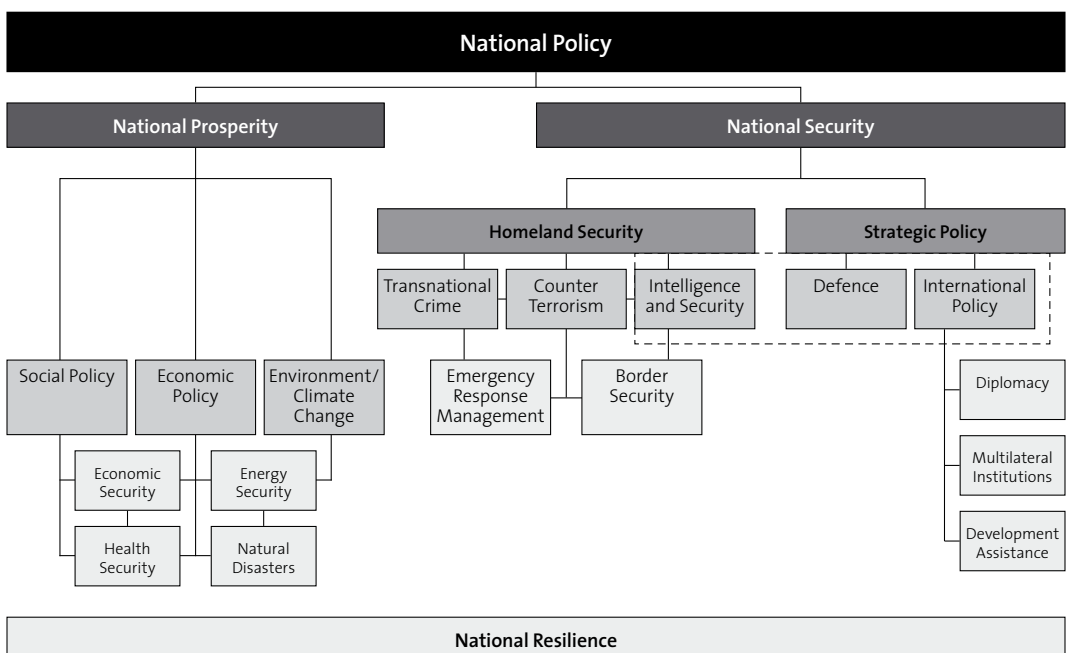
These criteria are not exclusive and can be limited by the range and availability of resources to respond. But if any threat to Australia or Australian interests failed to meet these benchmarks it should not be elevated to the status of a national security issue.

Using this metric, climate change is not a core national security problem. For now, the policy instruments necessary to deal with climate change are contained within the economic and social policy spheres. However, climate

change does have the *potential* to become a national security threat if the consequences of global warming or irregular weather patterns, for example, were of sufficient scale, proximity or urgency to warrant the involvement of the national security agencies. The clearest example of this would be if a small Pacific Island country were to become uninhabitable as a result of rising sea levels, and the Australian Government was called upon to deal with a regional humanitarian crisis.

Figure 1 identifies a set of core national security priorities. Consistent with the formal definition of national security under Australian law (see page 4), these priorities encompass the traditional activities of strategic policy (defence and foreign affairs), and homeland security. The chart recognises that in the conduct of national policy, Australia has two broad interests: national prosperity and national security. The chart also recognises that the concept of national resilience underpins both security and prosperity. Resilience is the ability to survive,

Figure 1: Core national security priorities



The formal definition of national security

The formal definition of national security is contained within the *National Security Information (Criminal and Civil Proceedings) Act 2004*.

Under the Act, 'national security' is defined as 'Australia's defence, security, international relations or law enforcement interests'.

'Security' means 'the protection of the Commonwealth and the several States and Territories from: (i) espionage; (ii) sabotage; (iii) politically motivated violence; (iv) promotion of communal violence; (v) attacks on Australia's defence system; or (vi) acts of foreign interference.'

'International relations' means 'political, military and economic relations

with foreign governments and international organisations'.

