

# THE **NAVY**

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THE JOURNAL OF THE NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA



**DEFENCE ELECTION COMMITMENTS ANALYSIS**

**AMAN DIALOGUE: BLUE ECONOMY – NAVIES  
AS ENABLERS OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY**

**AUSTRALIA'S INCREASINGLY  
IMPORTANT ROLE IN REGIONAL  
MARITIME SECURITY**

**REGIONAL  
MARITIME  
SECURITY**

**GLOBAL THREAT FROM SEA  
– DENOUEMENT ASHORE**

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### Front cover:

HMA Ships alongside HMAS STIRLING in preparation for Anti-Submarine Warfighting Exercise 2025 (Image LSIS Iggy Roberts).

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## Outlook Bleak

This issue begins with a detailed breakdown by NLA analysts of *Defence Election Commitments* made by the Government and the Opposition. Ironically, as of writing the only detailed manifesto commitments have been made by the Greens.

The NLA and *THE NAVY* are delighted to publish Rear Admiral Christopher Smith AM, CSM RAN excellent address to the AMAN Dialogue, hosted by the Pakistan Navy. The dialogue was attended by representatives from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and the *Primorsky Fleet* (otherwise known as the Russian Navy). The PLAN (with close relations to the Pakistan Navy) attended both the dialogue and the subsequent exercise. Given the attendees – from the *No Limits Axis* (NOLA) of China, Russia, and Iran – what Admiral Smith had to say was highly significant. He based his address on the *Blue Economy and Navies as enablers of economic prosperity* submitting:

*Good Order at sea is a conscious choice to steer clear of shoal waters and to avoid poor weather.*

Although universally recognised as the foundation of global prosperity, Good Order at sea is a conscious choice by nations. It is a conscious choice to:

- respect and uphold treaties to which they are a signatory;
- uphold customary international law;
- respect the sovereignty of other nations, just as a nation would expect its own sovereignty to be respected.

Colleagues, fellow naval and maritime leaders, I submit to you: conscious choices are being made contrary to the interests of good order at sea, contrary to furthering a Blue Economy with prosperity for all.

Given the audience, the address was direct and to the point. It would have had to have been approved by the Prime Minister & Cabinet Office and DFAT, prior to release. Which makes what Admiral Smith had to say even more significant. He gave as example, of actions which diminish good order at sea are the various examples of merchant vessels dragging anchors across communications cables and other seabed critical infrastructure having a significant disruptive impact on the global economic system:

*As a professional mariner, Admiral Smith found it hard to believe that so many anchors, could be so suddenly be poorly secured, for such extended periods of time.*



Northrop-Grumman-AQS-24-Mine Hunting UAS.



PLA Research Vessel Tan Suo Yi Hao patrolling Southern Ocean around Australian coast March 2025 (China Institute of Deep-sea Science & Engineering).

Building on the Blue Economy theme, picked up by Dr Simon Reay Atkinson in paper 4, he concluded:

The United Nations Law of the Sea Convention, in which 160 nations participated, remains one of the United Nation's greatest achievements. It has and can continue to underpin the current Blue Economy and Future Prosperity for all our nations. And Navies and Maritime Forces play essential roles in supporting it.

The second paper is by returning author and 2nd Prize (*Professional Essay*) Captain George Galdorosi USN (Ret). George examines *Australia's increasingly important role in regional maritime security: reconciling ends and means*. George addresses the accelerating move of the USN towards a Hybrid Fleet – arguing that “Australia would be well-served to keep a keen eye on how this hybrid fleet develops on the other side of the Pacific to see if this model might be right for Australia”.

Having worked at the U.S. Navy's Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific, and served as the assistant technical project officer for the Center's information exchange program with Australia, as well as with the Five-Eyes Technical Cooperation Program – Captain Galdorosi is well placed to provide insight into the threats and opportunities facing the ADF and RAN. His view is that

Australia is at an inflection point where it can accelerate its efforts to insert more uncrewed maritime systems into its force structure for many of the same reasons that the U.S. Navy has chosen to do so. If done properly– and with alacrity—this can only enhance Australia's important role in providing regional maritime security.

