

Australia's Grand Strategies and the Royal Australian Air Force

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Abstract

China's military build-up and its wolf warrior diplomacy are reshaping Australian foreign and defense policies. In response, Australia has conceived grand strategies of balancing and engagement and embraced a new defense approach. However, this rethinking has somewhat neglected air power, focusing instead on land and naval forces. The Royal Australian Air Force is modern and well-trained but limited in scale and with sustainment concerns. These characteristics pose challenges given that the two grand strategies have different requirements and undertaking both simultaneously creates real issues. There are multiple implications for the air force's force structure, basing, readiness, and mobilization. Moreover, the new defense approach considers the possibility of major power regional conflict but fails to address that such conflict might be protracted.

The world is once again a dangerous place. A very real war is underway in Europe, with Russia using significant armed force and threatening nuclear attacks as it fights to capture Ukraine. Meanwhile, in the Indo-Pacific, China is rapidly building up its arms, its political leaders are making aggressive statements, gray-zone actions are frequent, and some fear a military attack on Taiwan this decade. In response, many governments are doing some hard thinking and crafting grand strategies. Australia is one of these.

The term *grand strategy* may perplex, but many states employ this technique even if not naming it as such.¹ Most—perhaps all—governments seek to build and then apply their national power to establish desired relationships with other states. Such grand strategies are whole-of-government efforts, involving diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power. They are especially useful for states with limited power that need to focus scarce resources on their most important concerns.²

Australian foreign and defense policies are currently being reshaped to meet the demands arising from deepening geopolitical tensions. Grand strategies of balancing and engagement have been conceived, and a new defense approach has been embraced. However, this rethinking has arguably neglected airpower, focusing

¹ Peter Layton, "Defining Grand Strategy," *Strategy Bridge*, 17 August 2020, <https://thestrategybridge.org/>.

² Peter Layton, *Grand Strategy* (Brisbane: self-published, 2018), 9–36.

instead on naval and land forces. This is partly because the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) has nearly completed a long-term modernization program that began in the early 2000s. Consequently, the national government's interest and funding have now swung mainly toward the other services and their needs.

Such inattention is perhaps unwise. While the RAAF may have relatively new equipment, the geostrategic context and technological environment have significantly changed since much of this equipment was first contracted for acquisition.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a notable exemplar. The war has revealed that great powers may now try to conquer smaller countries using military might. It has also highlighted the significant changes in warfare brought about by the large-scale use of uncrewed air vehicles, contemporary ground-based air defenses, long-range cruise missiles, and accurate ballistic missiles. In this emerging era of rising tensions, large wars, and technical innovation, it is arguably ill-advised to perceive the RAAF as a set-and-forget military force.

This article aims to refocus attention on Australian airpower in the context of the two adopted grand strategies. It begins by examining these grand strategies, followed by a discussion of current and planned Australian airpower. The third section raises concerns about this airpower given the two grand strategies, and the final section notes implications for force structure, basing, readiness, and mobilization. The conclusion addresses future uncertainties. The principal focus is on the RAAF's place in Australian airpower.

Two Grand Strategies

Balance of Power

Australia is developing a balance-of-power grand strategy designed to be of a scale "sufficient . . . to deter aggression and coercion" and generate "a strategic equilibrium."³ This strategy aims to preserve national independence by creating a rough equilibrium of power that prevents any single state from becoming so dominant as to control the international system.⁴ States employ diplomacy, defensive alliances, and domestic military and economic mobilization to maintain a

³ Penny Wong, "National Press Club Address, Australian interests in a regional balance of power" (speech, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 17 April 2023), <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/>.

⁴ William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11.

favorable balance of power.⁵ This approach requires an activist stance and constant vigilance regarding power shifts.

Australia's balance-of-power grand strategy is clearly focused on the great power level, implicitly targeting China. Recognizing that it cannot balance such a power alone, Australia emphasizes collective defense. Unsurprisingly, Australia's foreign minister declares, "America is central to [Australia's] balancing."⁶ Australia is steadily implementing its balance-of-power grand strategy.

Diplomatically, Australia is deepening its US alliance and historical bond with the UK through the new Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership, while intensifying its defense relationship with Japan.⁷ Domestically, Australia is enhancing societal resilience by criminalizing foreign political interference, blocking specific foreign telecom firms, toughening foreign investment laws, strengthening critical infrastructure regulations, and countering hostile disinformation activities. Militarily, Australia is acquiring new long-range strike missiles, commissioning 11 new warships, upgrading northern defense bases, and developing offensive cyber capabilities.

To build the requisite national power, Australia is making several focused investments, including the new Future Made in Australia package and the National Reconstruction Fund, which target defense capability, advanced manufacturing, and critical technologies. Further investment is also directed toward local defense industries and reskilling the civilian workforce to meet defense manufacturing, repair, and maintenance needs.⁸

Today's grand strategy is unlike that during the Cold War (1947-1991). At that time America was focused on the Soviet Union; other countries were important mainly depending on whether they could help or hinder US ambitions. Unlike European nations, Australia was too distant to be useful and also lacked large armed forces. Reflecting this, Australian overtures to be involved in NATO-like strategic

⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 156–57.

⁶ Wong, "National Press Club Address."

⁷ Ashley Townshend, "The AUKUS Submarine Deal Highlights a Tectonic Shift in the U.S.-Australia Alliance," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 27 March 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>; and Euan Graham, "Is Australia-Japan defence cooperation about to be throttled up?," *The Strategist*, 5 March 2024, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/>.

⁸ "Investing in a Future Made in Australia," *Budget 2024-25*, 2024, <https://budget.gov.au/>.

level planning with the US were ignored, including while the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was still active.⁹

In contrast, today's grand strategy envisions Australian military forces meaningfully contributing to the regional balance of power, participating in strategic-level planning with America and its allies, recognizing the Indo-Pacific as the new central front, and acknowledging Australia's special geographic importance. Throughout this, Australia's alliance with the US is prominent.

