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## Australia Remilitarizes

By Derek Bolton

December 7, 2011

In the realm of geopolitics, Australia has often been the overlooked continent – a benign haven for rowdy cricket fans and sunburned tourists resting safely under a U.S. security umbrella.

However, recent transformations in the international system, notably the rise of China and an economic slump in the West, are rapidly ushering in a new age in Australian foreign policy. Slowly the sleeping continent has awoken to the din of machinery in uranium mines, shipbuilders in dry docks, and the arrival of a new contingent of U.S. Marines – the latter only the most recent indication of a re-posturing of the country’s foreign policy against perceived Chinese expansionism.

### Force 2030

In 2009, Australia’s Ministry of Defense issued a White Paper entitled “[Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030](#),” which outlines an aggressive plan for Australian military

expansion. Although economic woes have induced talk of military cutbacks in the United States and much of Western Europe, Australia's own initiatives have run counter to this trend. "The 2009 White Paper was developed in the midst of a global recession," notes the document's preface. "The Government has demonstrated the premium it puts on our national security by not allowing the financial impact of the global recession on its budget to affect its commitment to our Defense needs." Hinting at an expansionist current, it adds, "The more Australia aspires to have greater strategic influence beyond our immediate neighborhood...the greater level of spending on defense we need to be prepared to undertake."

The White Paper says that the government will introduce a "comprehensive set of reforms that will fundamentally overhaul the entire Defense enterprise, producing efficiency and creating savings of about 20 billion." However, reforms should in no way be interpreted as cuts — a sentiment reinforced by the planned expansion of Australian defense capabilities, with a particular emphasis on naval warfare.

Indeed, the document promises "a significant focus on enhancing our maritime capabilities. By the mid-2030s, we will have a heavier and more potent maritime force." This will include 12 new submarines, three destroyers equipped with SM-6 long-range anti-aircraft missiles, eight new frigates, and Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) amphibious ships.

## **China**

Australia has done little to hide the motivations behind this current mobilization. Outlining the rationale behind the formation of the White Paper, the authors write, "Changes in the distribution of global power have become obvious in the past decades. China's rise in economic, political and military terms has become more evident. Pronounced military modernization in the Asia-Pacific region is having significant implications for our strategic outlook."

They add, "China is likely to be able to continue to afford its foreshadowed core military modernizations. Over the long term, this could affect the strategic reach and global postures of the major powers. Reflecting on the possibility of U.S. military cutbacks, the report assesses that "Any future that might see a potential contraction of US strategic presence in the Asia-Pacific region, with a requirement for its allies and friends to do more in their own regions, would adversely affect Australian interests, regional stability and global security."

Given Australia's qualms over Chinese expansion in the region and fear of possible abandonment by the United States, the recent deployment of U.S. forces to the continent should come as little surprise, for it addresses concerns dating back to 2009.

### **Alliances 2030**

Australia has similarly undertaken new initiatives on the diplomatic front with equal fervor. Possibly the most significant move has been Australia's outreach to India, a longtime regional rival of China. The recent announcement by Prime Minister Julia Gillard that she will reopen uranium sales to India is a prime example, part of the new "[trilateral security pact](#)" that has been in the works between Australia, India, and the United States.

Although Chinese diplomats have remained cool toward the security pact, elements within the People's Liberation Army have voiced their strong opposition to the Australian moves. [General Geng](#) voiced grave concern in response to the pact, [noting](#), "This is not in keeping with the tide of the era of peace, development and cooperation and does not help to enhance mutual trust and cooperation between countries in the region, and could ultimately harm the common interests of all concerned." Geng went on to comment that the notion of U.S. and Australian officials seeking to advance "integrated air and sea combat" amounted to "trumpeting confrontation and sacrificing others' security for the sake of one's own security." Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd has responded in the face of such condemnation, "We are not going to have our national security policy dictated by any other external power. That's a sovereign matter for Australia."

So far Sino-Australian exchanges have remained strictly verbal, and not all signs point to confrontation. "Exercise Co-operation Spirit," a recent joint Chinese-Australian military exercise focused on earthquake disaster response, shows that the two countries have remained generally cordial despite increasing tensions. However, given renewed U.S. initiatives in East Asia in conjunction with Australia's apparent ambitions to curb Chinese expansion, such joint cooperation may be short-lived.