The author also holds back – knowing that advances are slow, and challenges to the RAN significant. At a time when a hybrid fleet of anti-access denial (A2D) systems and mine counter measures are of vital importance. If the RAN is to get out of port and address the A2D threat to undersea cables referred to By Admiral Smith. Where the next war is likely to begin – if not already in play.

Another returning author, John Hunter (*Essay 2nd Prize Non-Professional entry*) picks up on considerations made by Admiral Smith and Captain Galdorosi by examining the “three island chain strategy”, in his paper *Regional Maritime Security – a bit of history and a cautionary tale*. Hunter argues that Australia created the vacuum (into which China is playing) by not doing more, earlier. By negotiating with the larger economies “very long-term forward basing arrangements, shared with ANZUS partners, improving harbour and berthing facilities in key strategic island nations.” He suggests a tiered approach “with one or two major



PLAN LIAONING (CVG 16) A carrier coming to a sea near you.

## DANGEROUS TIMES

In the UK in the 1970s, one-third of Government spending went on health, education, and welfare. Today it is 75%, leaving only 25% for the rest, to prepare for war, fund defence, national security etc. The growth as seen in the NDIS – referred to in *Defence Election Commitments* analysis – has been 20 per cent per annum in recent years. It will eclipse Defence spending in 2027/8. These types of Government spending and debt – without productivity gains – are unsustainable. The challenge to all Western Governments is that without change, countries will be unable to sustain these services, and may go bankrupt if unable to borrow. The only way to create headroom for Defence short of significantly improving public sector productivity, although Trump and DOGE may be addressing this and U.S. debt – is to spend less on health, education, and welfare. Something no politicians have been willing to even contemplate to date.

Dr Atkinson notes Chris Donnelly's observation that "behind Trump's rhetoric, there is a desperate need to deal with America's terrible debt problem and to transform what had become a sclerotic form of governance."

It would be wrong to think it is plane sailing for China. There is considerable and growing evidence to suggest that China is in economic, fiscal, social, and political crisis. Dr Atkinson also refers to the deceptions in Communist Government's reporting. One of the reasons that brought down the Soviet Union. According to CCP, UN, WHO estimates the Chinese population may be 1.4 billion. However, this is being challenged. Two factors are seemingly in play. Based on the one-child policy, it appears unlikely that China's population would have grown faster than India's. At the same time, China has an ageing population – potentially impacted more by COVID, than previously admitted. Some suggest the actual Chinese population may be between 650 and 950 million, post COVID (due also to previous over-reporting). Explaining, in part, the empty and depopulating cities. If this is the case, the economic threats facing China and Xi Jinping may be significantly worse than first thought.

In recent months, Xi Jinping's position has been significantly weakened following the *CCP Two Sessions* – the concurrent meetings of China's legislature, the *National People's Congress* (NPC) and its political advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in February 2025 – specifically in senior PLA commands. There is a view that the Red Princelings challenging Xi will act to reduce the threat of a Taiwan invasion. There is another view, that the same factions (now controlling the PLA), will use a Taiwan invasion to topple Xi. The situation appears perilous. If Xi continues with his planning, China will invade Taiwan by 2027. If he backs off, the Red Princeling factions, will bring the matter to a head – using a Taiwan invasion as a ruse to seize power. There appear parallels to Germany in 1914 – where the Kaiser and political factions were all arguing for war, for different purposes and reasons.