In 1951, Australia had hoped for a treaty with the United States that provided a strong guarantee of Australian security, akin to the NATO treaty, with a firm obligation on all parties to act in concert to meet common dangers.¹⁰ However, Australia was disappointed. Its alliance lacked NATO's stronger treaty wording; permanent multinational headquarters at the strategic, operational, and component levels; logistics bodies; and common funding contributions.

Instead, US support for Australia was situational, dependent on Washington's assessment of its interests at the time. When US global interests were not engaged or did not align with Australia's, the alliance proved less helpful. This reality fostered in Australia a strong fear of abandonment by the United States in times of crisis and war.¹¹

Consequently, Australia adopted a strategy of assisting the United States in its times of need, hoping to cultivate a reciprocal obligation for future Australian needs.¹² Since the alliance was signed, Australia has joined the United States in military activities in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf region, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Today, the alliance is described as one of "trust, respect, friendship and shared sacrifice."¹³

⁹ "United States Minutes of the Second Meeting, ANZUS Council: Fourth Session, Washington, September 10, 1953," Office of the Historian, United States Department of State, Document 121, <https://history.state.gov/>; and Damien Fenton, "SEATO and the defence of Southeast Asia 1955-1965" (PhD dissertation, University of New South Wales, 2006).

¹⁰ David Lowe, "Percy Spender's quest," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 55, no. 2 (2001), 194-97, <https://doi.org/>.

¹¹ Allan Gyngell, *Fear of Abandonment: Australia in the World since 1942*, (Melbourne: La Trobe University Press, 2021).

¹² John Howard, Prime Minister, "Australian Foreign Policy," *Sydney Papers* 15, no. 2, (March 2003), 88-89, <https://search.informit.org/>.

¹³ Anthony Albanese and Joe Biden, "An alliance for our times" (joint statement, Prime Minister of Australia, 20 May 2023), <https://www.pm.gov.au/>.

Regional Engagement

Looking beyond the great powers, Australia has devised an engagement grand strategy focused on the Indo-Pacific's middle and smaller powers. This strategy involves collaborating with these countries to achieve common goals. Unlike the strongly statist approach of the balance-of-power grand strategy, engagement takes a bottom-up approach, working with governments, state bureaucracies, business groups, nongovernmental organizations, academics, and communities across countries. Cooperation is key, motivating participants to seek absolute gains irrespective of their distribution. In contrast, a balance-of-power grand strategy seeks relative gains to maintain a favorable balance among those involved.¹⁴

Australia's engagement grand strategy involves working with Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific countries: "to enhance our collective security and prosperity."¹⁵ The underlying intent is to improve participant nations' circumstances by keeping all connected and working together. This grand strategy is well underway.

In recent years, numerous regional economic agreements have been reached, including the 11-nation Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, the 10-nation Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus, the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, and the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement.¹⁶ To capitalize on these agreements, a new national strategy for greater trade and investment between Australia and Southeast Asia is now being implemented.

Ties between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Australia are deepening with the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and its associated Aus4ASEAN Futures Initiative. This initiative includes financing smart cities, digitization, technology innovation, digital skills training, and a scholarship program focused on maritime matters, connectivity, economic development, and sustainable development.¹⁷

Organizationally, an Office of the Pacific has been created within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to coordinate the numerous departmental

¹⁴ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Liberal Approaches," in *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, ed. Jennifer Sterling-Folker (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 55–56; and Brian C. Rathbun, "Is Anybody Not an (International Relations) Liberal?," *Security Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010), 6–10, <https://doi.org/>.

¹⁵ Wong, "National Press Club Address."

¹⁶ "Australia's free trade agreements (FTAs)" (fact sheet, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024), <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>.

¹⁷ "The ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership – a year of progress," Australian Mission to ASEAN, 2024, <https://asean.mission.gov.au/>.

initiatives underway. This office is complemented by the new Australia Pacific Security College established at the Australian National University in Canberra.¹⁸

There are echoes of earlier times in this engagement grand strategy, particularly with the Hawke–Keating (1983–1996) government’s regional “enmeshment” and “comprehensive engagement.”¹⁹ However, today’s context is different: decolonization is long completed, the relative economic weights of Australia and the larger regional states have shifted dramatically, urbanization and industrialization have surged across the region, a well-institutionalized regional political system is in operation, and China has become an economic giant.

From a military standpoint, engagement involves maintaining an Australian presence in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific, and fostering regional partnerships and friendships. This interaction is guided by the annually produced Defence International Engagement Plan. The plan encompasses military-to-military talks, such as chief-to-chief meetings, large multinational air exercises like Exercise Pitch Black—which may include aircraft from Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Japan, Singapore, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea—and unit-level interactions, such as air mobility training between the RAAF and the Republic of Singapore Air Force at RAAF Base Richmond near Sydney.

Several defense-associated collaboration programs are also underway. The Pacific Maritime Security Program supports regional surveillance capabilities and is providing 21 *Guardian*-class patrol boats to 12 Pacific island countries and Timor-Lesté. The Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) works with partners to address common security challenges and build strong people-to-people links, with the largest DCP involvements in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Timor-Lesté, the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia. The defense infrastructure partnerships involve significant joint projects with Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands, including 12 wharf modernizations. Lastly, the Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program collaborates with Pacific island countries on cyber resilience, including cooperation on cybersecurity and combating cybercrime.

Importantly, the two grand strategies are not alternatives but “mutually reinforcing.”²⁰ Working with regional states to enhance their resilience to external

¹⁸ “Office of the Pacific,” Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>; and “Australia Pacific Security College strengthens Pacific security,” Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>.

¹⁹ David Epstein, “Bob Hawke’s Asia legacy,” *The Interpreter*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>; and James Curran, “Australia’s endless rediscovery of engagement with Asia,” *Australian Financial Review*, 17 September 2023, <https://www.afr.com/>.

²⁰ Richard Marles MP, Deputy Prime Minister, “Address to the Sydney Institute Annual Dinner Lecture” (speech, Department of Defence, 14 November 2022), <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/>.

pressures aligns with the balance-of-power grand strategy. Employing different strategies to achieve different outcomes is crucial.

