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The Idea of National Security:

What Use is it to Policymakers?

Hugh White

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The Idea of National Security: What Use is it to Policymakers?

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A BIG IDEA

Over the past decade or more many governments, especially western governments, have taken steps to draw together a wide range of different functions, objectives and institutions under the concept of ‘national security’. This trend is driven by two simple ideas. First, countries and their citizens face many different types of security threats, and they all need to be taken seriously and given due attention and priority. Second, government has many different types of policy instruments that can be used to manage this range of security threats, and they can and should all be used in the most cost-effective combination to address the full range of security challenges. From these two ideas naturally springs a third: that governments should view the security threats they face, and the responses they make to them, holistically, and unite them under an overarching National Security Strategy. We might call these three ideas collectively ‘the idea of national security’.

It is no coincidence that this idea emerged in the years after the Cold War. For forty years until 1989, one specific security issue—major war—was seen to have dominated threat perceptions, and one specific policy instrument—conventional armed forces and the intelligence apparatus that supported them—was seen to have dominated national policy priorities. As this era passed, it was natural that

political leaders, policymakers, analysts and voters would start to shift their attention to new threats and their priorities to new policy approaches and instruments. And sure enough, a host of new security issues swiftly emerged, demanding new policy instruments and new uses for old ones. This was a complex process, but a few general trends clearly emerged over the 1990s. Concern shifted away from traditional inter-state security issues and towards intra-state, trans-state and non-state security threats. Priority—at least declaratory priority—moved away from military capabilities towards other policy instruments, and from military capabilities optimised for major war between big states to those more suited to smaller-scale wars, and the operations other than war, that were rapidly becoming both more common and more complex.

This was all well advanced by the turn of the century. The national security idea thoroughly informed UK Labour Government's Strategic Defence Review of 1998, and New Zealand's Defence Policy Review of 2000. In Australia, the Liberal Party (then in Opposition) proposed the establishment of a new integrated National Security Policy, directed by an Office of National Security in PM&C, as early as 1994. By the late 1990s analysts like Alan Dupont were arguing for the adoption of a National Security approach and a shift in ADF force development priorities from conventional warfighting to non-state security operations. Then of course came the East Timor crisis of 1999, and in 2001 the Al Qaeda attacks on the Word Trade Centre and the Pentagon. These events amplified the

imperatives behind the national security idea tenfold. In the first decade of the new century, National Security is clearly an idea in its ascendancy.

And yet the idea of national security remains rather elusive. It is still not quite clear what we mean by 'national security', nor how we can best put it to work in the policy process to guide government decision-making. This paper considers these questions, first by looking at the basic concept of national security, and then through an exploration of how we might best make 'national security policy'.

PLAYING WITH WORDS

We will not get far arguing about a general definition of 'national security', because in the end—as Alice considered in *Through the Looking Glass*—our words can mean whatever we want them to mean.[1] But it is important that we understand what *we* as policymakers mean by the phrase, otherwise it will be hard to make much sense of the idea, and hard to work out how we can and

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[1] See Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, The Millennium Fulcrum Edition 1.7 (online): http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12/12-h/12-h.htm accessed 2 April 2012 (Chapter VI 'Humpty Dumpty'):
'When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'
'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you CAN make words mean so many different things.'
'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'

should use it to make better policy. The place to start is with that troublesome word ‘security’. There are two problems with it; first, it can be applied to so many things, and second, that applying it to something makes such a big difference to how we approach it.

Obviously ‘security’ can cover just about anything: at its broadest, covering threats to anything we value as individuals, from our physical survival and wellbeing to our economic welfare, personal relationships and sense of self-worth, and then extended to anything we value collectively as part of a society or group. If the concept of national security is to be of any use to us we will need to narrow its definition considerably and identify just how much of the expansive concept of ‘security’ should be covered by the ‘national security idea’. Of course the most natural way to do that is through that other troublesome word, ‘national’. While ‘security’ can legitimately encompass someone’s individual emotional wellbeing, ‘national security’ naturally limits the field to those aspects of security for which the state might take responsibility.

