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# The Evolution of National Security Studies

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Brendan Taylor

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## INTRODUCTION

The Yale University Professor Arnold Wolfers famously once characterized 'national security' as an 'ambiguous symbol'.<sup>1</sup> More than half a century later, this same label of ambiguity could be assigned to 'national security studies' as an academic field. Some scholars would argue that such a discipline does not even exist, at least in any formal sense. Many others use the terminology rather loosely, interchanging it with other descriptors such as 'Strategic Studies', 'Security Studies' and 'International Security Studies.' The purpose of this chapter is not to engage in such disciplinary debates. This is not to suggest that disciplinary demarcations are not important. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of the fact that the sense of disciplinary identity surrounding various approaches to the study of security issues is currently so fluid, so heavily contested and so highly politicized that little of genuine substance can be said regarding where disciplinary boundaries ultimately begin and end between such fields as 'International Relations', 'International Security Studies', 'Security Studies' and 'Strategic Studies'.<sup>2</sup>

Setting aside these largely artificial intellectual demarcations, this chapter traces how academic approaches to the study of national security issues have evolved. Keeping in mind Wolfers' observation regarding the slippery nature of the term, 'national security' challenges are taken in the current chapter as referring simply to 'threats to national survival or well-being'.<sup>3</sup> The chapter begins by dating the origins of the academic study of national security issues to the period immediately preceding the Second World War. Second, it then explains the rise and the fall of the so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.67, no.4, December 1952, pp.481–502.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading see Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.8.

<sup>3</sup> David A. Baldwin, 'Security Studies and the End of the Cold War', *World Politics*, vol.48, no.1, October 1995, p.134.

'golden age' of national security studies which took place during the 1950s and 1960s. Third, the 'internationalization' of national security studies that occurred through the 1970s and into the 1980s is analyzed. Fourth, the 'transnationalization' of national security studies that followed the ending of the Cold War is discussed. Finally, on the grounds that the study of security in the post-Cold War and post-September 11 eras has become unduly amorphous and overly general, this chapter concludes that the time is now ripe for establishing a more distinctive and, indeed, Australia-centric approach to the study of national security.

## THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

The academic study of national security had its beginnings in the 1940s. The Second World War had a catalytic impact in this respect. As William T.R. Fox wrote in his survey of early work in this field during the mid-1950s, 'it was to be expected that fifteen years of world war and postwar tension, with problems of national security continually at the center of public and governmental interest, would shape the research activities of social scientists generally.'<sup>4</sup> David Baldwin even goes so far as to describe these early years as 'the most exciting and creative period in the entire history of security studies', pointing to the establishment of new graduate schools and research centres focusing on national security at leading academic institutions in the US, as well as the initiation of professional journals with a national security focus—such as *International Organization* and *World Politics*—which would go on to become prestigious and highly influential in their own right.<sup>5</sup> Because national security studies was not conceived of as a distinct academic discipline at that time—indeed, as

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<sup>4</sup> William T.R. Fox, 'Civil-Military Relations Research: The SSRC Committee and Its Research Survey', vol.6, no.2, January 1954, p.279.

<sup>5</sup> Baldwin, 'Security Studies and the End of the Cold War', p.121.

alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, many scholars would contend that it never has been—this pioneering work was undertaken by intellectuals working in the field of International Relations.

The inherent creativity of this period was evident in the very rich, and in some respects quite disparate, research agendas on offer. The wartime mobilization experience and realization of the need to maintain such capacities even in peacetime, for instance, encouraged the development of greater civilian competence and expertise in this area of national security, which had previously been the exclusive preserve of the military. Consistent with this, there was great interest in better understanding the relationship between the use of force and policy, and of finding ways to better coordinate military, diplomatic and industrial processes. At the same time, an acute awareness of the ‘security dilemmas’ which had sent the world spiraling into two catastrophic conflicts motivated a desire to develop more prudent national security policies. As part of this effort, the integration of military with non-military techniques of statecraft was given greater attention. Similarly, intellectual efforts were also made to examine the tradeoffs between greater military security, on the one hand, and other national objectives, such as economic welfare and individual freedom, on the other.<sup>6</sup>

The notion that issues of national security needed to be studied in a more systematic and rigorous fashion began to crystallize in the late 1940s. It was a view epitomized in Bernard Brodie’s famous essay, ‘Strategy as a Science’, which argued that strategy was ‘not receiving the scientific treatment it deserve[d] either in the armed