No single grand strategy can achieve all a state's objectives. For Australia, being within and working with a prosperous and secure region is an important national goal, regardless of global geostrategic considerations. Moreover, the engagement grand strategy could become the principal strategy if collective defense falters. Regional engagement is as much an enduring Australian concern as the fear of great-power abandonment.

Attempting to combine the two grand strategies would likely prove unsuccessful; trying to counter others while working with them is inherently incoherent. During the 1933–1939 period, Britain's combined balance-of-power and engagement grand strategy allowed Nazi Germany to exploit the differences between the approaches to its advantage, becoming militarily stronger and a much more dangerous foe.²¹

Australian Airpower

Defence Strategy

Informed by the two grand strategies, Australia's defense policies and the long-term development plans of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) are undergoing a significant overhaul. As part of this effort, the government recently unveiled Australia's first *National Defence Strategy (NDS)* alongside an Integrated Investment Plan (IIP).²²

In a policy sense, the *NDS* is an innovation as it will be revised every two years, replacing the erratic issuing of Defence White Papers used previously to guide the Department of Defence. The *NDS* is also considerably more expansive than the White Papers were in looking beyond the Department to take a national approach, across both the whole-of-government and the whole-of-nation, and to integrate all the instruments of national power.

The *NDS* asserts that addressing Australia's strategic challenges necessitates a strategy of denial to prevent adversaries from projecting power against Australia from the seas to its north. This aligns with the government's concept of "impactful projection," leveraging military power to exert influence at a significant distance from Australia. Early in his term, the defence minister declared the then-new government would "make the investment necessary to increase the range and le-

²¹ Peter Layton, "To Engage China, or Balance It?: Lessons From a Failed Grand Strategic Exercise," *War on the Rocks*, 20 July 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

²² *2024 National Defence Strategy and 2024 Integrated Investment Program* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2024), <https://www.defence.gov.au/>.

thality of the Australian Defence Force so that it is able to hold a potential adversary—forces and infrastructure—at risk further from Australia.”²³ The incoming prime minister reinforced this sentiment, stating, “in general, we need more weaponry that can actually make a difference.”²⁴

The *NDS* presents carefully balanced, nuanced judgments and is restrained in its approach. In contrast, the *IIP* sharply delineates funding allocations for new long-term equipment acquisitions for the ADF, quantitatively revealing priorities among capabilities. Areas of significant concern receive ample funding, those deemed less pressing receive less, and those considered irrelevant are omitted entirely.

Over the next ten years, approximately USD 220 billion will be allocated, with the largest single-project budgetary outlay directed toward the acquisition of nuclear attack submarines, estimated to cost between USD 35 billion to USD 42 billion. This initiative, known as AUKUS Pillar 1, involves Australia acquiring two second-hand and nine new nuclear submarines in a complex plan spanning several decades, with construction taking place in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. The scale and nature of this acquisition project holds substantial political significance, with the government describing it as “a whole-of-nation undertaking that will see around 20,000 jobs created across Australia.”²⁵ This workforce number is noteworthy given the ADF only has some 55,000 uniformed personnel.

The second-largest top-tier expenditure focuses on building six *Hunter*-class frigates, estimated between USD 15 billion to USD 21 billion. These substantial funding allocations for both the nuclear submarine and frigate projects underscore the dominant maritime focus of the denial strategy.

Importantly, the next tier of megaprojects aims to bolster the near-term warfighting readiness of the ADF. These include acquiring stocks of naval strike and air defense missiles such as Tomahawk, SM-6, and Naval Strike Missiles (USD 8 billion to USD 10 billion); enhancing Australia’s capability to manufacture guided weapons (USD 11 billion to USD 14 billion); and expanding logistics centers and capacity (USD 7 billion to USD 10 billion).

Below this USD 7-billion-plus tier, numerous smaller projects are associated with ongoing modernization efforts. Among these, several are focused on transforming

²³ Richard Marles, Deputy Prime Minister, “Address: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)” (speech, Department of Defence, 12 July 2022), <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/>.

²⁴ Prime Minister quoted in: Greg Sheridan, “Anthony Albanese flags Defence shake-up with drones and missiles,” *The Australian*, 4 November 2022, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/>.

²⁵ Richard Marles, Deputy Prime Minister, “Australian industry and jobs front and centre of AUKUS submarines” (press release, Department of Defence, 22 March 2024), <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/>.

the Army to maneuver in littoral environments, aligning with concepts akin to the US Marine Corps Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.

Worryingly, the IIP's emphasis on the Navy, and to a lesser extent the Army, overlooks the crucial ongoing recapitalization needs of the Air Force over the next decade. While the Air Force has received new aircraft in recent years, it will require replacement capabilities starting in the late 2030s, when the costs of acquiring nuclear submarines are expected to consume approximately 10 percent of the total Defence budget.²⁶

RAAF Airpower

ADF doctrine takes an expansive view of *airpower*, defining it as “the total strength of a nation's capability to conduct and influence activities in, through and from the air to achieve its objectives.”²⁷ Australian airpower extends beyond the RAAF's operational framework to encompass the Army's and Navy's helicopter fleets, uncrewed air vehicle (UAV) capabilities, and the diverse civil aviation sector. While primarily oriented toward air transport, the civil aviation sector also includes specialized capabilities such as maritime surveillance and search and rescue.

Airpower plays a crucial role within today's integrated and joint ADF by providing air superiority; air strike; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR); air mobility; air command and control; airbase operations; and technical support for airpower. Despite attempts to neatly categorize airpower, Australian capabilities rely on multirole aircraft and helicopters capable of performing multiple missions effectively. Table 1 outlines Australia's primary airpower assets, principally operated by the RAAF.

²⁶ Marcus Hellyer, “The 2024 Defence investment plan's key changes – or ‘The Subs that ate the ADF,’” *Strategic Analysis Australia*, 9 May 2024, <https://strategicanalysis.org/>.

