

SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SEA POWER CENTRE AUSTRALIA

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THE NEW MARITIME SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The recent upsurge in world terrorism and the potential for so-called 'rogue states' to acquire weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles has led to some rapid reassessments of national security demands in many countries, including Australia. The most recent Australian strategic assessment, *The Defence Update 2003* highlighted these newly prominent threats and the implications for the ADF. It also acknowledged the troubled nature of Australia's immediate region and its greater exposure to a variety of security threats. A likely outcome of the reassessment is a greater focus on ADF operations in the immediate neighbourhood, in response to terrorism or the many other existing and potential security problems.

Terrorist attacks in the last three years, have generated some broader appreciations of the nature of national security. South-East Asia has seen a resurgence of terrorist activity recently, some directly affecting Australia's interests. Most recent regional terrorist acts have involved relatively unsophisticated explosive devices, but the potential for attacks with more sophisticated weapons has been foreshadowed in the recent foiled attempt to smuggle shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles into the USA and the failed attempt in Kenya to shoot down an airliner in November 2002. There is also evidence of the desire by terrorist groups to acquire weapons of mass destruction, whether chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has a long record of involvement in countering terrorism within Australia, ranging from intelligence support to physical security of venues and hostage recovery. The extent to which the ADF could become further involved in counter-terrorism operations within Australia will depend on the nature of emerging threats, although the recent creation of a second Tactical Assault Group and an Incident Response Regiment flag an ongoing, enhanced role. The more sophisticated the threat, the more likely ADF capabilities will play a part in countering them. This could bring into play some major elements of the Force, including RAAF maritime patrol aircraft and RAN warships where shipping or maritime resources are involved.

Further afield, the potential for the ADF to be involved in countering terrorism will depend significantly on the willingness of regional countries to permit Australian involvement and on the development of regional approaches to the matter. Nevertheless, terrorism – like any threat – is better dealt with at a distance from the homeland if at all possible. The extent to which the sea dominates the region suggests that the Navy could play a significant role in counter-terrorism operations, either in its own right or jointly.

Defence 2000 determined that the ADF must comprise forces able to protect our maritime approaches and to support maritime and land forces deployed into the region. *Defence*

Update 2003 introduced two extra threats, terrorism and the proliferation and potential for use of weapons of mass destruction, noting the potential for increased calls for the ADF to operate in the immediate neighbourhood. It also accepted that our strategic circumstances had changed and that there would be consequent implications for future types of conflict, operations and the capabilities we would need. Nonetheless, the terrorist attacks since September 2001 have not 'changed everything'. There is still a range of security tasks and challenges likely to require the application of the operational capabilities now in the ADF and planned for it in the future. In recent years, for example, the Navy has been heavily involved in a very wide range of operations, ranging from outwardly simple policing tasks to major military campaigns.

The Navy has been involved in interception operations in the Persian Gulf for several years, has provided substantial support to land operations in East Timor, has prevented the arrival of illegal immigrants, has conducted sovereignty patrols in the Southern Ocean, and now has an ongoing support role in the Solomon Islands peacekeeping mission. But, even as the nation has been preparing to deal with terrorism locally, the Navy, as part of ADF contingents, has participated in two major 'conventional' military campaigns in the last two years within major maritime coalitions.

Another significant issue is the recent reminder that events demanding a military response can emerge with little or no warning – and can result in rapid policy shifts on the part of government. While the *Defence Update 2003*, produced in March 2003, noted that the Australian Government should not be expected to solve the problems of the Solomon Islands, by July the ADF had been committed to support the Solomon Islands government restore order. There can be no telling what future challenges will emerge for the Navy. One clear outcome of recent events is a realisation by Australian defence policy makers that a strategy emphasising protection of the maritime approaches and ultimately defence of the landmass is no longer sufficient. Changed strategic circumstances are demanding much greater emphasis on operations within the region by the ADF, with perhaps a greater emphasis on land force operations in future. More frequent operations in the region would involve a high priority for maritime forces. Any operations to be conducted offshore by the Army will be Joint. The naval contribution will include transport to the area of operations, command and control facilities, logistics support, and force protection in the area of operations. It could also permit sea-basing and the associated flexibility of force deployment and extraction.

The Navy will also need to be capable of future coalition operations with regional partners as well as with the USN. Experience and changing circumstances suggest that operations could occur anywhere from the Persian Gulf to the Korean Peninsula. Developments in the region, the breadth of



tasking which is likely to confront the Navy as a result of the changed strategic circumstances and the national response to them will call on the full range of naval capabilities.

