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The future of the Amphibious Task Force

an address to the Institute on 28 May 2013 by
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Commander, Australian Amphibious Task Group¹



The Australian Defence Force is developing an amphibious task force with United States and United Kingdom assistance. Based on two new 27,000 tonne amphibious assault ships, this will be a major leap in Australia's amphibious capability and will be a key enabler of Australia's maritime strategy.

Key words: Australia; maritime strategy; amphibious operations; amphibious assault ships.

The amphibious task force is a very exciting but at the same time challenging capability for the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The level of collaborative effort across the ADF on the development of the amphibious capability has been excellent and, in general, we are embracing the opportunities that it presents. We have made some great progress, especially over the last 18 months, and we have a good plan for the future in order to realise the amphibious task force capability.

We should be in no doubt, however, about the complexity of the challenges we face and we need to carefully manage expectations about what can be done and when. Forums such as this help us to manage these expectations. If we do not view this as a totally new capability and work at understanding what we can do with it, we will find it difficult to realise its full potential. If we get this right and realise the full potential, we would probably be one of only 8 to 10 nations that would be able to deploy this type of incredibly flexible force.

I will begin by explaining how an amphibious task force capability fits into Australia's maritime strategy and then explain what an amphibious task force can contribute to a maritime strategy. I will not detail the 'tactical' level of the capability – *i.e.* the specifics of ships, vehicles, and aircraft that will make up the Amphibious Task Force – although I will touch on this near the end.

Australia's Maritime Strategy

The Chief of Navy, in recent speeches, has focused on a maritime strategy and the need for a genuine maritime school of

thought in Australia. I want to emphasise that a maritime strategy is not all about Navy. Any maritime strategy must draw on all the Australian Defence Organisation's capabilities, as well as be integrated with other national capabilities, drawing on all instruments of national power.

Figure 1 depicts Australian maritime sovereignty, sovereign rights, and key transport and communications lanes, and those of our neighbours. It provides a different way of looking at the ocean and the areas where sovereign rights can be exercised. In order for the ADF to have an effective maritime strategy, we need to understand all dimensions of our maritime environment, including its terrain and, increasingly, the management of movement and communications on that terrain. There are many nuances and complexities embedded in this chart that can significantly impact our ability to operate if we do not understand them.

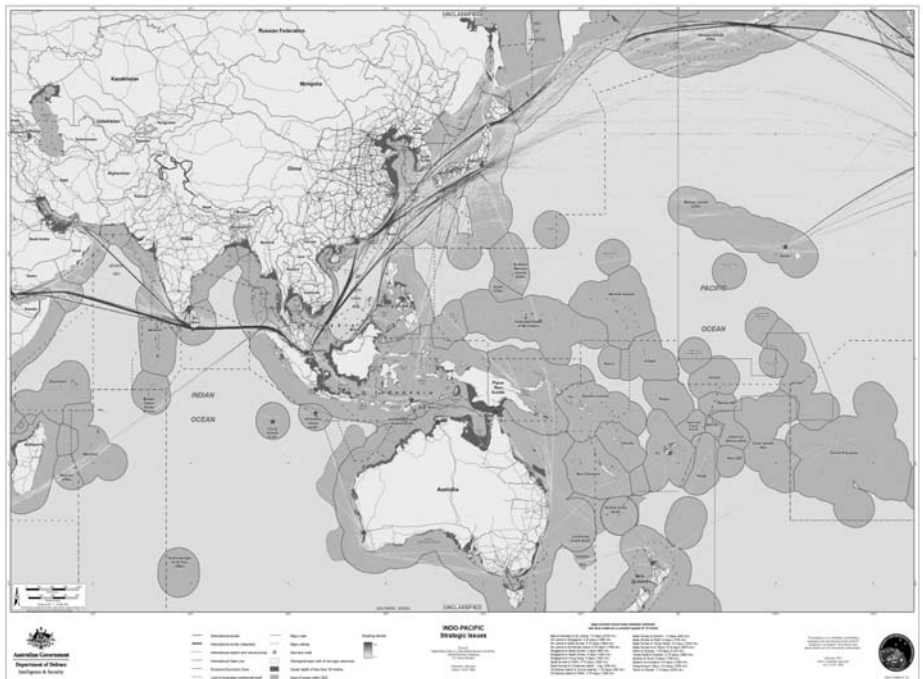


Figure 1: Chart depicting maritime sovereignty and sea lines of communication of Australia and its neighbours [Department of Defence]

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