²⁷ *ADF Air Power, Edition 1*, Australian Defence Force Integration Doctrine (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2023), 1, <https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/>.

Table 1. Major Australian airpower capabilities

Major Australian Airpower Capabilities		
Role	Weapon Systems	Notes
Air Defence	72 F-35A Lightning II	Nine F-35A in US awaiting Block 4 upgrades.
	6 E-7A Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control	-
	3 Jindalee Over-The-Horizon-Radars	-
	National Advanced Surface to Air Missile (NASAM)	Army assets. Acquisition underway.
	SM-2/ SM-6 Standard Missile system	Navy assets. Fitted to 3 Aegis-equipped DDGs.
	Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile Block II	Navy assets. Fitted to 8 ANZAC FFGs.
Land and Maritime Strike	24 F/A-18F Super Hornet	Undergoing Spiral Upgrade Program.
	22 Tiger ARH	Army assets. Being replaced by 29 AH-64E Apache.
	42 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems	Army assets. Being acquired. In medium-term to be fitted with Precision Strike Missile.
Electronic Surveillance and Attack	12 EA-18G Growler 4 MC-55 Peregrine	-
Maritime Patrol	14 P-8A Poseidon 4 MQ-4C Triton	-
	23 MH-60R Seahawk	Navy assets. 13 additional MH-60Rs being delivered.
Space Domain Awareness	C-Band Space Surveillance Radar Space Surveillance Telescope	Deep-space Advanced Radar Capability (DARC) from 2026.
Air Mobility	7 KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transport 8 C-17A Globemaster III 10 C-27J Spartan	-
	12 C-130J Hercules	Being replaced by 20 C-130Js.
	10 CH-47F Chinook	Army assets.
	40 UH-60M Black Hawk	Army assets. Beginning delivery.

As part of the balance-of-power grand strategy, the RAAF is adopting agile air operations.²⁸ This concept aims to leverage Australia's strategic depth by enabling sustained distributed air operations from austere and remote locations across a network of military airbases and civilian airfields in northern Australia. Recent agility exercises have demonstrated fast jet operations from airfields with reduced

²⁸ *ADF Air Power*, 81–87.

pavement strengths, utilizing shorter runway lengths than usual and civil-grade fuels.²⁹ The RAAF has also introduced tailored support concepts featuring reduced maintenance footprints, incorporating reach-back diagnostics and rapid response teams to ensure aircraft reliability during deployments away from main operating bases.

Additionally, the RAAF is exploring emerging technologies tailored for agile air operations. The Air Force Jericho team has developed concepts for unmanned and autonomous systems, including the indigenous “Camel Train” capability, aimed at providing autonomous logistics support across Northern Australia. According to the Chief of the Air Force, “It is a tangible demonstration of latent capacity within our national support base. Nurturing this capability, building a national ecosystem that can rapidly scale production of uncrewed systems, offers substantial potential to strengthen our readiness and resilience.”³⁰

Under the engagement grand strategy, the RAAF is deeply engaged in the new Defence Pacific Air Program, which comprises two notable strands. The first involves assisting the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) in reconstituting its air wing by providing two New Zealand-built PAC-750XL light transport aircraft, training aircrew and maintenance personnel, and funding airfield facility upgrades. This initiative also includes establishing a sister squadron arrangement between RAAF’s 35 Squadron and the PNGDF’s Air Training Wing.³¹

The second initiative involves regular six-week rotational deployments of RAAF C-27J Spartan transport aircraft through Papua New Guinea and Fiji, initiated in 2023. In Papua New Guinea, the C-27J detachments meet PNGDF airlift requests, undertake disaster-relief missions when required, conduct mountainous-terrain flying training, and facilitate the integration of PNGDF elements into air mobility deployments.³² In Fiji, the C-27Js participate in joint operations with the Republic of Fiji Military Force, aiming to enhance interoperability between forces. Activities include conducting search-and-rescue exercises and providing training in disaster relief operations.³³

²⁹ An example was during the 2023 Exercise Arnhem Thunder. “RAAF fast jets to land at Kununurra Airport, Western Australia,” *Air Force*, 2023, <https://www.airforce.gov.au/>.

³⁰ Chief of Air Force, “Building Readiness and Resilience in National Air and Space Power across the Spectrum of Competition” (speech, Air Force, 8 May 2024), <https://www.airforce.gov.au/>.

³¹ Tastri Murdoch, “The perfect gift for PNG,” *Defence*, 13 December 2023, <https://www.defence.gov.au/>; and Clarice Hurren, “Squadron’s family expanded,” *Defence*, 2 August 2021, <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2021-08-02/squadrons-family-expanded>.

³² Marjorie Finkeo, “Aircraft completes rotation in PNG,” *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 15 April 2024, <https://www.postcourier.com.pg/>.

³³ Imogen Lunny, “Spartan helps fortify Pacific ties,” *Defence*, 5 March 2024, <https://www.defence.gov.au/>.

Looking ahead to the RAAF's future and the government's ambition for impactful projection, several airpower projects relevant to the balance-of-power grand strategy are underway. Over the next few years, the Super Hornet and P-8 fleet will be equipped with the AGM-158C Long Range Anti-Ship Missile. Subsequently, the Super Hornets will receive the AGM-158B Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile–Extended Range. Concurrent upgrades to the Growler aircraft include the installation of the Next-Generation Jammer and the Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile–Extended Range. Integration of these stand-off missiles, along with the in-development Joint Strike Missile, into the F-35 fleet hinges on progress with the aircraft's protracted Block 4 upgrade program.

In the RAAF's development pipeline are hypersonic missiles and UAVs. The hypersonic missile ambitions reflect extensive research collaboration between Australia and the United States, now under AUKUS Pillar II. The Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment is a joint effort aimed at developing an air-breathing scramjet-powered, Mach 5 precision-guided missile capable of deployment from tactical fighter aircraft. This initiative also contributes to the USAF's Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile (HACM) program.³⁴ RAAF Super Hornets will test fire HACMs at Australia's Woomera range beginning in late 2024.

