

BOOK REVIEW:

How To Defend Australia

by Hugh White

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Hugh White (HW) is one of Australia's foremost Security Analysts, with a long and varied career in Defence, Academia and Government; and is known for his insightful and provocative style, as evidenced in the many books and articles he has written, as well as his media commentaries.

This book is written in HW's usual eloquent prose, is very analytical, logical and rationale in his treatment of the associated issues; reflecting his deep understanding of the complexity and contradictions of the subject area. The subject matter described is very relevant, and the insightful observations covered are:

- that whilst the USA is significantly invested in Asia, it is not part of Asia. Rather, its core strategic focus and capability is at home, and then with Europe. As such, HW observes that the USA has the flexibility to "pivot away" from Asia if it has to,
- Chapter 8 is a cogent analysis of the changed realities of modern maritime conflict. He skilfully draws the distinction between *Sea Control* and *Sea Denial* in respect of the specific Australian situation, and the need for the ADF to change focus to *Sea Denial*,
- the vulnerability of our key ADF Bases and C3 sites to various types of raids,
- the most effective response to direct attack on Australia would be to respond asymmetrically. Also, that we would need to be very pragmatic in our choices, and accept some unpleasant consequences and significant casualties,
- the need to deliberately trade-off spiralling system platform costs/sophistication to validated combat performance,
- the problems of running large complex programs within the heavily constrained environment of the bureaucratic, complacent, tardy and risk adverse Department of Defence.

HW then leaps to his preferred solutions, whilst ignoring or lightly touching on some factors:

- brushes off the essential need for 'protection of trade', *i.e.*, importing 80% of our fuel without a convoy of 3-4 tankers each fortnight, and after 30 days our military grinds to a halt, causing a wind-down of the economy. Thus, we need enough maritime assets to be able to conduct convoys to and from Singapore ongoing. Thus, his proposal to sell off the bulk of the current RAN is flawed,
- analysis of the host of issues associated with acquiring new submarines is pertinent and insightful. However, his solution of building a fleet of 24 to

32 evolved *Collins* (with double crews for the in service boats, *i.e.*, 60%) is not realistically achievable as we currently struggle to continuously maintain single crews for the four *Collins* boats in service at any one time,

- highlights the Army's meandering over the last three decades in search of a strategy to make itself relevant, and the problems of the seductive nature of "Special Forces" and "Amphibiousity". He also addresses the problem of lack of *Mass*, but provides no solution. He delves into the AFV question, but shows his lack of expertise and understanding of the basics of modern networked *Mechanised Warfare*,
- sees the RAAF as the best currently positioned and equipped Service. He recommends that we increase the RAAF to a 200 Fighter/Strike aircraft force. The problem is that we struggle at present to maintain a force of less than 100 Fighter/Strike aircraft,
- posit that in the end, the USA may well not risk receiving nuclear strikes from an adversary on its west coast cities, in order to safeguard Australia from nuclear attack/blackmail. As such, Australia does need to consider having a small number of our own nuclear weapons and delivery mechanisms to be used in extremis. Whilst HW's logic is agreeable, however, he provides no credible path to address the multitude of legal, political and emotional issues associated with such an approach.

HW continues with sound chapters on "Making It Happen". These posit that we can and should, progressively increase Defence spending to 3.5% to possibly 5% of GDP, accompanied by ruthless efficiency increases. He poses: "Do we have the moral fibre to actually accept the considerable human costs of a major confrontation? Or should we compromise our principles by kowtowing to the North?" He concludes by pointing out that we have to make a determination and that time is at a premium.

Neither the text nor Chapters are annotated or supported by references. However, there is a good Index, and each Chapter is supported by an extensive "Sources and Further Reading" list.

This book is a significant contribution to the appreciation of Australia's strategic and defence dilemma's, and is well worth a read and be informed of the issues raised.

Ian Wolfe