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<sup>6</sup> For further reading see Fox, ‘Civil-Military Relations Research’, pp.278–88.



services or, certainly, outside them.’ Brodie went on to observe that ‘failure to train our military leaders in the scientific study of strategy has been costly in war, and is therefore ... costly also in our present security efforts.’<sup>7</sup> The publication of Brodie’s oft-cited article coincided with the establishment in 1948 of the RAND Corporation in California. This government-funded ‘think tank’ was the first of its kind specifically dedicated to the systematic and rigorous study of strategic issues. It went on to become hugely influential during the Cold War years and, indeed, remains so today. Brodie himself began his affiliation with RAND at the time he was writing the aforementioned article; other intellectual giants in the field such as Alexander George, Herman Kahn, Andrew Marshall, Thomas Schelling and Albert Wohlstetter also spent time there.

## **THE ‘GOLDEN AGE’ OF NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES**

The establishment of RAND and the publication of Brodie’s article marked the formal beginnings of national security studies as a field of academic enquiry.<sup>8</sup> National security studies at this time focused very squarely upon issues surrounding the use of armed force in international politics. This research focus is certainly not difficult to comprehend against the backdrop of the formative security development of that time—the onset of the nuclear age. The advent of nuclear weapons became all-consuming for policymakers, academics and, indeed, the general public alike. All other security issues paled in comparison. Nuclear weapons were a ‘game changer’ in the truest sense of the term, potentially transforming the conduct and conceivable costs of war. As Richard Betts has observed, their appearance proved entirely

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Brodie, ‘Strategy as a Science’, *World Politics*, vol.1, no.3, April 1949, p.468.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Stephan M. Walt, ‘The Renaissance of Security Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.35, no.2, June 1991, pp.211–39.

conducive to academic contemplation precisely because there was so little empirical data to work with. In Betts' terms, 'nuclear war spurred theorizing because it was inherently more theoretical than empirical: none had ever occurred. Except for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where there was no question of retaliation, there was no messy store of historical evidence to complicate elegant abstractions.'<sup>9</sup>

Out of potentially terrifying technological development, therefore, a 'golden age' of national security issues emerged that would last for the better part of two decades. The strategic dilemmas presented by the emergence of nuclear weapons provided a primary point of focus. If war as defined in Clausewitzian terms was the 'continuation of politics by other means', how could these new weapons be employed as effective policy instruments when the risk of a devastating nuclear exchange was likely to be the end result? National security scholars during the golden age offered a number of possible answers: amongst these, what came to be known as 'deterrence theory' emerged as the chief intellectual contribution. Based on the assumption that all governments behaved rationally—an assumption heavily influenced by the Realist theories of International Relations which were prevalent at the time—this line of thinking suggested that a country's nuclear capabilities could be organized in such a way as to dissuade other actors from engaging in a nuclear exchange, and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> Also reflecting the preoccupation of national security scholars of the day with nuclear weapons, Henry Kissinger during the 1950s introduced the possibility of controlling and limiting nuclear war even after it had broken out, a line of thinking

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<sup>9</sup> Richard K. Betts, 'Should Strategic Studies Survive?' *World Politics*, vol.50, no.1, October 1997, p.14.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

which proved both influential and highly contestable over subsequent decades.<sup>11</sup> A third major strand of scholarship in the field of national security studies, which emerged during the early 1960s, looked at the prospects for arms control in the nuclear age.<sup>12</sup>

While the bulk of scholarship produced during this golden age emanated from American institutions, a disproportionately high number of Australian scholars were both prominent and influential in the key intellectual debates of the time. Indeed, Denis Healy, who was one of the founders of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in the late 1950s, observed in his memoirs that ‘from the middle fifties Australia has contributed far more to international understanding of defence problems than any country of similar size.’<sup>13</sup> Healy must surely have had in mind here such leading Australian strategic intellectuals as Desmond Ball, Coral Bell, Hedley Bull, T.B (Tom) Millar and Robert O'Neill. Most of these individuals worked either at or closely with the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, which was established at the Australian National University in 1966 as the first of its kind in Australia specifically dedicated to the study of strategic and defence issues.