The UAV effort focuses on the Boeing Australia MQ-28A Ghost Bat system. These autonomous drones are designed to collaborate with each other or with manned aircraft, performing high-risk ISR and combat missions. Currently, 13 Ghost Bats have been manufactured, with a final assembly facility for UAV production established at Wellcamp in Queensland.³⁵

Over the next decade, more than USD 2.7 billion will be invested in the Ghost Bat program, including the development of a Block 2 variant with enhanced capabilities.³⁶ In 2025, Ghost Bats will undergo operational trials to evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing the survivability and combat capabilities of RAAF air operations.³⁷ Engagement with the United States continues under the Combat Collaborative Aircraft Project Arrangement.

³⁴ Courtney Albon, "US, Australia eye joint hypersonics experiments in 2024," *CAISRNET*, 4 December 2023, <https://www.c4isrnet.com/>.

³⁵ "MQ-28A Ghost Bat Unmanned Aircraft, Australia," *Airforce Technology*, 22 June 2023, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/>.

³⁶ *2024 National Defence Strategy and 2024 Integrated Investment Program*, 63.

³⁷ Chief of Air Force, "Building Readiness and Resilience."

Airpower Concerns

Different Grand Strategy Needs

A significant challenge arises from having a force structure optimized for the balance of power grand strategy, which may not align well with engagement objectives. The balance-of-power strategy prioritizes military readiness and includes advanced long-range sensors, sophisticated missile systems, complex communication networks, space-based assets, and dispersed maritime air operations. Much of this technology is highly classified and typically shared only with close allies.

In contrast, engagement strategies emphasize peacetime operations aimed at fostering partnerships and enhancing regional capabilities. These activities involve collaboration with various military forces, coast guards, and civilian organizations across the region. Engagement efforts encompass humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search-and-rescue operations, fisheries patrols, counterpiracy missions, and emergency response initiatives.

High-end air assets pose challenges for these roles because they are overly sophisticated for the tasks being undertaken and difficult for foreign personnel to fly on as observers. For instance, the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, designed for advanced antisubmarine warfare, can perform fisheries patrols but is costly to operate and exceeds the requirements for such missions. Instead, the RAAF employs the C-27J Spartan transport aircraft for periodic fisheries patrols within the exclusive economic zones of small island nations in the Western Pacific.³⁸

However, the use of the C-27J underscores the inherent tensions in maintaining a single force structure that serves both grand strategies. While the C-27J proves valuable for engagement tasks, the RAAF may replace it with larger C-130J aircraft well-suited for balance-of-power objectives but less optimal for engagement activities, especially in Papua New Guinea and the smaller islands of the Southwest Pacific. Moreover, such roles demand different skill sets from personnel. Engaging with local communities over extended periods and cultivating relationships contrasts with the traditional fly-in, fly-out mentality typical of air transport operations.

Resource Constraints

To simultaneously pursue both the balance-of-power and engagement grand strategies effectively, a mixed force structure with dedicated aircraft types for each strategy would be ideal, rather than the RAAF's current multi-role approach.

³⁸ Peter Nugent, "Trained eyes scan the big blue," *Defence*, 24 November 2023, <https://www.defence.gov.au/>.

However, like most defense forces, the RAAF operates under a constrained budget and must prioritize its expenditures. These funding limitations are expected to become more pressing over time.

The substantial resource demands of the nuclear submarine project, both in terms of finances and personnel, will necessitate a rebalancing within the ADF. This reallocation is likely to affect the RAAF's capacity to support the engagement grand strategy, as maintaining high-end warfighting capabilities is often deemed more critical than fostering regional friendships.

In this decade, a worsening workforce shortfall will further exacerbate the challenge of simultaneously pursuing both grand strategies. The ADF is currently short by approximately 4,400 personnel, which is about 8 percent of its uniformed workforce, while the RAAF specifically is short by about 700 personnel—around 4 percent of its workforce. Addressing this shortfall in the near term is challenging due to the significant time required to recruit and train individuals to operate the RAAF's sophisticated equipment. Adding to this workforce problem is the RAAF's plan to recruit more than 2,100 additional personnel by mid-2028 to manage new capabilities being acquired. Given the current circumstances, this workforce expansion plan appears unrealistic.³⁹

Protracted War

Under the balance-of-power grand strategy, the RAAF could find itself involved in a major conflict and as in Ukraine today, this may be protracted. Unlike the recent Middle Eastern wars, where the RAAF's participation was a matter of choice and based on available force structures, a major conflict would be a war of necessity. It would engage all RAAF elements from the outset, have an indefinite duration, and potentially result in high attrition of aircraft and units.

To effectively deter potential aggressors, it is essential for them to believe that Australia possesses not only an air force capable of the initial combat engagements but also the capacity to expand and sustain its air force until the peace is won. Current defense plans have yet to address the critical issue of wartime mobilization. For a small air force dependent on overseas supplies, this is particularly challenging.

In a major conflict, it is conceivable that many of the RAAF's major combat aviation assets could be lost or damaged beyond repair. Replacing these assets during a war could prove difficult if traditional supply sources are cut off, unable to provide timely assistance, or are prioritizing their own air forces.

³⁹ *Defence Portfolio*, Portfolio Budget Statements 2024-25: Budget Related Paper No. 1.4A, (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia 2024), 18-22.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine offers valuable insights. Ukraine has demonstrated that UAVs of various types and sizes can be developed rapidly to provide some limited air capabilities sustainably. Preparing for high attrition through prior planning and action in peacetime could mitigate some of the challenges a major war might pose.

Gray Zone

Beyond resourcing matters, the two grand strategies alone do not address all defense concerns. China's persistent gray-zone actions are now a permanent feature of Indo-Pacific security. While pushbacks by another country might cause a temporary Chinese retreat, China consistently returns, often more aggressively.⁴⁰ Beijing learns from these short-term reversals and introduces new tactics, as is currently happening to the Philippines in the West Philippine Sea.