'Law enforcement interests' include: (a) avoiding disruption to national and international efforts relating to law enforcement, criminal intelligence, criminal investigation, foreign intelligence and security intelligence; (b) protecting the technologies and methods used to collect, analyse, secure or otherwise deal with, criminal intelligence, foreign intelligence or security intelligence; (c) the protection and safety of informants and of persons associated with informants; (d) ensuring that intelligence and law enforcement agencies are not discouraged from giving information to a nation's government and government agencies'.

bounce back and even prosper from shocks whether they be natural disasters, economic disruptions or deliberate attacks.

Issues that affect national prosperity, including climate change, economic security, energy security and health risks, all have the potential to become national security concerns if they meet the benchmarks of scale, proximity and urgency. In this way, Australian governments can begin to prioritise security issues and the policy instruments needed to deal with them.

Why do emerging international security issues pose a potential national security risk?

Central to understanding these new security risks is the interconnected but by no means integrated world in which we live. Globalisation, which has become the single dominant feature of this new order, has altered our threat perceptions, our economic

outlook and our potential vulnerability to external shocks.

This society of interconnected states faces stress from a variety of global threats, more accurately described as pressures and risks. Stress from increased population movements and infectious diseases, stress from the demand for energy to power the global economy, stress from conflict in fragile and failed states and stress upon the environment from climate change associated with rapid and expanding industrialisation. From these pressure points new transnational risks emerge and are made possible by the speed and facility of an increasingly borderless world.

To take one obvious example: in failed states such as Afghanistan, wars amongst the people have global resonances in terms of increased migration flows, drug trafficking, transnational crime and international terrorism. Conflicts that were once

constrained by the structure and discipline of the Cold War have become internationalised.

Successful market states have become financially, economically and strategically interconnected: a sub-prime mortgage lending crisis in the United States can knock 20% off the Australian Stock Exchange even at a time when the Australian economy is booming. Similarly, an economic slowdown in China would have important repercussions for Australian commodity production and for the wider economy. An outbreak of avian influenza could cause a global health crisis. Transnational drug and people smuggling gangs operate across central and Southeast Asia and their effects are visible on the streets of Sydney and Melbourne.

In other words, the interconnected world order which has created greater openness and political freedom is vulnerable to external shocks and disruptions in the flow of people, capital and technology.

Problems that occur are simultaneously national and international because the two are increasingly interconnected. National security therefore depends simultaneously upon international security and domestic economic prosperity. The recent establishment of the British Cabinet Committee on National Security, International Relations and Development captures something of the complex character of this new order.

There is a need here to return to first principles. In order to fix the conceptual gaps and structural deficiencies, a new national security paradigm needs to approach risk from a systemic perspective rather than a compartmentalised, bureaucratic one. By contextualising risk in terms of national threats and responses we can devise policies that are measured and appropriate.

How have other countries approached national security planning?

The range of interconnected vulnerabilities compels modern, successful, market states like Australia to reassess the kind of political structures that are best suited to address the new reality. In this new order, 'the right to security is of the highest order'.² But how have other countries understood the term 'national security' in this context?

In answering this question, new governments in London, Tokyo and Ottawa have recently published official statements or policy papers on national security. The trends and ideas contained within these debates offers some interesting comparative data as Australia begins a similar exercise.

United Kingdom

The March 2008 publication of *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom* specifically ranks six dimensions of the security environment that directly threaten UK national security interests. These are: terrorism; the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; transnational organised crime; the problem of failed states; state-based threats; and civil emergencies. See Table 1.

The UK security statement makes an important distinction between the drivers of global security threats and specific security problems or risks to the UK. In the hierarchy of issues discussed in the paper, terrorism ranks third, whereas globalisation and threats to a rules-based international order are more prominent.

Recognising that national security planning must adjust to the complexities of dealing with short-term threats such as terrorism and longer-term pressures to the international order, the UK Government has begun to streamline its national security architecture.

Table 1: UK national security challenges ranked according to issue***The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World (2008)**

Global trends	18%
Challenges to the rules based international system	12%
Terrorism	11%
Global instability and conflict, and failed and fragile states	10%
Poverty, inequality, and poor governance	10%
Transnational organised crime	9%
Weapons of mass destruction	8%
Climate change	6%
Civil emergencies	6%
State-led threats to the United Kingdom	6%
Competition for energy	4%

* based on the number of lines dedicated to each challenge.

