

# SEMAPHORE

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## ADF AMPHIBIOUS CAPABILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NAVY

The Government's announcement in November 2003 that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will acquire major amphibious and sealift ships should not be underestimated in the challenge it represents to the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the ADF. Strategic concepts, joint doctrine and tactics, and individual and collective training will all require development in order to maximise the potential advantages that an amphibious capability can provide. This applies not just to the amphibious fleet units, but to the entire RAN, as sea control is both a central tenet of a maritime strategy and a prerequisite to successful power projection and expeditionary operations using amphibious forces.

The Chief of Defence Force's (CDF's) direction to reinvigorate the Joint Amphibious Warfare Capability and to develop an Amphibious Ready Group, based on a high readiness Amphibious Ready Element, highlights the growing appreciation of the utility that a true Amphibious Warfare capability offers to Australia's strategic circumstances. Australia lies within an archipelagic region in which over 95% of cities and the population are in the littoral. The littoral may be defined as that area of the sea susceptible to influence or support from the land, and that area of the land susceptible to influence or support from the sea. Many strategists and historians have noted that the principal purpose of sea power is to 'determine or influence, and sometimes decide issues upon the land',<sup>1</sup> for as the maritime theorist Corbett pointed out, because 'people live on land, decisive results can only be concluded on land'.<sup>2</sup> Liddell-Hart described an amphibious force as 'the best kind of fire-extinguisher because of its flexibility, reliability, logistic simplicity and relative economy'.<sup>3</sup>

The Australian experience of amphibious operations is extensive, ranging from World War I to the present day. Our first national land operations were landings conducted in Rabaul and Gallipoli in 1914-15. Australian forces participated in raids and amphibious assaults in the Persian Gulf, Mediterranean and Pacific in World War II. RAN ships supported the Inchon landing in the Korean War, the INTERFET and UNTAET operations in East Timor, and riverine operations and the Royal Marines assault on the Al Faw Peninsula during the 2003 Iraq War. Most recently, Australian forces conducted a limited entry operation in the Solomon Islands.

Naval forces have a vital strategic ability to be used for political and diplomatic purposes, by being able to poise in international waters without appearing to directly interfere in another nation's affairs, yet able to act quickly when required.<sup>4</sup> Freedom of navigation is enshrined in the Law of the Sea. Amphibious warfare provides a unique capability

to exploit the maritime environment and achieve freedom of manoeuvre. Unlike land and air based forces, maritime forces can use the sea as an open medium by which to choose the time and place of landing. They are not reliant on forward operating bases, permissive entry or host-nation support, making them highly responsive to changing circumstances. Such forces can directly influence the critical vulnerabilities of an adversary.

In terms of amphibious capability, a small, dedicated, high-readiness force, trained and embarked, can threaten a vast area of the battlespace, achieving disproportionate effect for its size by representing a dilemma of uncertainty to an adversary. Such potential was most recently demonstrated in the 1991 Gulf War when an embarked US Marine Corps force diverted Iraqi units to defending the Kuwait shore, weakening the opposition to the real assault across the border of Saudi Arabia. Given the small scale of the ADF, it is crucial to achieve this kind of disproportionate strategic or operational effect, using a mobile tactical manoeuvre force, able to strike at will in time and space.

Sea Control, the freedom of action to use an area of sea for one's own purposes for a period of time or, if required, deny its use to an opponent,<sup>5</sup> is central to amphibious operations. Sea Control must be obtained to reduce the risk to the embarked force and the high-cost amphibious assets. At the same time, amphibious operations can assist in gaining Sea Control, for instance by denying land areas adjoining strategic straits and waterways to hostile elements.

CDF has reiterated the requirement for the ADF to have a Navy capable of Sea Control and Power Projection and an Army that is smart, hard, trained and ready to be projected in this complex environment.<sup>6</sup> The ADF must shift from a 'lift and lodge' philosophy, where Army units are deposited on a foreign shore for autonomous land operations, to a true manoeuvre warfare philosophy, using joint forces to exert influence in an uncertain littoral security environment.<sup>7</sup> The ADF must think of operations as a continuum, flowing seamlessly from initial deployment and lodgement, through redeployments, to the military end state, in order to achieve the operational and strategic effects articulated by Government. Single Service and joint doctrine and capabilities must reflect these shifts.

The Army must adopt a key role in our national maritime strategy.<sup>8</sup> As the Army continues to define its Amphibious Battlegroup and Combat Team concepts,<sup>9</sup> a shift is required to a view that a sea-based amphibious landing force can exploit littoral manoeuvre to achieve a decisive effect. This idea is being explored in emerging Army concepts and may be linked to a coordinated and concurrent airborne assault



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to achieve an overwhelming 'system shock' on an adversary.

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) will also have an integral role in the national maritime strategy, providing support to the ADF amphibious warfare capability, both during the sea movement and land-based phases. RAAF assets will provide essential functions including: Combat Air Patrols; a contribution to the maritime situational awareness through Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft; anti-submarine and anti-surface operations via Strike and Maritime Patrol Aircraft; and offensive support to land forces employing strike capable aircraft.