However, it’s not that easy. The connection between the state and security goes very deep. The provision of security is not just the highest priority of the state, as political leaders so often maintain, but the state’s very essence. The long history of government in human society is the history of the steady expansion—and occasional contraction—of the role of the state, driven by and perhaps also driving changes to, conceptions of security for which the state is responsible. The

fact that this is an interactive process is attested to by a phenomenon that some academics call ‘securitisation’. Shorn of jargon, ‘securitisation’ simply describes the changes that occur in the way we treat an issue once it has been identified and accepted as a matter of ‘security’. When something is a security issue, we expect the state to become more involved: we are apt to allow the state greater powers and resources to deal with it that issue; we are less patient of compromise with other policy objectives, and less tolerant of failure by the state to act effectively. All this means that politically, ‘security’ is a potent concept, and so inevitably ‘national security’ is a political as well as a policy construct which shapes the way governments talk about a state security issue and describe what they are doing about it. They do not always quite say what they mean or mean what they say.

NATIONAL SECURITY V. HUMAN SECURITY

So we will not get far explaining the scope of ‘national security’ if we just say that it covers those aspects of security that the state is involved with or responsible for. That could cover just about anything: economic security, social security, even psychological security in some circumstances. An alternative might be to look at the whole question from the opposite direction and suggest that national security has to do with the security of the state as opposed to the security of the individuals within it. But this seems too narrow, especially in the light of the development of the concept of human security in recent decades. In the 1990s,

as ideas of security expanded, the phrase ‘human security’ began to be used to refer to the welfare of individuals. ‘Human security’ in this sense is contrasted with ‘national security’, used in a limited sense to mean the security of the state itself, as opposed to the security of its citizens and other individuals. This is often seen today as an exclusive distinction; an issue can be one of human or national security but it cannot be both. It is also seen as a normative or evaluative distinction: concern for human security is good; concern for the security of the state is bad.

Underlying both these ideas is the assumption that the security of states is often, or always, at the expense of the security of people. It is easy to see that this is too simplistic and quite incompatible with our national security idea because it implies a concept of national security that is much narrower—and in some ways directly contrary to—the broad concept that our national security idea promotes. The scope for confusion is made worse by the fact that many who promote this kind of distinction between human and national security also subscribe to our national security idea as well. So we need to sort out the relationship between human security, the narrow sense of national security that some people counterpose to it, and the broader sense of national security that underlies our national security idea.

We might start by reminding ourselves how powerful states are, and in how many ways. Many people thought that in the era of globalisation states might become

less important, but that hardly seems to have happened. They remain the most potent institutions on earth, with unmatched material and institutional power, and with an emotional hold on individuals exceeded only by the family. Of course there are weak states, but they are weak relative to the expectations we have of what a state today should be able to do. Likewise there are states which do not retain a hold on the loyalty of many of their citizens, but those citizens most often define their disloyalty to their present state by their loyalty to an alternative. Perhaps the most basic reason why states are so powerful is that an effective state is essential for almost every form of human progress among its citizens: education, health, economic growth and, of course, law and order. In other words, an effective and secure state is a necessary condition for human security; this is what Hobbes meant when he so famously described life without a state as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.[2] The truth of Hobbes' observation can be seen in today's world. We can readily see how many human security problems are the direct result of state weakness and state failure.

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[2] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, (Chapter XIII, paragraph 9) (online: accessed 2 April 2012): http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-c.html#CHAPTERXIII

But the power of states has a darker side. Their strength gives them immense capacity for harm, both against their own citizens and against other states and their citizens. And because they are run by fallible humans, and have such a strong emotional hold on their citizens, the capacity for harm is quite often realised. States have a persistent propensity for large-scale organised violence against one another, as well as for using violence against their own citizens and other individuals who come under their power. It is fair to say that only the largest natural disasters can compare with the actions of states—wars and repressions of all kinds—in the creation of human misery. It is worth remembering that states possess such a capacity for harm for exactly the same reason that they have such a capacity for good: they are by far the most powerful of human institutions.

Hence the seeming paradox: states are both essential for the security of individuals, and also at the same time are among the biggest threats to them. And of course these light and dark aspects of the state interact: because the state is so important to our individual security (and to our sense of identity), we are easily persuaded to sacrifice individual security for the sake of the state and the ideas for which it stands. From there it is but a short and easy slide to thinking that the state is more important than the individual, and that the individual exists to serve the state, not vice versa. But even when we avoid that slide, and keep clearly in view the ultimate primacy of individual, human security over the security of the state, the importance of the state to each individual's security still means that in practice we have many tough choices to make over

how far to subordinate the security, and even the lives of individuals, to protect the state on which individual and collective security depends.

