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Defending Australia. Armed Neutrality the best option.

Background.

When 'Defence' is the topic of conversation, the emphasis commonly seems to be on Australia's presumed vulnerability, leading to the idea that a powerful and protective ally is needed. From there the discussion usually shifts into how the nation can best align itself with the military activities of that ally (currently the USA).

What is lacking from such discourse is consideration of what Australia's actual defence needs are; what defensive risks it faces. Only from that starting point can there be any meaningful discussion the best way to meet those needs. With the limited resources at my disposal, I have been unable to find much objective study of the topic from this angle. I am left wondering whether or not the Australian Defence Force has ever looked at the question from the perspective of a (hypothetical) potential adversary; whether it has ever 'gamed' the idea of a foreign entity conducting a really serious attack on Australia. By 'a really serious attack' is meant one that has the intention of invading and dominating the continent. Significantly, there is little information available on such a topic.

Might Australia be invaded?

To tackle this question, it is necessary to place oneself in the role of a potential aggressor, planning an invasion. How many troops might be required? How might they be transported? How might they be supplied and supported? What might be objective? What sort of resistance might be encountered?

When questions like these are asked, the chances of Australia enduring serious attack seem vanishingly small. The first thing to note is that Australia is an island. Any attacking force can only reach the continent by crossing water. This presents enormous logistical challenges. If the objective were to 'take over' the country, i.e. to replace the government and establish a fresh regime through military force, the personnel required would have to be roughly equivalent to all the current police forces of Australia, and all its armed forces, combined.

A considerable fleet of vessels for transporting such a number would be a primary requirement. Their safe passage (presumably under whatever defensive operations might be brought to bear) would be fraught. The continued and reliable transport of supplies such as food, fuel, hardware and munitions would face the same difficulties. And there need be no doubt that in such an extreme event resistance from the entire populace would be fierce.

The clear implication is that only a major power would have the capacity to conduct 'a really serious attack', as opposed to 'raids', which the nation could absorb. This then leads to the question, why would any major power want to attack Australia in this way? It is very hard to find any convincing reason. One sometimes offered is that 'they' might want to help themselves to our resources. Australia does have abundant

resources, mineral and agricultural. It has, however, over the years, demonstrated its willingness to trade in them. There is no indication that any nation would prefer to seize them through force of arms. Nor is there any likelihood of any of the world's major powers wanting to dominate Australia for purely ideological reasons (given the practical difficulties mentioned before).

It can be concluded that Australia is very, very safe. It is not going to have to endure a really serious attack. However, for the purposes of this submission, what might Australia need to do, to deal with, or at least deter, this unlikely scenario?

Without claiming to be a military strategist, the following are offered as essential requirements:-

1. Intelligence to ascertain the reality of any likely threat (the build-up of forces; the build-up of shipping and/or aircraft in the likely adversary)
2. Coastal surveillance to detect imminent threat (over-horizon radar, satellite imagery)
3. Mobile, land-based ordnance for attacking shipping and aircraft
4. A highly mobile land force that can be brought to bear on any location in which a beachhead might be established.
5. An organised civil defence, including training in guerilla warfare. (An idea with some support within the Defence Establishment)

https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/8216-what-if-australia-loses-the-next-war?utm_source=DefenceConnect&utm_campaign=15_06_21&utm_medium=email&utm_content=2&utm_emailID=5e0379b3dca63fa606073f3c07d9a7e7dfd0c23feb8105b4561196107bc290)

Others, more learned than I have a more sophisticated approach:-

Argument.

In the world of *realpolitik* alliances cannot be trusted absolutely. Nations look after their own self-interest first. Hugh White has argued that, if Australia were to come under attack or the threat of attack, it is likely that the USA would only come to our defence if it served some benefit to itself.

<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/standing-alone-why-australia-cant-rely-on-america/>

It is for reasons such as this that he argues that Australia must plan to defend itself alone. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-must-plan-to-defend-itself-alone/>

Focussing on the fact that Australia is an island, White has identified 'maritime denial' as the best defence for Australia. He argues that Australia could develop the capacity to prevent serious assault. As he puts it, "The bigger an assault, the easier it is to spot and the more vulnerable it would be to interdiction."

<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-to-defend-australia-control-and-denial/>

White's arguments are spelled out in full in his book "*How to Defend Australia*".

<https://www.blackincbooks.com.au/books/how-defend-australia>

In a work published in 1986, Desmond Ball and J.O. Langtry argued that Australia is capable of defending itself **A Vulnerable country : civil resources in the defence of Australia / edited by J.O. Langtry and Desmond Ball.** *(Yet to be read by this author...)*

Australia should know from its experience at Gallipoli that defending a coast-line is very much easier than attacking one. It should also have learnt in Afghanistan and Iraq that so-called 'insurgents' with inferior weaponry are nevertheless a formidable opponent, tying down much larger and better-equipped forces. These lessons should be brought to bear on a realistic defence strategy.

Dr Albert Palazzo, Director of War Studies at the Australian Army Research Centre, has presented a compelling case for 'armed neutrality' for Australia in a recent article. <http://bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/6589/dependencyarmed-neutrality-future-options-australian> He argues that great power politics (i.e. the rise of China and the decline of the USA) and the deepening climate crisis, are the two concerns that make armed neutrality the best possible option for Australia to retain its security. He identifies Australia's geography as the most important aspect of this security, which, in terms of military strategy, would make a shift in emphasis to 'anti-access area denial' (A2AD) desirable. "Since Australia does not have any land borders, it is more suited than most countries for an A2AD barrier." In this regard, Palazzo's and White's positions co-incide.

"For Australia, geography remains the most important aspect of its security. In a future in which the US retreats from being the global leader, Australia should seek security in maximising the most important advantages of its geography – its relative isolation and its lack of land borders. Australia's geography would be a very powerful fit for a security policy based on armed neutrality. Moreover, armed neutrality is a policy that addresses both of Australia's critical security concerns." (Palazzo)

Mike Scrafton argues that Australia should avoid going to war – as an over-riding strategic goal <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/avoiding-war-must-be-australiaschief-strategic-goal/> He sees the need for a capable defence force, which I take to mean one that would deter attack, without necessarily having to engage any enemy. This, again, points towards armed neutrality.

Conclusion

On balance, the arguments for Australia showing less reliance on its alliance with the USA and a greater willingness to take full responsibility for looking after its own security have great weight.

Australia's geography is its greatest defensive asset.

This, coupled with a defence force 'to be reckoned with' by any potential invader, would be sufficient to keep the nation secure. The conclusion has to be a policy of armed neutrality.