By the mid-1960s, however, the golden age of national security studies was rapidly drawing to a close. Two developments contributed to its demise. The first of these was the escalation of the Vietnam War. The relevance and utility of theories developed during the golden age were increasingly called into question in the face of challenges presented to the US, in particular, by the Vietnam imbroglio. As Joseph

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Harper for Council on Foreign Relations, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Hedley Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race: disarmament and arms control in the missile age*, (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson for the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> Denis Healy, *The Time of My Life*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p.192.

Nye and Sean Lynn-Jones have observed, disciplinary shortcomings were exposed most vividly by 'attempts to apply concepts drawn from deterrence theory to the conduct of the Vietnam War.'<sup>14</sup> In the relatively radical political milieu of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in the face of the emergence of strong anti-war sentiment in the United States, the study of national security issues came to be regarded as unfashionable, even distasteful, at many American universities. Added to this, the relevance of national security studies and, in particular, its preoccupation with nuclear matters was also seen to have diminished in light of the easing of tensions (or *détente*) which was occurring in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union at the time.

## **THE 'INTERNATIONALIZATION' OF NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES**

As the decade of *détente* between the US and the Soviet Union shifted scholarly attention away from an exclusive focus on military threats, greater recognition of other security challenges—primarily those of an economic variety—began to emerge. Two other considerations encouraged this new focus. The first related to the view that Vietnam had exposed some of the limits to American power and had left the US substantially weakened: both internally, due to the very deep domestic divisions occasioned by this conflict, and externally, given the blow to American credibility which the somewhat ignominious US withdrawal had dealt. Predictions of American decline were rife at the time, not completely unlike those which are being aired today in the context of difficult and protracted operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and as a consequence of challenges posed to the US in the aftermath of the global financial

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr. and Sean M. Lynn-Jones, 'International Security Studies: A Report of a Conference on the State of the Field', *International Security*, vol.12, no.4, Spring 1988, p.11.

crisis. America's declining economic position in the period immediately preceding Vietnam subsequently sparked increased scholarly interest in the economic dimensions of security. The so-called 'oil shock' of 1973 reaffirmed this interest by vividly demonstrating the extent to which national security could be compromised by the use of 'economic weapons', on this occasion against the US in the form of the Arab oil embargo.<sup>15</sup>

The study of security issues in the period immediately following the Vietnam War appeared to take on an increasingly international flavor. This, coupled with the greater attention being given to the economic dimensions of security, saw 'interdependence' emerge as something of a catchphrase amongst scholars of national security. The leading exponents of this concept were Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, who in their classic 1977 study *Power and Interdependence* argued that the national security of any one country was increasingly 'sensitive' and 'vulnerable' to developments in others.<sup>16</sup>

During this period, efforts to develop more sophisticated theoretical approaches to the study of international security politics were also afoot. Epitomizing this trend was the work of American political scientist Kenneth Waltz, whose 1979 study *Theory of International Politics* suggested that understanding the internal composition and seeking to dissect the internal motivations of any one state was largely irrelevant as far as international security was concerned. Instead, Waltz suggested, all states were essentially very similar units behaving in almost identical ways. In an anarchic

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<sup>15</sup> For further reading see Klaus Knorr and Frank N. Trager, *Economic Issues and National Security*, (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas for the National Security Education Program, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977).

international political environment, their default position was essentially to balance against the strongest power in the international system and to allocate additional resources to national security to achieve that end.<sup>17</sup> The clarity and accessibility of Waltz's 'structural realist' theories were particularly appealing to national security practitioners of the day, who by the early 1980s were also drawn to its capacity to explain a renewed heightening in Cold War tensions between the US and the Soviet Union.

This growing emphasis upon *international* security issues certainly did not see the study of national security disappearing altogether during the 1970s. Indeed, some of the most sophisticated academic work in the history of national security studies was produced during this period as scholars sought to apply 'organization theory' to issues of national security. The name most frequently associated with this approach is Graham Allison, whose seminal 1972 study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Essence of Decision*,<sup>18</sup> posited that decisions and actions in the area of national security are ultimately the product of complex intra-national political processes resulting 'from compromise, conflict, and confusion of individuals with diverse interests and unequal influence.' Allison thus argued that national security decisions simply cannot be understood, nor predicted without giving due consideration to 'who participates' and in 'what roles.'<sup>19</sup> In the Australian context, Desmond Ball later emulated the basic

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Citations of this work in the current chapter refer to the updated edition of this text; Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 275.

