

# SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SEA POWER CENTRE AUSTRALIA

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## SAILING INTO THE FUTURE

The international security climate has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, and particularly over the last two years, forcing a major re-think of our security situation. We are facing a world much less certain and stable than before, and the Asia Pacific region is not immune from these changes. The Government now clearly expects the ADF to be far more pro-active in dealing with potential threats, moving from a focus on the direct Defence of Australia to a more expeditionary outlook. With this renewed emphasis on meeting trouble *before* it gets to our shores, a strong Navy remains critical to our national defence. Maritime Power has been an indispensable feature of almost every Australian military operation since 1901. Much of this has been transparent to the outsider, but maritime power has been, and remains, absolutely essential to virtually all Australian military operations.

For Australia the strategic influence of the sea is all encompassing. The sea permits direct or indirect attack on Australia's national interests from every direction. Australia's reliance on the sea for trade and economic well being is absolute. With globalisation resulting in greater interdependence of national economies, great harm could be done to the economy and the people of Australia by even low-level warfare or asymmetric threats against Australian trade or interests at a distance from our coastline. Control of the sea is not only axiomatic to the protection of trade but for the projection of power from the sea. In a maritime environment power can only be projected from the sea if a nation can assert power over the area of the sea that is required to support the operation. The growing importance of the sea in the Asia Pacific region is reflected in the rise of regional naval power, which indicates that the value of maritime power is being recognised by many countries as a critical factor in their development.

Given the maritime and littoral nature of Australia's strategic environment, *sea control* is vital, and the ability to gain and maintain sea control must be the basis upon which the Navy is structured. Sea control is that condition that exists when one has freedom of action to use an area of the sea for one's own purposes for a period of time and, if required, deny its use to an opponent. It is a relative rather than absolute concept. That is, you only need the degree of control required to achieve your mission, and only for the time taken to achieve your mission. Sea control is multi-dimensional, applying not only to the sea surface, but also to the water column and seabed, the air and space over the sea, and the adjoining land areas that influence the sea. Air and land forces are thus integral to the concept of sea control. Control of the air and the adjoining land areas, particularly in choke points and other key littoral zones, is critical.

Unfortunately, much of the benefit of maritime forces is not always apparent, and so does not feature in the public's perception of national security. Operations such as blockades

may continue quietly for many months before becoming effective, and critical efforts to maintain uninterrupted sea lines of communication to support land campaigns are usually forgotten when looking at the land campaign itself. Australians rarely realise that without sea control we could not have sent the ANZACs to Gallipoli, defended New Guinea in World War II, or operated in East Timor.

There are essentially three broad categories of tasks that maritime forces can undertake – diplomatic, constabulary and military. The RAN has seen a major increase in the tempo and range of operations in all three categories over the last ten years. Clearly the constabulary roles are an increasing focus for the Navy, with ongoing border protection activities, drug interdiction and fisheries patrols all being high profile and demanding requirements. A high level of diplomatic activity has been sustained, with visits, exercises and peace support activities. As with the Army and RAAF, and as has been recognised by the Government, naval forces structured and trained for military warfighting roles can undertake the less demanding diplomatic and constabulary ones, but the reverse is not true. Hence the RAN must be structured for warfighting, as the defence of Australia and its interests, is and must remain, the ADF's primary concern. Consequently, we need to maintain high-end warfighting capabilities within a *balanced fleet* of surface ships and submarines and the ability to coordinate with airborne assets and land forces to ensure control of the airspace and sea-land interface. We must structure to suit our own national needs, but some specific high-end naval capabilities, that are both critical for Australia's security and fully interoperable with coalition partners, are essential.

There are some key characteristics of seaborne forces that must be capitalised on to maximise our national security. The first is *mobility in mass*. Even a moderate sized ship can carry a far greater payload than an aircraft. Although slower than aircraft, ships are much faster than land forces, a key factor in littoral manoeuvre operations. Thus ships will remain the primary method of transferring the bulk of equipment and personnel, augmented by air movement for time-critical activities. Secondly, ships have both *reach and presence*. By carrying most of their logistic requirements with them, and deploying with dedicated replenishment and support vessels, a task group can operate for extended periods at long distances from shore support. The carrying capacity of ships also mean they can provide significant logistic support to land forces, minimising the footprint ashore. Additionally, ships do not need host nation support to operate away from Australian territory. Thirdly, *readiness* is also a key attribute. Ships can be ready to deploy in a contingency at very short notice. Fourthly, their *flexibility* means they can undertake a variety of roles, often simultaneously, during the same deployment. They can shift from the most benign of activities to offensive action with



virtually no warning. Finally, modern warships possess *resilience*, being designed to withstand significant damage or defects when coupled with well-trained crews. These attributes are critical in the Multi Dimensional Manoeuvre Concept that the ADF has recently endorsed for the future.