As has been seen by the recent PLAN Surface Action Group deployed around Australia in February and the ongoing spy ship surveying Australia's high-speed maritime cables (amongst other things), Australia is the front line. It is the stopper to CCP ambitions beyond the South China Sea. In other words, irrespective of what Australian's might think, Chinese PLA planners are thinking about war with Australia in the event of invading Taiwan. ■

deep-water naval base agreements, augmented with less expensive and easier-to-negotiate small port upgrades that could support major naval assets in small numbers on short stay." Combine with "upgrades to airport and air traffic management facilities also in key strategic countries." Noting the horse may already have bolted, Hunter suggests:

Australia and its regional allies must increase its investment in the region by ramping up political, diplomatic, economic, and military activities - quickly and with the open support of the USA. This increased focus will counter the developing multi-lateral relationships China is seeking in our maritime backyard, a backyard critically important for national and regional security.

The final paper by Dr Simon Reay Atkinson returns to a theme developed in his October paper *Globalisation is to the Maritime as Oceans are to the World*, in which he argued that fundamental to globalisation is the Blue Economy, referred to by Admiral Smith (paper 1). In *Maritime is Global – It's the Blue Economy that leads it*, Atkinson argues that challenges to the Global Order of the time come first from sea, even though the dénouement is ashore. He cites the USSR peaking as an industrial power in 1973 with its modern, industrial-age fleet – unable to keep pace in the information age. And bankrupt and dissolved by 1989/1992. He identifies that, potentially during COVID, for the first time in 80 years, US global comparative GDP (GCGDP) increased. While China's, having flat lined since 2010, decreased. Dr Atkinson contends that China has at the same time built the best information-age fleet – to challenge the U.S. – just as the scientific age changes. From the *Information Age*, to what he calls the *Synthetical* (AI) *Age*. Quoting some advanced economics – for the editor at least – he argues that if the Global West and its people can engage with the new sciences, industries, and capabilities of the time – then they may lead the new age. And defeat, economically, the threat posed by China. It is an interesting thesis – based upon historical precedence – and one that contains significant risks. Risks that the West is no longer able to respond – and has created Soviet political economies of its own, e.g. the EU. And, or, that China will accelerate its military ambitions, knowing that it risks falling behind. Given also its own economical and societal challenges – exacerbated during COVID. Along with a falling comparative Global GDP. As other western economies and the US improve.



For the maintenance of the Maritime wellbeing of the nation. The Navy League is intent upon keeping before the Australian people the fact that we are a maritime nation and that a strong Navy and capable maritime industry are elements of our national wellbeing and vital to the freedom of Australia. The League seeks to promote Defence self-reliance by actively supporting defence manufacturing, research, cyberspace, shipping, transport, and other relevant industries.

Through geographical necessity Australia's prosperity, strength, and safety depend to a great extent upon the security of the surrounding seas and island areas, and on unrestricted seaborne trade.

The strategic background to Australia's security is changing and, in many respects, has become much less certain following increasing tensions, particularly in East Asia involving major powers, and in Europe and the Middle East. The League believes that Australia should rapidly increase the capability to defend itself, paying particular attention to maritime defence.

