

# SEMAPHORE

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## THE NAVAL CONTRIBUTION TO JOINT OPERATIONS

*There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics* - Benjamin Disraeli

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) strives to be a seamless joint force, one in which the integration of individual Service capabilities is recognised as a key warfare concept.<sup>1</sup> Within this context it has seldom been more important to ensure that those making or influencing Australian defence policy understand the contribution these Service capabilities bring to the joint ADF effort. Unfortunately, some lobbyists all too often view events through a single-service lens. The distortion inherent in such perspectives usually results in arguments that are misleading, if not fundamentally flawed. To take but one example, a review of the 2000 Defence White Paper assured readers that '...20 of the 22 operations that the ADF has taken part in over the last decade have overwhelmingly involved land forces'.<sup>2</sup> The author's contention, based on the experience of East Timor, Cambodia, Bougainville, Somalia and Vietnam, was that land forces—including certain undefined air and naval elements—represented almost the entire requirement for such operations.

The source for the 20/22 statistic was seemingly a map and table in the 2000 White Paper labelled 'ADF Involvement in Overseas Humanitarian Relief, Evacuations, Peacekeeping and Peace-Enforcement Operations 1990-present', which listed the 22 operations reproduced in Table 1.<sup>3</sup> The map made no claim to be comprehensive, and included no reference to relative levels of service participation, but it has nonetheless been regarded as authoritative. Certainly, the '20/22' interpretation has become widely accepted, and has since appeared regularly in officially sponsored publications.<sup>4</sup> The usual aim is to illustrate a perceived paradox between peacetime strategic theory and actual operational practice. Land forces, it is argued, have traditionally 'predominated' in Australia's offshore operations, yet a persistently larger proportion of the ADF's equipment vote and strategic intellectual capital has gone to its naval and air capabilities. The clear, and sometimes stated, implication is that these high technology assets have fallen far short of the land force contribution to making 'Australian policy both credible and effective'.<sup>5</sup>

The resources allocated under Australia's defence policy are beyond the scope of this newsletter, but it behoves those offering advice and analysis to use the best possible data. To anyone familiar with the tempo and scope of joint maritime operations over the last 15 years, the 20/22 statistic and similarly themed statements of relative usefulness make little sense. Not because the ADF's land forces have been under-engaged, but rather because Australia's maritime forces have proven at least equally effective as diplomatic and military tools and, at the unit level, have generally offered more flexible options during crisis planning and decision making.

### ADF Involvement in multinational peace operations

Operation	Naval Contribution
1. UNTSO - Lebanon/Syria, 1956-	None known
2. MFO - Sinai, 1993-	None known
3. UNIIMOG - Iran/Iraq, 1988-90	None known
4. UNTAG - Namibia, 1989-90	None known
5. MIF - Persian Gulf, 1990-2000	13 x MFU & personnel
6. DESERT STORM/POLLARD – Kuwait, 1991, 1999	4 x MFU & personnel
7. MINURSO - W. Sahara, 1991-94	None known
8. UNAMC/UNTAC - Cambodia, 1991-93	Personnel
9. UNOSOM (I&II) / UNITAF - Somalia, 1992-94	2 x MFU & personnel
10. UNAMIR - Rwanda, 1994-95	Personnel
11. SPPKF - Bougainville, 1994	3 x MFU & personnel
12. TMG/PMG - Bougainville, 1997-	Various units & personnel
13. INTERFET/ UNTAET - East Timor, 1999-	Various units & personnel
14. IPMT - Solomons, 2000-	Various units & personnel
Humanitarian relief and evacuation of civilians	
15. UNMCTT - Afghanistan/Pakistan, 1983-93	None known
16. CMAC - Cambodia, 1992-99	None known
17. MCO – Mozambique, 1992-2002	None known
18. Drought/Tsunami relief - PNG, 1997-98	3 x LCH & personnel
19. Drought relief - Irian Jaya, 1998	Various units & personnel
20. Evacuation of civilians – Cambodia, 1997	1 x MFU
21. Evacuation of civilians - Solomons, 2000	1 X MFU
22. Periodic disaster relief and other assistance in the South Pacific	Various units & personnel

Table 1: Selected ADF Operations 1990-2000

There is no official list of all ADF operations, offshore or otherwise, but by comparing Table 1 with the SPC-A's database<sup>6</sup> several features become clear.

First is the crucial nature of each naval component deployed, given that only eight of the operations listed in Table 1 did not include a naval contribution, either in the form of specialist staff or ships. This contribution was often of significant size and in the case of seagoing units invariably critical to operational success. In East Timor, for example, the first ADF assets in theatre in strength were from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). At its peak the INTERFET naval component included 20 warships and 5000 personnel, briefly outnumbering even the land forces.<sup>7</sup> As well as ensuring a secure environment for the insertion phase, the naval component provided continuing protection, surveillance and logistic sustainment for follow-on forces. In sum, more than 90 per cent of the cargo entering the theatre moved by sea, while all personnel and equipment movement within the theatre ultimately depended either on amphibious vessels or the ground and aviation fuel provided by naval tankers. To suggest, as



one narrative history has done, that other Service support to the land forces was 'fairly minimal', has little in common with operational reality.<sup>8</sup>

Similar assessments may be made about the naval and air contributions to peace missions in Somalia, Bougainville and the Solomons. RAAF aircraft and RAN ships first brought the joint force to the theatre then, in addition to patrol and response tasks, deployed ships offered a tailored combination of local mobility, afloat command & control, and communications, intelligence, aviation, medical, catering and even recreational support. By projecting power into remote and otherwise inaccessible locations naval units ensured presence over a far larger area than could otherwise have been achieved. The ADF's disaster relief operations, as the most recent events in Indonesia have highlighted, likewise included a large maritime component; simply because mobility in mass can be achieved no other way, and only ships possess the unique capabilities needed when infrastructure either does not exist or has been rendered inoperable. Just as vital, by minimising or removing the need for a footprint ashore naval capabilities place minimal stress on scarce local resources. In view of all these factors, the relevance of emotionally loaded terms such as 'overwhelmingly' and 'predominated' to the joint operational environment is questionable.