So where is the Navy heading in the future? *Force 2020* and the *Future Warfighting Concept*, detailing how we expect to fight by 2020, envisage the ADF operating as a truly *seamless* force, with tailored capability packages networked together to complement each other. The key enabling concept emerging is that of Network Centric Warfare (NCW), which aims to link the sensors, weapons and command and control systems of a force together into a seamless package. For the Navy the NCW future will largely be an evolution of the way we already conduct business, utilising the same principles, but with greater bandwidth, automation and function transferability.

The RAN clearly needs to be able to operate autonomously at significant distances from Australia and to support the Government's requirements to transport, protect and support land forces on extended operations in our immediate region and broader area of interest. While this most obviously requires amphibious sealift and afloat support ships, it is critical that the RAN retains a balanced fleet to provide for the sea control that is essential to achieve success in *any* offshore operations. The vision for 2020 is for a fleet of surface ships, aviation assets and submarines that have the ability to facilitate control of the maritime battlespace, in close cooperation with the RAAF and Army. At the heart of this force will be an air warfare capable destroyer or more correctly termed, a Sea Control Combatant (SCC), working with the Joint Strike Fighter, Airborne Early Warning & Control aircraft, Air to Air Refuelling aircraft, and Army Ground Based Air Defence assets, to maintain control of the air and provide air defence for an ADF task group deploying from Australian shores. Aircraft are obviously key components of this vision, but our geography places clear limitations on land based aircraft operations. Although forward bases in other countries will always be our preferred option, we cannot assume they will always be available or defensible, and a capable SCC will provide a high level of air control even in the absence of continuous aircraft support.

The SCC, whilst having a strong air warfare bias, will not, however, only be used for air defence. They will be our primary surface combatants and will deliver a range of capability options to the ADF. Capable of operating at the highest end of the conflict spectrum, they will contribute to activities for the direct defence of Australia, operating in the region, or globally as part of allied coalitions. The utility of these vessels means that they will be critical used across the full spectrum of maritime operations from diplomacy through to full-scale combat operations. They will also be the mainstay of our sea-based strike and air warfare capabilities, as well as having significant surface, undersea and electronic warfare abilities. They will be true multi-role platforms, fully interoperable with our major allies, key ADF assets to assert sea control, and absolutely essential to any ADF led operation offshore. The SCC will be supplemented by other surface combatants. The ANZAC Class frigates and any follow on surface combatants will need to be capable of working in the littoral environment as well as independently in the open ocean. RAN surface combatants must increasingly be able to deliver firepower further inshore in support of land operations, particularly during the vulnerable initial stages of a landing.

As the ADF becomes more expeditionary in its outlook, the

Navy will have the key role of transporting, protecting, landing and supporting land forces in the littoral. Work is already well advanced to introduce up to three large replacement amphibious ships, which will obviously need excellent range, good speed and self-protection capabilities. Importantly, these ships, in conjunction with replenishment ships, will have a significant role in supporting as much of the landing force infrastructure as possible, in order to minimise the footprint ashore. All these developments would significantly reduce the burden of both getting assets ashore and then supplying and protecting them. This 'sea basing' concept entails having as much of your force as possible at sea, only landing what you need to do the job ashore, when and where you need it, and is something the ADF should closely investigate.

Submarines will become increasingly networked and integrated into our task groups, and hence increasingly useful in the joint environment as well as their current individual roles. Unmanned Underwater Vehicles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles have a potential that needs to be exploited in the future to significantly reduce the risk to our people. They will be deployed from both surface ships and submarines in a variety of surveillance and warfare roles. The mine warfare capabilities again proved their worth during the Iraq War, and will remain a potent force into the future. A replacement capability is required in the 2020 timeframe. Finally, patrol boats are the mainstay of our constabulary force, and the requirements for the surveillance and response capabilities that these ships provide will inevitably increase over the coming decade.

The maritime strategy that we need for Australia's security relies on a strong, capable and balanced Navy, and in the increasingly uncertain times ahead we must have the ability to gain and maintain sea control. We must retain some cutting edge capabilities to be able to operate independently with an acceptable chance of success, as well as to contribute in a real and practical way to coalition operations. In short, land forces, embarked forces, naval assets, aircraft and command elements must be networked so everyone has the same picture, and the best placed assets, regardless of service, are tasked to deal with situations. A truly seamless force, able to work with the Army, RAAF and our allies to provide a total force package, is fundamental to meeting the strategic tasking of the Government.

*This is a summary of a speech to the United Service Institute on 6 August 2003 by the Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral C.A. Ritchie, AO, RAN.*