## The Navy League:

- Believes Australia can be defended against attack and that the prime requirement of our defence is an evident ability to control the sea and air space around us and to contribute to defending essential lines of sea, undersea and air communication with our Allies and trading partners.
- Supports a continuing strong alliance with Five Eyes, AUKUS, QUAD, FPDA, and ANZUS partners.
- Supports close relationships with all nations in our general area particularly PNG, Indonesia, the Philippines and the South Pacific Island States.
- Advocates the acquisition of the most capable modern armaments, surveillance systems, sensors, and decision support to ensure decisive advantage over forces in our general area.
- Advocates a strong deterrent element in the ADF.
- Believes the ADF must be capable of protecting commercial shipping both within Australian waters and beyond, in conjunction with allies.
- Endorses the development of the capability for the patrol and surveillance of all of Australia's ocean areas, its island territories and the Southern Ocean.
- Supports Government initiatives for rebuilding an Australian commercial fleet capable of supporting the ADF and the carriage of essential cargoes to and from Australia in times of conflict.
- Supports Government intention to increase maritime preparedness and increase defence expenditure to 3% of GDP.
- Urges the strength and capabilities of the Army (including particularly the Army Reserve) and Air Force be enhanced, and the weaponry, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, cyberspace and electronic capabilities of the ADF be increased, including an expansion in its UAS, UUV capability.
- The Navy League believes maritime Defence requires a joint integrated endeavour across Navy, Army and Air Force.
- Considers that the level of both the offensive and defensive capabilities of the RAN should be strengthened, in particular with a further increase in the number of proposed replacement surface combatants noting the need to ensure essential fuel and other supplies, and the many other essential maritime tasks.
- Recommends bringing forward the start date of the destroyer replacement program to both strengthen the RAN and mitigate the local industry capability gap.
- Recommends the urgent replacement and increase in numbers of the current mine-countermeasure force.
- Strongly supports the early acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines.
- Recommends very early action to provide a strategic submarine base on the Eastern seaboard and further development of Western Australia facilities.
- Notes the potential combat effectiveness and flexibility of the STOVL version of the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35B Lightning II) and supports further examination of its application within the ADF through the LHDs.
- Supports the development of Australia's defence industry, including strong research and design organisations capable of the construction and maintenance of all warships, submarines, and support vessels in the Navy's order of battle, and welcomes the Government decision to provide a stable and continuous shipbuilding program.
- Advocates the retention in maintained reserve of operationally capable ships that are required to be paid off for resource or other economic reasons.
- Supports a strong and identifiable Naval Reserve with consideration as to remobilising the Port Divisions in support of securing the maritime and homeland base.
- Promotes and supports the Australian Navy Cadets organisation.
- Advocates urgent Government research and action to remedy the reported serious naval recruiting and retention problem.

**As to the RAN, the League,** while noting vital national peacetime tasks conducted by Navy, including border protection, flag showing/diplomacy, disaster relief, maritime rescue, hydrography and aid to the civil power:

- Supports the maintenance of a Navy capable of effective action in hostilities and advocates a build-up of the fleet and its afloat support elements to ensure that, in conjunction with the Army and RAAF, this can be sustained against any force which could be deployed in our area of strategic interest.

## The League:

- Calls for a bipartisan political approach to national defence with a commitment to a steady long-term build-up in Australia's defence capability including the required industrial infrastructure.
- Believes that, given leadership by successive governments, Australia can defend itself in the longer term, within acceptable financial, economic and manpower parameters

## UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

The last three months have seen some unprecedented naval activity in the Indo-Pacific region.

It started with the deployment of a French Carrier Strike Group (CSG) consisting of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier CHARLES DE GAULLE (and her air complement of Rafale fighters and Hawkeye AEW&C) accompanied by the destroyer FS FORBIN (D620), frigates FS PROVENCE (D652) and FS ALSACE (D656), fleet oiler FS JACQUES CHEVALLIER (A725) and an unnamed nuclear-powered attack submarine. The group also had two Atlantique 2 maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) and a A-400M transport aircraft in support.

The group was part of a security and diplomatic strengthening exercise known as Clemenceau 25. Its mission was to strengthen interoperability ties with Indo-Pacific Navies and send a clear message to China that France is a real player in the region.

The French CSG participated in exercises with Indian, Canadian, Australian and Royal Navy ships in the Indian ocean before sailing on to the South China Sea to exercise with US, Japanese and Filipino navies, making a port call in Subic Bay.

US Navy Super Hornets cross decked onto the CHARLES DE GAULLE, while French Rafales did the same on the US aircraft carrier USS CARL VINSON.

One interesting 'interoperability' issue uncovered by the French during a visit to Darwin of the replenishment ship FS JACQUES CHEVALLIER was the inadequacy of the fuel storage in the port. The French ship was hoping to refill its storage tanks to support the CSG but found that there was not enough fuel in Darwin to complete the task. The ship then stopped in Singapore where it was able to fully replenish.