These choices are all the more complex because the state—and the nation it embodies—does not just keep individuals secure. States also contribute enormously to an individual's sense of identity. Human beings want three things above all else: to be safe, to be rich, and to feel good about themselves. Often the last of these will trump the first two, and the identity that membership of a community bestows is among the most valued of human goods. This helps to explain why it is natural for people to place the security of their state ahead of their own, and why societies generally revere those who do. Hence, the security of the state does often seem to transcend the security of the individuals within it. Those who distinguish human security from national security, and give human security priority, are implicitly downgrading the significance of the state and its status and welfare as a genuine human good, often to be ranked alongside, or even ahead of, individual security. That is easy to accept when the state has no hold on the loyalty of its citizens, but it is less credible when individuals feel an interest in the state that goes beyond the state's role in providing his or her personal security. And such feelings are remarkably common and durable: history tells us that people can remain loyal to the most unworthy states.

How we strike the balance between the security of the individual and the security of the state, recognising the complex stake that each individual has in the state's

security, is one of the great questions of politics. Different communities reach different decisions in different circumstances. A novelist musing in the late 1940s on France's tragic dilemmas between 1914 and 1945 wondered whether his nation's citizens must always face a choice between Dachau and Verdun.[3] At the heart of this choice is the realisation that that in any circumstances human security and national security are deeply intertwined. The simple 'human security/national security' distinction will not help us much in sorting out what the national security idea is all about.

PROTECTING THE STATE AND SOCIETY

Nonetheless, the distinction between national and individual security may be some help in clarifying our national security idea. The traditional, narrow sense of 'national security' which is implied by the 'national security/human security' dichotomy is almost invariably framed in terms of a narrow conception of the kinds of threats the state might face: threats of overt violence posed by another state, or by organised insurgents within it. That is obviously too narrow for the idea we are trying to develop. But perhaps the wider concept of national security we are after is nonetheless still anchored in the idea of the security of the state itself, or of the wider community, as opposed to the security of individuals within

[3] Jean Dutourd, *Les Taxis de la Marne*, (Gallimard, 1956) [*The Taxis of the Marne*, trans. Harold King, Simon & Schuster, 1957]: 'War is less costly than servitude. In the end, the choice is always between Verdun and Dachau.'

it. Many things that threaten us as individuals—cancer and heart disease, road accidents, domestic violence and industrial injury—are not commonly thought of as falling within the scope of national security broadly defined, whereas flu pandemics, terrorism, climate change and transnational crime do. Why might that be? One answer might be the scale of risk: the sheer number of people who might be affected. But that doesn't seem to fit, because, for example, even a major flu pandemic would not kill more Australians in a year than cancer and heart disease. So perhaps the key factor in determining whether we perceive a risk as a 'national security issue' in the broader sense implied by the national security idea is the extent to which we believe it might threaten not just individuals in the society but the working of the state and society itself.

The importance of this factor is clearly shown in the response to 9/11. The attacks in New York and Washington led people to conclude that terrorist actions like those, and the broader campaign of which they were judged to be a part, posed a threat not only to individual citizens who had the misfortune to be involved in them, but to the whole fabric of society, and even the wider global order within which states operate. It was this conclusion that made the attacks appear to be such a serious security issue, and which led people spontaneously to consider them as acts of war. Hence, for example, the Fridge magnet distributed by the Howard Government to all Australian homes in 2004, which enjoined us all to 'Help protect Australia *and our way of life'* [author's emphasis]. So while it may be true that more Americans are killed in road accidents in any

one month than were killed during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, terrorism is seen as a *national security* issue and road safety is not because, tragic though road accidents are for those directly involved, they are not seen as posing any wider threat to society and the state. Society has learned to live with these risks, and can carry on despite them.

The same point could be made about disease. A flu pandemic might not kill many more people than more normal aliments like cancer and heart disease, but its episodic and highly infectious nature means that it would potentially cause major social disruption in the way that normal levels of mortality from disease do not. And the same could be said about cyber-security. Cyber-attacks would hardly be a national security issue if they were regarded simply as another form of crime or vandalism, with consequences primarily limited to those most directly affected. What makes cyber-attack seem more serious is the fear that our societies now depend so much on cyber-networks that the society as a whole would be disrupted by attacks on them. If this is right, then the key to understanding the new ‘national security idea’ is to see it as encompassing all those threats which might affect not just the safety of any one of us, but the workings of the state and society more broadly. This way of understanding ‘national security’ also explains the concept’s political and even emotional potency: it engages not just our sense of our own safety, but the importance of the state to our sense of identity.