orientation of Allison's approach to produce an oft-cited study analyzing the strategic missile programs undertaken by the John F. Kennedy Administration.<sup>20</sup>

The revival of superpower tensions in the 1980s shifted the focus of national security studies back squarely to issues surrounding the use of armed force in international politics. Yet, unlike at the outset of the Cold War, where work in this area was heavily theoretical, national security studies during the 1980s took a decidedly empirical turn. There were a number of reasons for this. First, the declassification of a raft of US government documents provided an empirical base which national security scholars could use to research American nuclear strategy.<sup>21</sup> Second, interest in the study of strategic intelligence issues burgeoned, facilitated once again by the declassification of historical source material and through the subject matter's inherent suitability to a largely empirical focus. Third, and perhaps most importantly, in light of the widespread disenchantment with national security studies occasioned by the onset of the Vietnam War, research increasingly focused upon testing and elaborating many of the theories which had emerged during national security studies' golden age. Ball's interrogation of Kissinger's earlier theories regarding the possibility of limited nuclear warfare is representative of this work.<sup>22</sup> Also in the Australian context, Paul Dibb's prescient study of the sources and limits of Soviet power reflected the greater empirical rigour and willingness to challenge the conventional wisdom exhibited by scholars of national security at that time.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Desmond Ball, *Politics and force levels: the strategic missile program of the Kennedy Administration*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p.xv.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Desmond Ball, *Can Nuclear War be Controlled?*, Adelphi paper no.169, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Dibb, *The Incomplete Superpower*, (Basingstoke: MacMillan for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1986).

## THE 'GLOBALIZATION' OF NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

Not unlike during the Vietnam era, the ending of the Cold War and the attendant evaporation of the Soviet empire once again brought national security studies into disrepute. Scholars were widely criticized for failing to recognize the important political and societal shifts which were taking place in the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact due to their inordinate focus on military arsenals. As a consequence of these failings some commentators went so far as to describe national security studies as intellectually 'weak' and 'bankrupt.'<sup>24</sup> As in the 1970s, academic focus thus quickly shifted away from the study of military threats. Indeed, a period of euphoria ensued where a number of scholars went so far as to proclaim the obsolescence of major war. The chief proponent of this view was Frances Fukuyama, who in 1989 infamously asserted on the pages of the American journal *The National Interest* that the 'end of history' had arrived.<sup>25</sup> According to Fukuyama, the collapse of the Soviet Union had resulted in the emergence of democracy as the dominant ideology in international politics. Faced with no competitors, and with a political ideal which simply could not be matched, Fukuyama argued that humankind had reached the culmination of its political development, and went on to predict that major war would become a thing of the past in this new democratic world.<sup>26</sup> Reflecting the existence of a similar sense of optimism among policymakers, US President George H.W. Bush in

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<sup>24</sup> Sean M. Lynn-Jones, 'The Future of International Security Studies', in Desmond Ball and David Horner, eds., *Strategic Studies in a Changing World: Global, Regional and Australian Perspectives*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence no.89, (Canberra: Australian National University, 1992), pp.87–8.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, no.16, Summer 1989, pp.3–18.

<sup>26</sup> See also Francis Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man*, (New York: Free Press, 1992).



1991 just as famously heralded the prospects for a 'New World Order' being established in the wake of the Cold War.<sup>27</sup>

Just as in the 1970s, interest in the economic dimensions of national security enjoyed resurgence during the 1990s. By this time, 'globalization' had supplanted 'interdependence' as a new buzzword amongst scholars of international relations more generally.<sup>28</sup> Consistent with this, scholars of national security began debating the merits of attributing prominence to threats of a transnational and global nature. This debate grew particularly heated over the question of whether global environmental degradation constituted a national security threat. Leading the affirmative camp were scholars such as Robert Kaplan, who grimly predicted a 'coming anarchy' in which state authority would collapse altogether in the face of increasing environmental degradation.<sup>29</sup> Skeptics on the negative side, such as Marc Levy, countered that the environment was best not regarded as a national security issue on the grounds that few if any direct linkages existed between environmental problems and violent conflict, whilst treating the environment in such a manner risked obscuring the often indirect routes through which environmental factors can aggravate domestic and regional security problems, particularly in the developing world.<sup>30</sup> The Australian scholar Alan Dupont featured prominently in this debate, charting a middle way between these two schools of thinking by arguing that environmental problems ought to be considered as national security issues on the

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<sup>27</sup> President George Herbert Walker Bush, 'Toward a New World Order', Address to a joint session of Congress and the Nation, 11 September 1990.