Just as France has shown the way this year with carrier diplomacy, so will the UK with the arrival of the HMS PRINCE OF WALES led CSG in the Indo-Pacific region in the very near future. It's expected the CSG will have a strong NATO flavour with its escort flotilla. It will also be the first time the RN has deployed with two squadrons of UK F-35B JSF. Again, a clear message to China.



The aircraft carriers USS CARL VINSON, JMSDF IZUMO and the French FS CHARLES DE GAULLE exercising in the South China Sea together as part of France's Clemenceau 25 regional deployment. A powerful statement to China. (USN)

Of course, the other major naval development was the unprecedented and provocative circumnavigation of Australia by a Chinese Surface Action Group (SAG), consisting of a cruiser, frigate and a replenishment vessel, there was also much speculation that a nuclear-powered submarine was also present, but that was never confirmed.

The Navy League has been warning for some time that something like this would occur soon and that its significance would be a telling indicator, a wake-up call if you will, to Australia that the tyranny of distance is no longer a string in our defence bow.

This sort of provocative and bullying behaviour is not new to other countries in our region, such as Taiwan. So, Australia will need to get used to it, or do something about it. While 'harassing' future deployments could be an option - regardless of being in international waters given our maritime patrol aircraft are constantly harassed (and dangerously) in international airspace - a taste of their own medicine may need to be delivered judiciously to push back just enough to make them think twice.

The next Chinese navy circumnavigation is only a matter of time. It is also only a matter of time that the next group of ships may involve a much larger number and type of ships, including an aircraft carrier, which brings its own air traffic control issues. We may get a situation where Virgin Australia pilots will be reporting that they are being shadowed and challenged by Chinese fighters in the Tasman Sea.

Currently, Australia is the only AUKUS partner without an aircraft carrier. We are also the only QUAD member without an aircraft carrier. China now has three, and counting. The carrier debate in Australia has always been kept alive by the Navy League. Our policy agenda, published in every edition, has for decades advocated for a fixed wing capability at sea. Our most recent update of that states:

*"The League: Notes the potential combat effectiveness and flexibility of the STOVL version of the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35B Lightning II) and supports further examination of its application within the ADF through the LHDs."*

The quickest way to get real combat power to sea now is through modifications to the LHDs CANBERRA and ADELAIDE, along the exact same lines as the Japanese Izumo class, and purchase F-35B JSF. Ironically, plans already exist in Defence HQ and with the ships' builder Navantia to do just that. Alternatively, Japanese, Singaporean, Italian, USMC or RN F-35Bs could use the extra deck space our LHDs could provide for coalition operations at sea. We are stronger together than separate.

For the rest of this year the League will attempt to add vital information to the public discourse on the aircraft carrier debate, so that members and readers can fight the ignorance and disbelief clouding the minds of our defence thinking. To paraphrase a quote from J.R.R Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, 'those who don't believe in aircraft carriers can still die from them'.



HMAS HOBART receiving fuel from the replenishment ship FS *Jacques Chevallier* in the Indian Ocean as part of France's Clemenceau 25 regional deployment to test and refine regional interoperability. (Defence)

## DEFENCE SPENDING IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION

At the time of writing, the election had just been called and neither side of politics had committed to any significant additional spending for the next term of government, other than the Coalition with an announcement of an extra squadron of land-based F-35A JSF fighters. While a welcome announcement, a better alternative would be to split the 28 aircraft purchase into RAAF and RAN lots. Ten F-35A for RAAF and 18 F-38B for Navy/RAAF.

As a cost mitigator and roadmap to capability, any pilot, armourer or maintainer moving onto the B model from the A only needs a conversation course as the aircraft are identical in combat systems and most flight and engine controls. Afterall, the J in JSF stands for Joint.

Both sides of Government need to take note that the U.S is now expecting Australia to spend 3% of its GDP on Defence. At the most recent senate estimates it was revealed defence spending by the Albanese government is currently at around 2% with their projected rise to 2.3% in 2030 stated by Defence officials as probably unachievable, based on their current plans and policies. Inflation has also significantly reduced Defence's purchasing power making a GDP indicator somewhat misleading.