This fits the emergence of the national security idea since the end of the Cold War. One of the key insights of the last two decades has been that states and society can be threatened by many things other than conventional war. As the Cold War focus on military force faded, many other kinds of threat came into sharper focus. Perhaps we should say *back* into sharper focus, because few if any of these insights are especially new. We have always recognised that the workings of a state could be threatened by non-state actors and even by natural forces, and we have always recognised that states could threaten one another by means other than armed force. The new 'national security idea' reflects the reassertion of these insights against the predominant focus on military threats during the Cold War. But it does more than that, because the new national security idea has been motivated not just by a sense that military threats are less worrying than they used to be, but also that non-military threats have grown more worrying. It is often suggested that globalisation's benefits in promoting a stable order among states, making war less likely, have been offset by its fostering of a range of new national security threats including climate change, global terrorism and cyber-attacks.

SCOPING NATIONAL SECURITY

If this is right, we need to give sustained attention to determining which security risks pose a danger to the state and society as whole, and which do not. That is a substantial job, and this paper is not the place to attempt it in any detail. But

there are a few general points that are worth considering, as they at least provide a starting point for more detailed analysis, and will provide some guideposts for considering how to make the idea of national security work for policymakers.

First, it is clear that the numerous threats to state and society as a whole—what for convenience I will call here ‘societal threats’—include but are not limited to ‘existential’ threats. This term has been used frequently in recent years, especially in relation to terrorism. That is almost certainly a gross exaggeration, and a misleading one. There are real existential threats, but terrorism is not one of them. I think it is better to limit the term to those threats which unequivocally pose a threat to the physical *existence* of a society. Such threats do occur: one could say the Holocaust was an existential threat to Europe’s Jews, and the European settlement of Australia constituted a comparable threat to the Aboriginal peoples. And of course the risk of a large-scale nuclear exchange—not the use of one or two warheads, but of hundreds—poses a genuine and persistent existential threat to many countries and societies. We need to take genuinely existential threats exceptionally seriously. We cannot do that if we elevate every significant threat to existential status, so we need to be clear that societal threats are not necessarily existential. We can and should prioritise societal threats between those that could disrupt society and those that could destroy it.

Second, it is clear that societal threats, whether existential or not, can have many sources. Major war is clearly a societal threat, and large-scale nuclear war an existential one. Nuclear terrorism—involving, for instance, up to five weapons detonated in major cities—would constitute a societal threat but not an existential one. Climate change, if its consequences are severe enough, could become a societal threat, and in extreme cases even existential. Likewise, a major outbreak of a highly contagious and highly lethal strain of flu could constitute a societal threat, as could a collapse of food production infrastructure. More exotically, a meteor strike on earth could pose a grave societal or existential threat. All of these possibilities deserve to be considered as national security threats in our sense.

Thirdly, however, there are plenty of security problems which do not fall within the scope of societal threats as I characterise them here. Crime, for example, is clearly a security issue, but only at extreme levels does it begin to become a societal threat and therefore a national security problem. Perhaps the drug wars in Mexico and Columbia have become societal threats, but nothing in Australia's experience of criminal activity has done so. At anything like present levels, crime is a problem that society manages without being threatened by it. This is true of transnational as well as domestic crime: while it poses formidable policing challenges and imposes substantial costs, these do not constitute societal threats unless there is good reason to believe that they cannot be managed to prevent major social disruption. This suggests that what counts as a societal

threat depends not just on the seriousness of the threat, but also on the capacity of the state to contain it, and the capacity of the community to absorb the residual consequences. Hence, traffic accidents and addictive drugs are national tragedies but not societal threats.

More contentiously, one could argue that on this basis people smuggling at anything like the present rates does not pose a societal threat to Australia. I would also argue that terrorism—excluding nuclear action and perhaps terrorism using biological weapons—does not pose a societal threat, let alone an existential one. The Bali Bombing suggested that Australian society can absorb a major terrorist attack without threatening society or the state. And what about Cyber-attack? Could an attack on computer systems constitute a societal threat? While many assume that it could, I am sceptical that it would be the case. Clearly a major cyber-attack could disrupt many aspects of contemporary life, but would it disrupt society as a whole? This is a subject that needs more work, starting from the critical point that a security problem can be serious and potentially very costly without being a societal threat, and hence without falling under the scope of national security as I am characterising it here.