<sup>28</sup> See Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr., 'Globalization: What's New? What's Not? (And So What?)', *Foreign Policy*, Issue 118, Spring 2000, pp.104–119.

<sup>29</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy', *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol.273, issue 2, February 1994, pp.44–76.

<sup>30</sup> Marc A. Levy, 'Is the Environment a National Security Issue?', *International Security*, vol.20, no.2, Fall 1995, pp.35–62.

grounds that they do demonstrably 'generate conflict within and between states, and threaten human survival.'<sup>31</sup>

The debate over whether transnational challenges could genuinely be regarded as national security issues was settled in the eyes of many when commercial airliners plunged into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Virtually overnight, the countering of transnational terrorist threats was elevated to become a top priority on the national security agendas of many governments, particularly in the Western world. Just as rapidly, terrorism studies became a cottage industry: new courses, research programs and even entire research centres sprung up, taking advantage in many cases of the increased government funding opportunities on offer. The 2002 Bali Bombings reinforced Australian—both public and governmental—perceptions of terrorism as a national security challenge.<sup>32</sup> Reflecting that sentiment, a recent study produced under the auspices of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute observes that Australia's

overall risk profile as a potential target has been substantially heightened over the past decade ... As the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) has noted previously, Australia or Australian interests were the subject of planned, conducted or aborted terrorist attacks every year from 1999 to 2005. At the same time, globalization and increased cross-border movements of people, money and commodities have

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Dupont, *East Asia Imperilled: Transnational Challenges to Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.14–16.

<sup>32</sup> For further reading see Clive Williams and Brendan Taylor, eds., *Countering Terror: new Directions Post '911'*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence no.147, (Canberra: Australian National University, 2003).

rendered redundant the traditional defence afforded to the country by geographic distance.<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, the scope of national security studies has expanded yet further to encompass a whole raft of emergent issues. In a manner reminiscent of debates regarding prospective linkages between the environment and national security, climate change has gained increased attention, both as a potential security challenge in its own right and as a 'threat multiplier' with the alleged capacity to exacerbate other drivers of instability.<sup>34</sup> Disease-based threats with the 'potential to cause a high degree of damage and disruption in a short space of time' have also been added to the menu of choice available to scholars of national security.<sup>35</sup> Natural disasters have even been considered in analogous terms, with one respected scholar drawing parallels between the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the September 11 terrorist attacks in terms of their respective significance from a national security perspective.<sup>36</sup>

## NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES REDUX?

As this paper has demonstrated, the study of national security issues has evolved considerably from its beginnings as an academic endeavor in the 1940s. During this period, the nature and scope of the field has been significantly shaped by real world developments. The emergence of national security studies in the 1940s, for instance,

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Chalk and Carl Ungerer, *Neighbourhood Watch: The evolving terrorist threat in Southeast Asia*, (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 2008), p.2.

<sup>34</sup> For further reading see Jeffrey Mazo, *Climate Conflict: How global warming threatens security and what to do about it*, Adelphi Series, vol.49, issue 409, (London: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Christian Enemark, *Disease and Security: Natural Plagues and Biological Weapons in East Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.1.

<sup>36</sup> Tim Huxley, 'The Tsunami and Security: Asia's 9/11?' *Survival*, vol.47, no.1, Spring 2005, pp.123–32.

resulted directly from the experience of the Second World War, both in terms of a realization of the intricacies associated with military mobilization, and out of a desire to alleviate the security dilemmas which had ultimately culminated in that catastrophic conflict. The onset of the nuclear age in the 1950s gave the study of national security issues greater focus and impetus, just as the Vietnam War experience of the late 1960s and 1970s and the ending of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s undermined its credibility. The study of national security issues has been adapted in the face of these ebbs and flows, generally broadening in the face of adversity to take on a host of new international and, increasingly, transnational security challenges.