The Brown Government has established a national security committee headed by the PM, which replaces various ministerial committees on defence and overseas policy. The single committee structure is focused on issues relating to defence and counter terrorism, as well as community relations within the UK.

The government has also given greater autonomy to the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, a recommendation made by the Butler Report (a review of the intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction). Finally, the government has announced a single budget for security and intelligence with a £1 billion increase over three years to boost counter-terrorism efforts in the UK and overseas.

These measures have been commended as a positive step towards reshaping the national security architecture for the twenty-first century and eradicating the contradiction, duplication and competition that previously characterised the UK's security policy framework.

Japan

Japan has yet to define its long term national security strategy. However, recent turbulence in international affairs has provoked further discussion about Japan's national security role. One Japanese commentator has recently argued that a more comprehensive security policy is necessary because of the uncertain security environment in the Asia-Pacific region and the recently diverging views between Tokyo and Washington.³

There are also concerns that Japan's national security architecture is unsuited for dealing with the contemporary threat environment. Recent cabinet level discussions have raised the need for a more strategic approach to national security planning—in particular, the need to better link the various cabinet, ministerial and council institutions that formulate and implement decisions relating to national security.⁴

This is part of a broader debate about Japan's constitutional restrictions and the limitations they impose on Japan's collective security obligations. The 2007 decision to suspend refuelling operations in the Indian Ocean, Japan's contribution to the coalition effort in Afghanistan, is the most recent example of this debate. Tokyo's contribution to international security operations has been under constant review since anti-terrorism laws were passed in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks.

The debate revolves around operational flexibility for the Japanese self defence forces. As with the security debate in the UK, there is a broad appreciation for an increasingly complicated international security environment. The 2007 Japan National Defense Paper, for example, recognises a range of national security issues from traditional inter-state relations to new threats such as transnational terrorism, and notes that this complex security environment

demands a comprehensive policy response including military, diplomatic, judicial, police, intelligence and economic measures.

Despite this recognition, however, the security environment for Japan remains strongly characterised by state-centric threats that emanate from the Asian region. The defence paper notes specifically the presence of regional powers, namely China and India, and draws a clear distinction between the patterns of regional economic cooperation and integration, and the lack of a common post-Cold War security understanding in the region. Japan's national security outlook is dominated by the North Korean nuclear and missile crisis, China's military and economic advancement and ongoing territorial disputes with neighbouring countries. Non-state threats such as terrorism and piracy enter the security calculation by way of the threat posed to the critical sea lanes that are fundamental to Japan's economic connection to the world.

There is a clear differentiation between military and non-military aspects of managing the security environment. Non-military threats are recognised as integral elements of Japan's long term security but are addressed by, and promoted through, Japan's Overseas Development Assistance policy.

Canada

The concept of Canadian national security has evolved in recent years. The former Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy had positioned Canada's national security policy firmly within the human security framework, noting that it was no longer about states rights and national sovereignty but about individuals.⁵ Axworthy argued that national security and human security were complimentary.

Axworthy's human security agenda was notable for the lack of emphasis given to the possibility of future direct military threats

to Canada and was instead focused on multilateral institution building, peacekeeping operations and the promotion of Canadian values and ideals.

The September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the shifting political landscape in Ottawa have altered the national security debate in Canada. The 2004 publication of *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* provided a much sharper focus on Canadian national security. The then Prime Minister Paul Martin addressed security interests primarily in terms of protecting Canadian sovereignty and reinforcing Canadian internal security. *Securing an Open Society* articulated three core national security interests: protecting Canada and Canadians at home and abroad; ensuring Canada is not a base for threats to allies; and contributing to international security.

Securing an Open Society listed a number of potential security threats, ranging from non-specific threats such as natural disasters through to failed states and religious extremism, but did not rank them in terms of gravity or immediacy.