Fourthly, the societal implications of a threat seem to depend to an extent on the issue of agency. At any given scale of disruption, threats posed deliberately by other people are much more disturbing than those caused by natural forces, and those caused by foreigners are more disturbing than those caused by our fellow

citizens. Hence, the deaths of 188 people in Victoria's 2009 bushfires were less disturbing than the deaths of 88 Australians in the Bali bombing; and the Oklahoma terrorist attack in the 1990s had considerably less impact in the US than the 9/11 attacks. In shaping our sense of security, the prominence of human and foreign agents in our lexicon of societal threats reinforces the importance of identity alongside more concrete vulnerabilities.

Finally, how to prioritise among all of these different threats? The forgoing analysis suggests that in addition to the traditional criteria of probability and seriousness, two other (possibly interconnected) factors need to be considered. First, how well equipped is the state and society to manage a threat and to live with its consequences? Second, how deeply does it impinge on our sense of identity? These factors together may help to explain why, for all the attention given to what is regarded as a new, non-traditional national security issue, old-fashioned fears of military attack continue to loom large as the paradigmatic national security threat. Whether you see it as correct to continue to place such emphasis on conventional wars, or whether you see it as simply a carry-over from earlier, different times, depends on how you perceive the international order. The more you believe that deep and enduring changes in the international system have fundamentally reduced the risks of conventional war between states, the more anachronistic will be your recognition of the continued centrality of such wars in our national security thinking. The more you see the peace of recent decades as a happy but quite possibly transient episode, the more

seriously you will rank conventional war in the hierarchy of national security threats. However you regard the future of the international system, there is very little reason to believe that an increase in non-traditional threats like terrorism or climate change has any countervailing implications for the scale of traditional threats of major war. Many proponents of the national security idea tend to assume that because new threats have increased, the old ones have reduced. There is no clear basis for that assumption.

STRATEGISING NATIONAL SECURITY

So much for the first aspect of the national security idea: defining its scope and limits. Now we need to turn briefly to the second aspect: how do we frame policy to address this large, diverse, and still rather incompletely-defined set of security challenges? Most discussion of this question centres on the idea of a National Security Strategy, and in what follows I will consider this idea in some detail. It is worth starting by making clear what we mean by that word ‘strategy’: it has at least two meanings, and both are relevant to the present context, so we need to be especially careful as to which meaning is relevant. In its narrower sense, ‘strategy’ can be taken to refer to anything that relates to the role of armed force in international affairs. In its wider sense—the sense in which all organisations have, or claim to have, a strategy—it refers to the orderly alignment of means and ends, usually over the long term. Obviously ‘strategy’ in the narrower sense will be part of any National Security Strategy, but a National Security Strategy

itself is a 'strategy' in the second, broader sense. It is a plan (or a process) in which we decide how to apply the entire range of means that might be relevant to address the gamut of national security threats we have identified.

The idea of an overarching National Security Strategy like this can be traced back through the last century into the one before; but confusingly, it first evolved in relation to strategy in the narrower sense. In the 19th century, as warfare industrialised and became drastically more complex, the scope of strategy in the narrower sense broadened. Up to Napoleon's time, strategy was something undertaken by Generals in the field as they manoeuvred their forces for battle. By the commencement of the last century it became something carried out by statesmen as they marshalled their nations for war. In the two World Wars that followed, the idea emerged of a Grand Strategy that brought all the resources of the nation to bear on the single objective of winning the war. This idea was further developed in the early stages of the Cold War, when documents such as NSC 68 were developed to focus all aspects of American power on the task of containing the Soviet Union.[4] To a recognisable extent today's National Security Strategies are modelled on these exemplars.

[4] National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68): see 'A Report to the National Security Council—NSC 68', 12 April 1950. President's Secretary's Files, Truman Papers. *Harry S. Truman Library and Museum* (online: accessed 2 April 2012): http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/sectioned.php?documentid=10-1&pagenumber=1&groupid=1

But of course there is a critical difference. The twentieth-century style National Security Strategies aimed to concentrate a wide range of policy instruments in a single, clear objective: this was a difficult task in itself. But the task of the modern NSS embodied in the national security idea is much harder, because instead of focusing on a single clear objective, it aims to apply the full range of national security instruments to the full range of national security threats. As we have seen, this covers a vast range of very different kinds of threats, even within the rather restrictive scope that I have proposed for national security in the earlier passages of this paper. It covers everything from global warming to nuclear war, flu pandemics to meteor strikes and cyber-attack. These are all very different kinds of problems, and they call for radically divergent policy responses. The depth of these differences is considerable. Some differences arise from human actions and others do not: of those that do, some arise from deliberate hostile actions and others are the unintended consequences of non-hostile acts. How are we to integrate responses to all these different types of threat into a single policy framework?