The nature of the region is such that ports will not always be available and operations will often require amphibious sealift – ships capable of loading and offloading over beaches or from offshore, using landing craft and helicopters. The amphibious sealift ships will also need extensive command and control suites for the management of joint and coalition operations. Resupply and sustainment operations will for the most part be accomplished by Navy afloat support ships. They will need to be capable of carrying and distributing a wide variety of stores, including ammunition. Afloat support vessels will be needed to support both amphibious forces and other naval forces.

Australian forces deployed offshore will need protection. The nature and extent of any threat will vary significantly with the circumstances and geographical setting. In some cases, where there is no evident or overt threat, protective forces could act simply as a deterrent. RAAF tactical and maritime patrol aircraft will contribute to such protective efforts, although the latter will often find it difficult to maintain a permanent presence in an area of operations, because of their limited range and the uncertain availability of forward operating bases. Permanent force protection can be provided by the Navy's surface combatants, which offer sustained and flexible force protection options for ADF forces operating in the coastal fringes of the entire region.

Surface combatant sustainability comes in part from a level of logistic self-sufficiency but mostly from the capacity to replenish from afloat support ships. This results in an ability to remain on station for months at a time. Their flexibility comes from their inherent responsiveness and adaptability and the considerable combat power they can wield. Surface combatants can move from the most benign of postures to the most offensive in very little time – and if necessary, with little or no outward sign of having done so. Similarly, the range of sensors and weapons carried by these ships allows them to 'up the ante' gradually if circumstances so dictate. In a force protection role, surface combatants can deal with a range of threats simultaneously including: submarines, surface craft, aircraft, anti-ship missiles, and a range of land-based threats. Recent ADF operations in the region have indicated the need to counter quite sophisticated levels of threat. Importantly, however, there are limits to the capacity of the RAN's existing surface combatants to manage some threats, especially sophisticated threats from the air. While they could provide self-defence and defence of other units in the immediate vicinity, their ability to provide comprehensive area defence of a deployed force would be very much diminished by the lack of long-range sensors and weapons. It is primarily these inadequacies that the new air warfare capable destroyer is intended to correct.

Submarines can also contribute to force protection, through intelligence gathering and operations against adversary submarines and surface vessels within an area of operations. Beyond that, the submarine force can also be used offensively in support of offshore operations with their covert ability to insert special forces units.

Finally, there may be circumstances, such as those in the recent Iraqi conflict, in which mine warfare forces will play a significant protective role. The region in which we operate is susceptible to minelaying and our response to such operations could include RAN mine warfare forces.

Terrorism, as manifested recently in South-East Asia, has generated a new and immediate threat to Australian interests. Thus far it has been limited to relatively unsophisticated attacks but more sophisticated means will likely be used in future. The nature and extent of the threat means that it has to be taken seriously and that the ADF must be an integral part of the national response to it. Furthermore, the ADF will need to adapt as the nature of the terrorism threat changes.

One such adaptation could include ADF operations offshore and within the region. These operations could involve elements of all three Services, including Navy surface combatants, submarines, amphibious sealift and minewarfare forces. Offshore operations could also be required for other reasons, as terrorism is by no means the only threat, and Australia's immediate region still presents a range of problems of a more traditional kind.

The main implication of these developments for the RAN is likely to be a greater emphasis on operations in support of land forces. Virtually any offshore land operation will involve the Navy both in transport and in force protection roles. Depending on circumstances, and the areas of operation, many if not all of the Navy's combat and support capabilities could be brought into play. In some instances, the Navy might well be the major provider of force protection. In such circumstances, the Navy could also expect to be confronted by a range of threats including traditional yet sophisticated ones.

The combination of emerging and existing threats to Australia and its interests in the region will continue to present the nation with significant security challenges. The intention to include offshore deployment of land forces in the response to them will place a new emphasis on maritime forces and in particular those of the Navy. All such deployments will demand much support from the Navy and will demonstrate again the already proven value of maintaining a Navy with a broad balance of capabilities.

Sea Power Centre Australia

Defence Establishment Fairbairn, CANBERRA ACT 2600

Director	CAPT Richard Menhinick	(02) 6287 6253
Facsimile		(02) 6287 6426

Naval History Section

Director of Naval History	Dr David Stevens	(02) 6266 2423
Facsimile		(02) 6266 2782

Research Section

Research Officer	LCDR Glenn Kerr	(02) 6287 6411
Facsimile		(02) 6287 6426