The trouble with the ensuing globalization of national security studies which has transpired over the past two decades is that few, if any, security threats are genuinely global in nature. In the case of climate change, for instance, skeptics and supporters alike generally concede that this issue will impact different regions in very different ways. Those most vulnerable will typically be located in less developed areas who are already more prone than the developed world to conflict, famine and pestilence.<sup>37</sup>

The same is true of disease-based threats. As Christian Enemark has observed,

the point at which a disease burden qualifies as intolerable, however, is largely a matter of political judgment. Consequently, the threshold for securitization of a microbial threat may vary from country to country, and from disease to disease.<sup>38</sup>

The problem for Australia in all this is that many of the issues currently researched by scholars of national security are actually of very little direct relevance in that they cannot be said to pose genuine threats to the 'national survival or wellbeing' of this

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Dibb, 'Defence policy can't be left to doomsayers', *The Australian*, 21 December 2007, p.10.

<sup>38</sup> Enemark, *Disease and Security*, p.1.

country. Moreover, merely adding all international anxieties and apprehensions to our own national security studies research agenda risks a situation where the much smaller number of arguably more genuine national security questions—such as how Australia ought to respond to the potentially destabilizing power transition currently transpiring in Asia—could ‘become a pea lost in an amorphous ball of wax.’<sup>39</sup> Or as Paul Dibb has more eloquently put it: ‘when every international worry becomes a security threat, the meaning of national security is trivialized.’<sup>40</sup>

Against that backdrop, this paper advocates the establishment a more consciously Australia-centric approach to the study of national security. As this overview of the evolution of national security studies has demonstrated, when research and teaching in this area began in the 1940s it was decidedly national (or, more accurately, US-centric) in orientation. To be sure, some years later that subsequently led to charges of ethnocentrism. As Nye and Lynn-Jones observed in the late 1980s, ‘the overwhelming majority of specialists in international security studies have been American. The policy issues that have attracted the most attention have therefore been US policy issues. Most of the major concepts and theories in the field have been developed by Americans.’<sup>41</sup>

Yet that is no longer the case. While American academic institutions and research centres such as RAND remain world leaders in the field, other countries have substantially improved their capacities in this area. In Europe, a plethora of research centres and think tanks have emerged to complement the work long done in this field by such well established institutions as the IISS and the Stockholm International

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<sup>39</sup> Betts, ‘Should Strategic Studies Survive?’, p.9.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Dibb, ‘Climate change is no strategic threat’, *The Spectator Australia*, 12 June 2010, p.vii.

<sup>41</sup> Nye and Lynn-Jones, ‘International Security Studies’, p.14.

Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). In Asia, the proliferation of such institutions dedicated to the study of security issues has been equally impressive, with many genuine centers of research excellence now operating in China (e.g. China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies), India (e.g. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses), Japan (e.g. National Institute for Defense Studies), Singapore (e.g. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies) and South Korea (e.g. Ilmin International Relations Institute, Korea University). A degree of cross-fertilization is also occurring between these two regions. The IISS, for example, established an Asia office in Singapore in 2004. This office coordinates the hugely influential Shangri-La Dialogue, which is held annually in Singapore and which has essentially become a de facto meeting of Asian defence ministers run by a European think tank.

Australia's capacity to adopt a more distinctive and genuinely 'national' approach to national security studies has also increased significantly over recent years. New think tanks with a clear interest in national security issues—such as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the Lowy Institute for International Policy, and the Kokoda Foundation—have come into being over the past decade and have quickly made their mark. In addition to the new National Security College based at the Australian National University, a host of new academic research centers and teaching programs—such as the Centre for International Security Studies at the University of Sydney—has been established.

It may, of course, seem somewhat counter-intuitive to advocate this type of silo approach to national security, precisely at a time when the Australian government is calling for an elimination of such a mindset within Australia's own national security

community. Yet the approach suggested here does exhibit a number of clear benefits. First, it would certainly not preclude collaboration between Australian national security scholars with their international counterparts on threats of a genuinely global nature, if and when those were ever to materialize. Second, Australian expertise developed in specific research areas—stabilization operations, for example—could always be shared with international counterparts if and when such areas became directly relevant to others, and vice versa. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the policy relevance of national security studies in Australia would increase significantly through a narrowing of research agendas to focus on those issues posing a genuine threat to this country's national survival or wellbeing. Last, but not least, a more Australia-centric approach to national security studies in this country would also constitute a more efficient and effective use of resources. In view of the fact that a number of new and existing institutes with a national security studies remit—such as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute—are funded by the Australian taxpayer, this latter consideration is not an altogether trivial one.

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