And the challenge increases in complexity and when we consider not just the range of threats to deal with, but the policy responses we might bring to bear on them. How are we to align and prioritise a huge range of very diverse policy instruments—aid, diplomacy, armed force, policing, economic and trade policy, immigration policy, health policy, etc.,—with this huge range of security problems to create a coherent strategy linking one to the other? The greatest risk, of

course, is that we do not try. Instead, our National Security Strategy becomes merely a series of lists of possible threats and possible responses, interspersed with earnest but vague commitments to take them all seriously and to deal with all of them effectively. This kind of response does not deserve to be regarded as a strategy. A strategy that deserves the name must set objectives, establish priorities, and allocate resources. No one has yet determined how to achieve that across the whole policy space covered by the national security idea.

What is to be done? Maybe the task is hopeless. To the tidy bureaucratic mind—and to proponents of the national security idea—there is something deeply appealing about the thought of a single, overarching plan. But in practical terms it is an elusive goal. Even the arch-planner himself, Robert McNamara, when he headed the Pentagon for J.F.K., put aside the idea of a single National Security Strategy for dealing with the Soviets. He argued that it would either be too broad and general to be of any use, or too specific to be a reliable guide to high-level decisions. His concerns certainly seem to be borne out by the National Security Strategies produced by his successors in Washington over recent decades.

The best approach to National Security planning might therefore be to abandon the top-down, deductive approach favoured by advocates of the national security idea. Instead, we might follow the old injunction to break any large job into several smaller ones. The management of all great enterprises requires the resolution of tension between integration and devolution; between centralising

control to ensure the parts all fit together, and dispersing responsibility to ensure that each component works effectively. It may be that in the National Security field we need to strike this balance by *conceiving* National Security as a whole, along the lines sketched above, but by *planning* our responses separately, recognising that in the long run there is little in common between our responses to, for example, major war and pandemic flu, except at the highest level where trade-offs need to be made on a largely intuitive basis.

In this model we might develop a series of distinct National Security Strategies to address separate kinds of societal threats: one for major war; one for climate change; one for pandemic flu, etc. Each plan would explore how all the instruments of national power might be brought to bear on a specific threat. Once that was done it would be possible, and indeed necessary, to draw all the parts together and set priorities between them; and this process might indeed produce an overarching National Security Strategy. But such an overarching strategy would build from a series of separate plans, rather than each separate plan being derived from it.

This may seem to be a rather modest approach to building a National Security Strategy, but it would be a considerable advance on Australia's current situation. Imagine, for example, that an Australian government set out to develop an integrated strategic plan to cover individual, specific national-security issues: for instance, the future of our relationship with Indonesia; or the viability of our small

island neighbours; or climate change. Such a plan for Indonesia could identify, for example, the disjunct between our long-term interests in Indonesian politics and the modesty of the political staff of the embassy in Jakarta. It would explore the value of our present aid program in achieving long term objectives in the relationship, and it would provide an opportunity to look beyond terrorism and people smuggling to consider the deeper strategic issues which Indonesia and Australia might want to cooperate on in future decades: radical results. Likewise, such a plan for the Australia's relationships with our small island neighbours could consider the value and limitations of military deployments to places like East Timor for Australia's long-term interests. It could consider just how deeply we are willing, able and required to involve ourselves in the internal affairs of these countries, and how that might be best be achieved. It could consider the consequences for Australia's interests of China's growing role in our neighbourhood, and how best to respond. A National Security Strategy on Climate Change might gives us the opportunity to consider whether the development of a national ETS is really a higher priority than active middle-power diplomacy to promote the negotiation of a successful global deal, without which any Australian action is futile.

These simple illustrations suggest that our priority in national security planning should not be to attempt to develop a single overarching strategy to cover the entire gamut of national security. It is much more important, and much easier, to start by undertaking some genuine strategic planning—long-tem, outcome-

focused work that sets priorities and allocates resources—on a whole range of urgent issues currently facing us. Until we learn to plan strategically for individual security issues, we have no chance of developing a responsive, adaptable, and effective strategic plan for the entirety of the National Security field.

The national security idea is with us to stay because it embodies some true and important insights about the nature of security and how we can manage it. But so far the evidence suggests that the concept has not been of much use to policymakers. To render it useful we have to clarify what we mean by national security, determine what we mean by national security strategy-making, and begin making that strategy, from the ground up.

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