The subsequent 2005 *International Policy Statement* stated that Canada's fundamental interests are ensuring continued prosperity and security for Canadians. The statement prioritises Canada's role in North American security structures. It also acknowledged the importance of Canada's Arctic interests. It noted the importance of deepening Canada's engagement with new power centres, namely China and India, and reaffirms Canada's commitment to multilateralism. It charted a more active role in international affairs based on Canadian contributions to Afghanistan and other zones of instability. Countering terrorism, stabilising failed states through peacekeeping operations and combating proliferation were identified as being the

three areas where Canada was most able to make a difference globally.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has recently promised a revised statement on national security. In his October 2007 Speech from the Throne, Harper argued that Canada's focus needed to gravitate towards more traditional security concerns. These included the importance of Canadian sovereignty on the northern border in response to new challenges 'from other shores', a commitment to new Arctic patrol ships and enhanced surveillance capability, the continuation of Canada's involvement in bringing security to Afghanistan and Haiti, and the advancement of Canada's economic interests.

From these overseas examples, several common points emerge. First, judgements about the balance of power in the international system will remain central to national security planning. State-based military threats have not disappeared; they have simply been joined by a more diverse range of transnational problems and risks that require different ways of thinking about how security outcomes are delivered. So anticipating and responding to the rise of new powers in Asia will continue to be a first order priority for Australian national security planners.

The second aspect of the national security debate is the recognition that non-traditional security threats require different policy responses. The use of military assets will not always be the most effective tool for dealing with transnational risks such as climate change that pose a threat to both individuals and the interests of the state. So security planners will require a better mix of policy instruments, both bilateral and multilateral, to anticipate security risks, prevent them where possible, and to minimise harmful consequences.

Finally, and despite many commonalities between them, national agendas will vary over time according to factors such as political orientation, geographic location and historical responsibilities.

What bureaucratic changes are necessary to deal with the contemporary security environment?

Above all, national security policy must be tethered to core national interests—in our case the security and economic prosperity of the Australian people. Our security interests are closely tied to both regional and global developments. And anything that narrows our strategic choices or limits our policy options is a potential threat to national security.

In this context it's important that the national security architecture possesses a framework for assessing contingencies that may run from increased migration flows to rising levels of transnational crime to international terrorism or environmental and health risks.

These new security risks are often symptoms of other problems and changes within the wider environment. Risks such as terrorism or energy security are both networked and interconnected. They do not have obvious root causes. They require governments to adopt a networked approach that is prepared to adapt to a range of unforeseen contingencies.

Consequently, the time is particularly propitious for governments to think imaginatively about a security strategy that addresses more coherently the risks its citizens face. Such a strategy would recognise that domestic and international risks are connected, complex and broad. They require an emphasis on prevention as well as preparedness, mitigation as well as response.

A complex phenomenon like international terrorism requires a strategic response, for example, that does not feed into the terrorists need for revenge and reaction and thereby reinforce rather than mitigate its local and global ideological appeal.

Such a revolution in national preparedness requires a comprehensive security strategy that builds networks across and between all levels of government in cooperation with the private sector and civil society actors. In order to facilitate this outcome, the old security architecture must be replaced with one that is more integrated, open and transparent.

To achieve better integration and cohesion in national security policy, government agencies will need to move from the twentieth century silos in which they were created to twenty-first century networks.

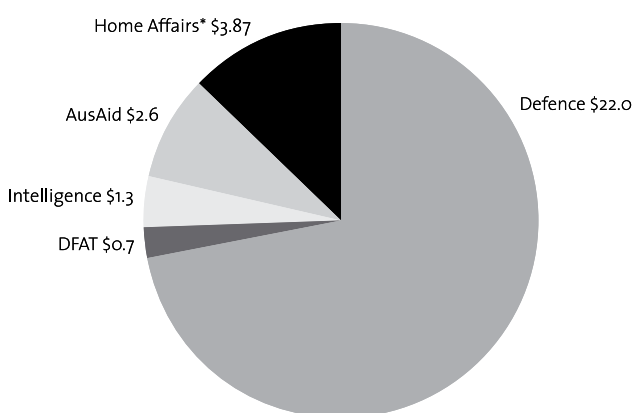
National security should become a central organising principle for government. Taking this seriously would mean coordinating the annual budgets for defence, foreign affairs, intelligence, home affairs and international development assistance. They require

integration into a more holistic system that can be used to evaluate and prioritise risk in order to deal with it more effectively. A single national security budget should be constructed as the first step towards rebalancing the focus of the various agencies that contribute to national security.