China's particular gray-zone model is a perpetual drain on other nations' defense and security resources. Worse, gray-zone actions are steadily increasing and becoming more serious. Responding is becoming nondiscretionary, necessitating specific types of equipment, skills, and tactics.⁴¹ Australia's grand strategies so far are neglecting the problem.

The balance-of-power grand strategy, in which China looms large, offers limited utility for countering gray-zone actions. By design, these actions occur below the threshold of armed conflict and are not situations where military forces want to reveal their high-end warfighting capabilities to a potential adversary. Conversely, the engagement grand strategy focuses on collaboration, not on thwarting another nation's aggressive gray-zone actions.

Emerging Technology

Over the past several years, nations have increasingly prioritized technological innovation to build the national industrial power their grand strategies require. China has led this approach, with others, including the United States and United Kingdom, progressively following suit.⁴²

China's latest phase involves re-engineering its national innovation chain to better generate disruptive technological breakthroughs. This effort includes forming

⁴⁰ Peter Layton, *China's Enduring Grey Zone Challenge* (Canberra: Air and Space Power Centre, 2021), 11–42, <https://airpower.airforce.gov.au/>.

⁴¹ Peter Layton, *Grey zone challenges and Australia–Japan defence cooperation* (Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute, 2022), 13–22, <https://www.griffith.edu.au/>.

⁴² *Vision for Competitiveness: Mid-Decade Opportunities for Strategic Victory* (Washington: Special Competitive Studies Project, May 2024), <https://www.scsp.ai/>.

consortia that integrate research, development, and production entities.⁴³ In the military domain, this re-engineering aims to develop “new quality combat power” in areas such as maritime situational awareness, cyber defense, artificial intelligence, space management, and uncrewed combat forces.⁴⁴

Similarly, the Australian Department of Defence is pursuing enhanced innovation through reorganization. The principal initiative is the Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator (ASCA), which will integrate the diverse parts of Australia’s defense innovation process to accelerate the transition of innovative technology into in-service military capabilities.

The ASCA is focusing on exploiting emerging technology initially developed for commercial purposes rather than bringing breakthrough technology into ADF service.⁴⁵ This approach suggests that while the RAAF may keep pace with strategic competitors in terms of technology, it is unlikely to maintain a sustained edge.⁴⁶ This is concerning, given that China aims to develop “new quality combat power” in areas like uncrewed combat forces, which are particularly important to the RAAF.

Implications for Airpower

Force Structure

To support the balance-of-power grand strategy, the RAAF is integrating various long-range missiles onto its Super Hornets, Growlers, and F-35s. This is proving to be a protracted process, with the ADF’s Chief of Joint Operations, General Gregory Bilton, expressing frustration at the lengthy time involved during the RAAF’s 2024 airpower conference. The result is that the RAAF cannot respond as swiftly as it would like to the ongoing changes in the regional balance of power.

The lengthy time required to upgrade modern aircraft is a well-known issue with significant real-world implications. The rise of uncrewed systems now offers an alternative. These can be fielded much quicker as they do not require the same demanding safety and certification standards as crewed aircraft. In this regard, the

⁴³ Arthur R. Kroeber, “Unleashing ‘new quality productive forces’: China’s strategy for technology-led growth,” *Brookings Institution*, 4 June 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

⁴⁴ Xi Jinping, “Strengthen mission responsibility, deepen reform and innovation, and comprehensively enhance strategic capabilities in emerging fields” (speech, Xi Jinping’s Important Speeches Database, 8 March 2024), <http://jhsj.people.cn/>.

⁴⁵ Peter Layton, “Evolution not Revolution: Australia’s Defence AI Pathway,” in *The Very Long Game: 25 Case Studies on the Global State of Defense AI*, ed. Reiko Borchert, Torben Schutz, and Joseph Verbovzsky (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024), 507, 512.

⁴⁶ George Henneke, “Defence innovation: a view from Indo-Pacific 2023,” *The Strategist*, 15 November 2023, <https://www.aspirategist.org.au/>.

Ghost Bat UAV will enter RAAF service before the F-35 Block 4 upgrade makes the aircraft long-range missile capable. However, Ghost Bat is not a low-cost system. In May 2022, the government announced the acquisition of seven Block 1 variants for USD 314.9 million, to enter service with the RAAF in 2024–2025.⁴⁷

In early 2023, the RAAF Chief highlighted the need to reduce the cost of advanced combat drones before they can be widely used by the Air Force: “the price point, and where it really looks interesting to us, is if we can get it to about a tenth of the cost of a manned fighter. So if we get to 10 per cent, then I can start to build the mass and survivability of not just manned platforms, but the entire air combat system.”⁴⁸

The RAAF’s capability to execute the balance of power grand strategy would significantly benefit from acquiring affordable UAVs useful across a variety of roles. While the RAAF’s new Triton UAVs provide impressive capabilities, each air vehicle costs more than USD 100 million, limiting the number that can be fielded and making any losses nearly untenable.

The current RAAF projects involving UAVs arguably focus on acquiring advanced rather than cutting-edge technology. The USAF’s shift toward iterative development of short-lifespan, UAVs under its Collaborative Combat Aircraft program suggests an alternative approach that the RAAF might adopt.⁴⁹ This fast-to-field but short-in-service-life approach, combined with emerging technology, could enable the RAAF to obtain the affordable uncrewed air vehicles it seeks. The new ASCA program could potentially be restructured to support this ambition.

Perhaps less obviously, UAVs may also have applications within the engagement grand strategy. Emerging cargo UAVs could be deployed in the Southwest Pacific, where many airstrips are relatively short, less than 3,000 feet. A network could be envisioned where medium-sized communities on various islands are connected via large cargo drones. From these communities, small cargo drones could distribute goods to numerous smaller villages across the islands.

In developing and operating such a network, the RAAF, with its extensive experience in regional air transport, could play a valuable role. This involvement could utilize either full-time regular force personnel or part-time reservists.⁵⁰ Additionally, the camel-train autonomous logistics support system mentioned earlier may

⁴⁷ MQ-28A Ghost Bat Unmanned Aircraft, Australia,” *Airforce Technology*.