All elements of the RAN will have a role in maximising the utility of an amphibious warfare capability. The new specialist amphibious ships and their landing craft will need to operate with a large force of personnel, helicopters, armoured and other vehicles, as well as medical and headquarters capabilities. They will need to extend and maintain skills in multiple-aircraft flight deck operations while conducting concurrent landing craft well-dock operations, in all weathers and conditions, and in all threat environments. The future sealift capability, while not purpose built for amphibious warfare, will contribute to the amphibious mission by ferrying troops and equipment.

Surface combatants and submarines have a critical role in establishing Sea Control around an amphibious task force and assisting in projecting force ashore. Future combatants like the Air Warfare Destroyer will be crucial to this task and their weapon, sensor and combat data systems must be optimised for littoral operations. Naval fire support systems, potentially including enhanced range gun munitions and land attack missiles, will be essential to both shaping operations and the early phases of the landing while land-based fire support systems are deploying. While the ADF does not plan to operate against defended entry points, experience on South Georgia Island in the 1982 Falklands War demonstrated the threat that even an infantry section armed with light support weapons can pose to a landing force, and the utility of naval fire support in its neutralisation. Surface combatants must be able to protect the task force they are escorting from land, air and maritime threats, be they missile, torpedo, electronic or direct-fire attacks. Submarines will contribute essential reconnaissance and surveillance information as well as interdicting hostile maritime forces sent to interfere with operations.

Mine warfare and clearance diving forces will have a vital role in ensuring freedom of manoeuvre, from conducting clandestine beach reconnaissance to the clearance of mines and obstacles in the beach approaches. Hydrographic forces are also redeveloping the tactical application of their skills in providing 'rapid environmental assessment' of the hydrography, oceanography and meteorology of the littoral zone. Patrol boats may also have a role in assisting the protection of amphibious forces in the inshore littoral, including riverine operations as demonstrated by coalition forces during the recent Iraq War. None of these skills are new to the RAN. Our hydrographic, mine warfare and patrol boat forces earned a high reputation in World War II in the South-West Pacific for

their support to Allied amphibious operations against Japanese forces. RAN surface combatants provided essential anti-aircraft defence and naval gunfire support to most of these operations. These hard earned skills were allowed to decline post-war as the focus on littoral warfare shifted to a focus on Cold War anti-submarine warfare as a result of the growing Soviet submarine threat in the Pacific.

In terms of doctrine, the RAN needs to continue to develop an understanding of what it means to wield a landing force as a maritime weapon. A broad understanding of how Army conducts land warfare will be crucial to developing joint concepts, tactics and doctrine. RAN amphibious doctrine must be developed in coordination with Army, RAAF and Joint concepts such as Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment, Expeditionary Air Warfare and Ship to Objective Manoeuvre. Developing the intimate understanding of each other's domains, between the Commander of the Amphibious Task Force and the Commander of the Landing Force and their staffs, is an essential factor in the command and control of amphibious operations and training. Exercising and habitual working relationships are the keys to achieving this.

Individual training will embrace amphibious warfare skill-sets, flowing through warfare officer, logistic and staff training, and introducing Amphibious Warfare elements into many individual RAN sailor and officer courses. Collective training will also evolve. A revised approach to managing Joint and single Service training is being developed. In order to provide the directed Amphibious Ready Element at short notice, and ultimately the Amphibious Ready Group, a much greater degree of lower tactical level, integrated training is required. This will ensure personnel in the ships, landing craft, land force, helicopters and headquarters have the intimate understanding of each other's requirements to be able to deploy to meet short notice contingencies such as evacuations and interventions in non-permissive or hostile environments.

The enhancement of Australia's Amphibious Warfare capability, as part of a balanced force, is a very significant one for the ADF and the RAN. New thinking, new and re-learned skills, and a degree of joint cooperation, never seen before and reflecting the ADF's vision of a seamless force, will be required.

- <sup>1</sup> Edward L. Beach, quoted in Clark G. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea*, London, 1976, p. 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Gibson, J.D., 'Sir Julian Corbett on Amphibious Operations', *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 1998, p. 69.
- <sup>3</sup> Sir Basil Liddell-Hart, quoted in *ADDP3.2 – Amphibious Operations*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, 2003, p. 3-6.
- <sup>4</sup> Royal Australian Navy, *Australian Maritime Doctrine*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra 2000, p. 43.
- <sup>5</sup> Royal Australian Navy, *Australian Maritime Doctrine*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra 2000, p. 39.
- <sup>6</sup> General Peter Cosgrove, Transcript of Speech to Senior Leadership Recall Day, 31 July 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> Sea Power Centre - Australia, 'The New Maritime Security Environment', *Semaphore*, Issue 13, November 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Defence Publishing Service, Canberra, 2000, Section 6.7.
- <sup>9</sup> Director General Future Land Warfare, Army Development Concept for Entry from the Air and Sea, 24 July 2002.



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