The most appropriate place to locate and direct the national security budget would be the new Office of National Security. But the current minimalist option of re-badging the old national security division of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will not be sufficient in the long term.

The new ONS should be a separate, statutory authority with responsibility for publishing an annual security risk assessment on an all-hazards basis in order to provide government with advice on funding priorities across the entire national security budget. Such an approach would enable the better coordination of expenditure devoted to individual elements of national security such as international development, foreign affairs and defence in the context of both risk prioritisation and risk mitigation.

Figure 2: Single national security budget, \$ billion



* The Home Affairs budget includes the following government agencies, Attorney General's Department, Australian Federal Police, CrimTrac, AusTRAC, Customs, Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Institute of Criminology.

More precisely, it could offer a framework for evaluating whether the current division of labour between national security agencies, the federal police and the national intelligence community, for example, is the most effective use of the significant increases in financial provision these agencies have received since 2001.⁶

Publishing an annual report on levels of risk and responses will facilitate openness and transparency as well as opening the area to public debate, a necessity in an effective political democracy.

Building national resilience

A further feature of an integrated strategy to address risk would involve in its assessment not only national capabilities and risk vulnerabilities, but also the resilience of government and civil society to respond to events.

At its broadest level, resilience is the ability to bounce back from a range of shocks, whether they affect economic prosperity (disruption to energy supplies for example) or national security (such as a terrorist attack on a major city).

National resilience thus becomes an important framework for linking government policy on issues such as the domestic economy and national security. The British Government has paid increasing attention to national capabilities and has created a Civil Contingencies Secretariat at the core of government to manage risks and to assess long-term consequences.

Beyond contingency planning, national resilience requires the inculcation of an understanding of what membership of a diverse, complex, modern state entails not only in terms of individual rights but also of obligations to both governments and fellow citizens. In a political democracy it

is important that all citizens recognise that politics is a way of ruling divided societies without undue violence. This becomes increasingly important in the context of globalisation in which citizenship has become commodified and treated like membership of a local video store.

National resilience requires the promotion of shared values as the basis for people from different religions, cultures and beliefs to live together in a plural and diverse but inclusive society and explore their pluralism and diversity through a common political process and a shared public morality.

Conclusion

It would be easy for the government to maintain the current range of policies and practices that address the national security risks that Australia faces globally, regionally and domestically. But this would be the politics of complacency and it would be wrong.

We do not know when a national emergency, environmental or otherwise, will strike, but we can assume that it will not be at a time and a place of our own choosing. It is critically important, therefore, that the government begins to think and plan proactively to meet the contingencies we face and to implement the most effective framework for addressing them.

Endnotes

- 1 CNA Corporation, *National security and threat of climate change*, Alexandria VA: CNA Corporation, 2007.
- 2 Amitai Etzioni, *Security First for a Moral Muscular Foreign Policy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, p.5.
- 3 http://www.jiia.or.jp/en_commentary/200706/01-1.html

- 4 In Japan, the key institutions are the Cabinet Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense and National Security Council.
- 5 <http://www.peace.ca/axworthyaddresswoodrow.htm>
- 6 For an assessment of current structural problems, see, 'A Review of Interoperability between the AFP and its National Security partners', *The Street Review*, March 2008. http://www.afp.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/71833/The_Street_Review.pdf.

About the Author

Dr Carl Ungerer is the Director of the Australian National Security Project for ASPI. Prior to joining ASPI, Carl was a lecturer in international relations at the University of Queensland. His previous appointments include Foreign Affairs and National Security Advisor to the Leader of the Australian Labor Party (2002–2004), senior Strategic Analyst in the Office of National Assessments (1999–2002) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (1993–1999). Carl has published widely on foreign policy and national security issues, including *The Politics of Nuclear Non-Proliferation* (co-edited, 2001) and *Australian Foreign Policy in the Age of Terror* (edited, 2008).

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