⁴⁸ Ben Packham, “Air Force names its price for drones,” *The Australian*, 3 March 2023, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/>.

⁴⁹ Joseph Trevithick, “Top Air Force Officer Doubles Down On Aerial Combat Drones With Short Life Spans,” *The War Zone*, 13 June 2024, <https://www.twz.com/>.

⁵⁰ Peter Layton, *Australia's New Regional Context: Pacific Island Futures and Air Power Possibilities* (Canberra: Air Power Development Centre, 2020), 63–68.

have broader regional applications. Participating in a drone cargo network could allow the RAAF to continue contributing to the engagement grand strategy, particularly if the C-27Js are withdrawn from service. This transition could ensure ongoing support to regional communities and facilitate humanitarian missions, aligning with broader strategic objectives in the Southwest Pacific.

AUKUS

The AUKUS nuclear submarine program will eventually provide Australia with a survivable antiship capability able to operate at long range for extended periods. In the interim, crucial for the balance-of-power grand strategy, the RAAF is maintaining a highly competent maritime strike capability using standoff weapons and cruise missiles. These capabilities will require recapitalization in the late 2030s but might diminish in priority as the nuclear submarine fleet enters service. This suggests a potential reevaluation of the RAAF's long-historical role in maritime strike.

However, several factors argue against such a shift. Airpower can respond more swiftly than submarines to evolving operational needs; for instance, combat aircraft can swiftly redirect their focus geographically. Additionally, unlike submarines, aircraft can be rapidly reloaded and returned to combat within hours rather than weeks. Finally, while Australia's nuclear submarine fleet will be limited in number, their strategic employment will require careful management and conservative use due to the significant impact of any potential loss. The RAAF's airpower, while also constrained, is considerably less sensitive to attrition.

AUKUS, however, encompasses more than the acquisition of nuclear submarines. AUKUS Pillar II involves multinational collaboration to advance military capabilities using emerging technologies such as quantum computing, cyberwarfare, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and electronic warfare.⁵¹ For the RAAF, AUKUS Pillar II could synergistically complement ASCA and potentially provide strategic advantages through the deployment of innovative technology. Ensuring this advantage may necessitate active RAAF participation in AUKUS Pillar II, despite the potential workforce challenges this might pose.

Gray Zone

China's gray-zone activities in the East and South China Sea have persisted for over a decade and are anticipated to continue indefinitely. These actions destabilize

⁵¹ John Christianson, Sean Monaghan, and Di Cooke, "AUKUS Pillar Two: Advancing the Capabilities of the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia," *Center for Strategic and International Studies Briefs*, 10 July 2023, <https://www.csis.org/>.

the region and constantly pose risks of escalation into armed conflict. The RAAF could play a role within a broader ADF and regional initiative aimed at both curbing China's expansion of gray-zone activities and reducing the likelihood of accidental escalation to war.

RAAF involvement could encompass operational and capability development aspects. Operationally, a sustained campaign strategy might be devised focusing on influencing Chinese decision makers across various command levels. This strategy could involve responses designed to sow concern, induce confusion, and employ deception, leveraging the theatrical nature of Chinese gray-zone actions.⁵² Specific operational measures might include RAAF contributions to regional air policing efforts, utilizing the new Triton unmanned air vehicles for maritime surveillance of China's gray-zone activities, and exploring the establishment of a crisis hotline under the auspices of the multinational Five Power Defence Arrangement.⁵³

Longer term, the RAAF could collaborate with the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force to adapt the MQ-28 Ghost Bat for air policing missions that include gathering imagery of Chinese military aircraft engaged in gray-zone activities.⁵⁴ Employing UAVs for this purpose would decrease reliance on expensive and limited-life crewed aircraft, thereby shifting more of the cost burden of gray-zone activities onto China.

Defending Air Bases

The RAAF has adopted agile combat employment concepts and regularly conducts dispersed air operations across northern Australia. Such maneuvers, according to the RAAF's Air Commander, involve deploying squadrons across various "bases and places," making it challenging for hostile forces to target RAAF air assets effectively. Nevertheless, targeting is not impossible, especially if the squadrons are deployed to islands offshore where dispersion is probably only feasible around the airbase and not to different airfields. Moreover, the necessary fuel stores and maintenance support facilities at the various air bases may be much less agile, or even fixed, making them vulnerable to attack.

Currently, the ADF can provide only limited airbase air defense, although efforts are underway to improve this capability. The RAAF possesses fighters capable of air defense, and the Army is getting some NASAMS units, with the 2024 IIP funding modern integrated air and missile defense command-and-control systems,

⁵² Peter Layton, "China's Gray Zone Air Power," *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 26 March 2024, <https://irregularwarfare.org/>.

⁵³ Layton, *China's Enduring Grey-Zone Challenge*, 78–84.

⁵⁴ Layton, *Grey Zone Challenges and Australia-Japan Defence Cooperation*, 22.

sensors, and passive defense measures. While these capabilities may suffice against limited-scale attacks involving drones, cruise missiles, and bombers, there remains a gap in defending against ballistic missiles, which alongside cruise missiles, pose the most likely threat to RAAF bases in Australia or offshore.⁵⁵

The conflict in Ukraine has underscored the effectiveness of medium-range surface-to-air missiles (SAM) in countering such threats, particularly in major conflicts envisioned by the balance-of-power grand strategy. Consequently, it is crucial for the RAAF not only to enhance its mobility between airbases and airfields but also to bolster defenses against ballistic and cruise missile attacks. Acquiring a medium-range SAM capability for airbase defense is imperative.

Readiness

To keep its aircraft flying, the RAAF relies on timely maintenance resupply from global companies, primarily located in the distant United States and Europe. Given the demands of the balance-of-power grand strategy, the RAAF must prepare for the possibility of disruptions in its aircraft maintenance supply chains. In a major conflict scenario, traditional suppliers may prioritize their own military needs, face physical or cyberattacks on their manufacturing plants, or see supply routes to Australia severed by hostile actions.