The second noteworthy feature is that the listed operations vary markedly in scope, complexity and significance. The land force contributions to the various UN missions in the Middle East involved contingents ranging from to 8-15 military observers in UNIMOG, to 13 in Lebanon, and a 45-strong force communications unit in the Western Sahara. The teams deployed for mine clearance were still smaller, with just two military members serving on rotation in Mozambique and 6-9 in Pakistan/Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> These activities were undoubtedly important, but they were also operationally constrained and, as peacekeeping missions, cannot be considered force structure determinants. It further stretches credibility to equate each with the naval contribution made to the Maritime Interception Force in the Persian Gulf. To 2000, this commitment had involved 13 major fleet unit (MFU) deployments and several thousand naval personnel, and has since seen another 21 MFU deployments and two major conflicts. Important in assessing the inherent versatility of naval forces is an understanding that the tasks undertaken in the Gulf regularly changed and ranged right across the spectrum of operations between the diplomatic, constabulary and military dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

A third feature is that Table 1 reflects only a selection of the ADF's recent offshore operations. Among those missing are: UNSCOM in Iraq (1991-2000); the Cambodian Maritime Assistance Project (1993-97); the Stabilisation Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1997-2004); and at least one disaster relief mission in South East Asia (1991). The first three included specialist naval personnel, while the last involved the crews of two MFUs providing aid after a volcanic eruption in the Philippines. Also absent are at least four operations planned to evacuate Australian nationals during regional civil disturbances, including Bougainville (1990) and Indonesia (1998). Although not always executed, the maritime option was available if needed, and Australia placed up to four major surface combatants and supporting units on high alert for each contingency. Australia has also undertaken a range

of long-term maritime surveillance operations in the region, notably GATEWAY (1981-) and SOLANIA (1988-), that are widely recognised as contributing to the security of our immediate neighbourhood. Although these operations are largely dependent on maritime patrol aircraft, they have made regular use of sophisticated naval capabilities. While their absence from the original listing is understandable, this reinforces the White Paper table's limitations as an authoritative reference.

Finally, in assessing the wider dimensions of Australia's security the role of warships in shaping our strategic environment should not be underestimated. Ignoring the argument that every naval deployment is an 'offshore operation', there has been a long-standing Government policy to use the RAN to maintain and enhance regional engagement. Thus major surface combatants, amphibious and logistic units, submarines, patrol boats and hydrographic vessels have kept up a series of rolling deployments in East Asia and the South Pacific. In addition to preserving an almost continuous high-profile presence and providing a practical demonstration of Australian interest in the region, there have been many secondary benefits. The late Admiral Michael Hudson, when Chief of Naval Staff, put it well when he wrote:

The skills our sailors take with them are highly regarded...and the Navy has been able to provide a great deal of assistance to local communities throughout the region. This aid scheme, often provided by the voluntary efforts of people in the Fleet, is a source of pride and fosters goodwill which could never be achieved through any amount of diplomacy or aid dollars.<sup>11</sup>

Implementation of Australia's joint strategic vision deserves better than flawed statistics and divisive debate. An assessment of our responses to recent crises might accurately remark: 'Over the past 15 years the ADF has used its diverse and highly versatile naval assets as either the lead units or essential enablers in every major and most smaller offshore operations.' The ADF's professional credibility demands that this contribution is both understood and publicly acknowledged.

<sup>1</sup> *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, ADDP-D.1, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, 2003, p. 6-1.  
<sup>2</sup> J. Hartley, 'A Review of the White Paper', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, February 2001, p. 29.  
<sup>3</sup> *Defence 2000, Our Future Defence Force*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2000, p. 11.  
<sup>4</sup> See M. Evans, *From Deakin to Dobb: The Army and the making of Australian Strategy in the 20th Century*, Land Warfare Studies Centre (LWSC) Working Paper No. 113, Canberra, 2001, p. 41; and *The Tyranny of Dissonance: Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of War 1901-2005*, LWSC Study Paper No. 306, Canberra, 2005, p. 75: 'Between 1989 and 1999, of twenty-two offshore operations that the ADF undertook, the Army—the Cinderella service since the end of the Vietnam War—predominated in twenty of them'.  
<sup>5</sup> J. Grey, *The Australian Army*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 257-8.  
<sup>6</sup> *Database of Royal Australian Navy Operations 1990-2005*, SPC-A Working Paper, forthcoming.  
<sup>7</sup> P. Kinghorne, 'OPERATION STABILISE - Naval Participation in East Timor', *Naval Supply Newsletter*, June 2000, pp. 25-6.  
<sup>8</sup> Grey, *The Australian Army*, p. 256.  
<sup>9</sup> N.F. James, 'A Brief History of Australian Peacekeeping', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 104, January/February 1994, pp. 3-18.  
<sup>10</sup> 'The RAN in the Gulf - two years on', *Semaphore* issue 3, March 2005.  
<sup>11</sup> Royal Australian Navy, *Chief of Naval Staff Newsletter June 1987*, Department of Defence (Navy Office), Canberra, 1987, p. 21.

