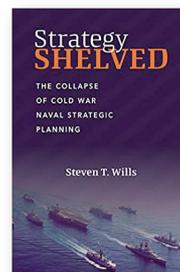


## BOOK REVIEW:

# *Strategy shelved: the collapse of Cold War naval planning*

by Stephen T. Willis

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'Strategy' is not a concept often voiced in connection with Australian defence matters; put simply, our defence strategy is a matter of using what the Australian Defence Force (ADF) operates in ways that most effectively mesh with the plans of our major ally – the United States (US). In this book, Stephen Willis has provided a clear insight into how the US Services, and specifically the US Navy (USN), design and implement strategies to meet US requirements and circumstances.

The US *National Security Act 1947* and subsequent legislation introduced immense difficulties for all four US Services. For the first time, there was to be joint consideration of individual Service plans, with the aim of coordinating the national strategy to be adopted and implemented through a cabinet-level Secretary for Defense. The formation of the US Air Force independent of the US Army and the consequences of the strategies adopted for World War II – including the decline of Britain as an international power, the rise of the Soviet Union, and the advent of nuclear weapons – created a witch's brew of competing interests. Until close air support to land forces was demonstrated effectively by the USN in Korea, aircraft carriers were thought inappropriate strategic instruments. Not until the success of the Navy's Poseidon Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile programme in 1959 was the USN regarded as an effective part of the national nuclear-deterrence force.

Strategists do not grow on trees. The USN hierarchy recognised and responded to the need for concerted action to develop and nurture a capability for strategic development within the office of the Chief of Naval Operations and to teach strategic thinking at the Naval War College. This became particularly urgent when succeeding efforts by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy to take the Service chiefs and their staffs out of the chain of command were approved by Congress. A further incentive was the arrival of Defense Secretary McNamara's civilian 'Whiz Kids' to devise and oversee defence equipment programmes. All this probably has a familiar ring to ADF officers. The resulting US strategy was termed 'Flexible Response' – the ability to respond with a mix of forces to any Soviet initiatives – to which the USN contributed its Polaris submarines and its carriers, and an increasingly obsolescent and shrinking surface force. Further decline was arrested by the appearance of a resurgent and aggressive Soviet navy in the late 1960s.

Under Admiral Zumwalt's leadership, the USN produced a series of seminal strategic documents from

1970 onwards. The motivating factor was the achievement of four key goals – nuclear strike, defence of sea lines of communication, power projection and overseas presence. Zumwalt saw that the USN must exercise a global presence to counter Soviet influence and mischief making. These concepts led to the publication of the 1980 Maritime Strategy, which also highlighted the use of the USN's offensive power exercised by a fleet of 600 ships. Then, in a very short period of time, the decline and abrupt collapse of the Soviet Union, which concluded in 1991, rendered the entire strategy untenable.

USN strategists scrambled to shape a new strategy in the absence of a major maritime competitor, while dealing with a US Marine Corps that saw for itself a role outside its traditional amphibious roots, and the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act 1986*, which mandated joint planning at the expense of the individual Services. Thrown into the mix was the 'Base Force' concept promulgated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which cut the naval force by a quarter. What emerged was a strategy of naval support to land forces '... From the Sea', with its emphasis on littoral operations, however defined. Successive Chiefs of Naval Operations attempted to shift the perennial struggle for resources between warfare communities towards the ideas of forward presence and logistical support. '... From The Sea' was followed by a series of similar attempts of varying impact to chart a course for the USN, while the Service confronted the enormity of mandated reductions in its seagoing strength. More staff effort was devoted to saving the fleet than devising a strategy to direct its capabilities and development – hence Willis's title: *Strategy Shelved*.

This book is dense with insights into the processes and the personalities involved in developing and implementing USN strategies from the 1940s which may, at first glance, deter potential readers of any Service background. A careful and conscientious study of Willis's work, however, will be rewarding in demonstrating key essentials in devising plans to give effect to national strategy in an increasingly 'joint' environment. The author's other theme is the need to isolate and protect strategy development from the demands of warfare communities and other lobby groups. To do so is both difficult and somewhat divisive. Its achievement is a measure of the success of senior leadership in meeting the challenges of the shifting and volatile world in which we live and the Australian Defence Force operates.

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