The complexity of aircraft support items often necessitates their importation, as economies of scale discourage Australia from establishing local production lines for these high-cost items. Moreover, manufacturers typically prefer to retain production of these in-house. Therefore, Australia needs to maintain appropriately sized stockpiles of critical items essential for keeping the RAAF's aircraft combat-ready. A buffer of 6–12 months would help mitigate the initial impact of a major disruption, allowing time to establish alternative supply chains.

Mobilization

In the balance-of-power grand strategy, the RAAF is placing considerable emphasis on long-range missiles. These missiles are costly to procure and store, potentially diverting funds from other force structure priorities. However, in a major conflict, current missile stockpiles may prove inadequate. The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine highlights that the availability of guided weapons and explosive ordnance can dictate the pace of conflict.

⁵⁵ Peter Layton, "Australia's Chinese ballistic missile problem," *The Interpreter*, 26 April 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>.

This situation underscores the importance for nations to develop their own sovereign missile production capabilities. Australia is initially responding by domestically manufacturing M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System's (HIMARS) Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) rockets, starting in 2025. While this improves supply chain resilience for GMLRS rockets, it does not directly address the RAAF's missile needs.

The missiles employed by the RAAF are more complex than GMLRS rockets, making local manufacturing in Australia unlikely, though final assembly of imported components remains a possibility. Yet, this approach relies on lengthy supply chains that could be vulnerable during wartime. Therefore, alternative options need to be considered.

Firstly, the design of some missiles intended for use by the RAAF could be significantly simplified, particularly by employing less sophisticated electronics that are more readily available, even if this results in a loss of performance. Russia's ability to continue missile production despite extensive sanctions illustrates this possibility. Russian missiles utilize outdated chip technology found in consumer goods such as "dishwashers and refrigerators."⁵⁶ Using such components and other easily sourced dual-use items has made Russian missile manufacture considerably more robust than a comparable Western manufacturing capability would be. In a war, having access to somewhat primitive missiles is preferable to having none at all.

Secondly, Russia has optimized the effectiveness of its limited missile stocks and production capacity. They are employing Iranian-designed Shahed drones as armed decoys to divert and deplete Ukrainian air defenses. This strategy enables Russian missiles, which individually possess greater destructive capability than the Shaheds, to penetrate defenses more effectively. Russia is even establishing a production line for Shahed drones within Russia, streamlining their design to dramatically reduce production costs. The concept of enhancing the effectiveness of each missile fired, whether through using armed decoy drones like the Russians or employing active electronic warfare support, holds considerable merit. The Ghost Bat UAV might play a future role in such electronic warfare support operations.

Conclusion

Australia's two grand strategies outline clear operational paths, force structure requirements, and necessary force postures for the RAAF. However, as always,

⁵⁶ US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, *quoted in*: Steven Feldstein and Fiona Brauer, "Why Russia Has Been So Resilient to Western Export Controls," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 March 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.

resources are scarce, requiring prudent allocation and wise utilization. The ongoing personnel shortfall poses a significant challenge, already impacting RAAF capabilities and unlikely to be easily resolved.

Looking ahead, the issue of force structure recapitalization will grow increasingly pressing. Today, the RAAF is equipped relatively well for a middle-power air force, a result of past funding commitments that enabled the acquisition and integration of current capabilities. However, Australia's recent acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines introduces new funding uncertainties that may affect the RAAF's future in the next decade.

Workforce dynamics and funding priorities can be managed as these are within Australia's control. Externally, however, there are potential challenges that could undermine the viability of the balance-of-power grand strategy, particularly related to the nation's ability to build and sustain the national power required for success.

Firstly, this grand strategy implicitly targets China, Australia's largest trading partner by a significant margin. Trade with China supports the ADF, including the RAAF's advanced but costly force structure. However, this economic relationship could be jeopardized by political decisions by the Chinese government, economic downturns, internal instability within China, or even a major conflict, exposing a vulnerability in the RAAF's future funding.

Secondly, perhaps even more critical, there is growing skepticism within a major political party in the United States, reflective of broader sentiments among Americans, regarding America's alliance commitments. Australia's balance-of-power grand strategy hinges on continued strong US engagement in collective defense in the region. Any shift in US commitment could trigger Australia's historical concerns about abandonment, reminiscent of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the region in the late 1960s to focus on European affairs.

If the United States were to significantly withdraw from the Western Pacific, Australia would likely intensify its focus on the regional engagement grand strategy, notably expanding its diplomatic, economic, and informational tools of national power. Conversely, the military component would likely pivot to prioritize the defense of Australia, its island territories, and the Southwest Pacific.⁵⁷ Sustaining a regional collective defense posture capable of balancing against a great power would be impractical without substantial and assured US participation.

When the United Kingdom withdrew from the region previously, Australia began to emphasize its alliance with the United States more prominently. Consequently, the RAAF gradually transitioned to a force structure influenced by the

⁵⁷ A revamped RAAF might focus on air defence; this is considered in Peter Layton, *Contested skies: Our uncertain air superiority future* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2018), 13–15.

United States, replacing British Canberra bombers with F-111s and French Mirage fighters with F/A-18s. If the United States were to similarly withdraw from the region in the future, a comparable shift could occur once again, this time toward other nations with perceived enduring interests in Australia and its surroundings.

France's geographic proximity to Australia through its overseas territory of New Caledonia, makes it a potential partner of strategic importance. Additionally, the United Kingdom maintains strong historical ties with Australia and is increasingly engaged with Japan on military matters, including collaborative efforts in developing a sixth-generation fighter.

The two concerns associated with the balance of power grand strategy are speculative possibilities that may not materialize, potentially allowing this strategy to endure as a stable foundation guiding the RAAF's future. However, the inherent uncertainties underscore the importance of not neglecting the engagement grand strategy. It would be prudent for the RAAF to carefully maintain its involvement in this grand strategy. For Australia and the RAAF, maintaining both grand strategies appears to be a strategic and shrewd approach. ✪

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