It was also recently revealed that the Government has directed Navy to scale back the Collins Life Of Type Extension (LOTE) project. If so, this is concerning to say the least, but it does fit an historical pattern. This government has struck off more ships from Navy than the PLA-N (People's Liberation Army- Navy) could ever have hoped to achieve in combat. Three Hunters, six Arafuras, two large joint support vessels an entire mine hunting and hydrographic fleet and potentially a submarine or two. Ships have also been decommissioned early without replacement.

The Rudd Gillard Rudd government was no better either. Under their watch the Defence budget was gutted to 1.56% of GDP. They refused to acquire the 4th AWD and delayed SEA 1654 (Success Replacement), plunging Navy into the shipbuilding valley of death.

Not that the other side of politics is immune to bad decisions. Had Malcolm Turnbull not replaced Tony Abbot, and cancelled all his plans for defence (which included JSF on our LHDs) then Navy would have already replaced the Collins with the Soryu and could still be on the path to SSNs in the late 2030s.

The optics of our spending commitment are very important given the reliance we have on the U.S for our future submarine capability. A capability which I hasten to add is something the League has been fighting to acquire for decades. Let's hope we can be as successful with fixed wing carrier aviation. ■

**Mark Schweikert**

President, Navy League of Australia

28 March 2025

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Directed Telescope is broken down in terms of current Labor commitments, made shortly before the announcement of the 3 May Federal election; those commitments made by the Liberal National Party in response to the March Budget; and, finally, what a Labor-Green/Teal minority Government Defence Force might look like. This ties in with the current bookie's odds for a Labour Minority Government, with the ALP and LNP equal favourites to win. But the LNP being unable to form a minority Government.

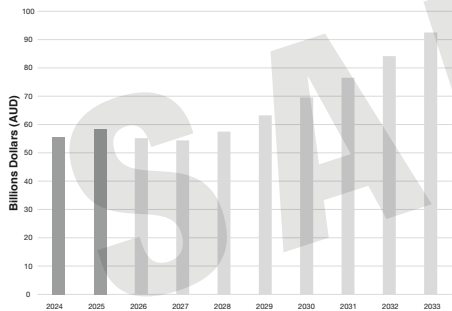
**ALP ELECTION COMMITMENTS**

*plus de la même chose  
(more of the same)*

The current Minister of Defence Mr Richard Marles announced before summer 2024, that the Defence Budget (currently at \$55.7B) would grow to \$100B by 2033/4. This is in line with current commitments in the *Forward Estimates* to increase spending (estimated now at 10% pa) from 2028. AUKUS becomes viable at 3% GDP, reached by this projection in 2031.

As outlined in other analysis, Defence Spending in real terms – based on cuts and Defence Cost Inflation (DCI) – is set to decline until 2027. The new 2025 Government may choose to: bring forward / accelerate spending; stay as is, or cut further. The most likely outcome is to “stay as is.” Meaning future increases will be implemented / authorised by the incoming 2028 Government. After years of [comparative] decline, an unprecedented 10% pa increase may be unmanageable by Defence and politically unaffordable, in peacetime.

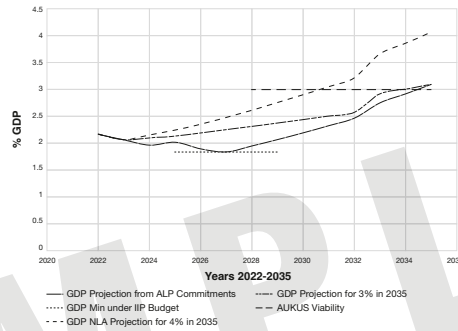
To avoid Defence spending dipping below 2% in 2024-5, an additional one-off \$700M was allocated to the Defence Budget. Taking the budget to 2.03% GDP. In the run up to the Federal Election, Mr Marles promised an additional \$1.0B for Defence but no clear articulation was made as to what this would be on.



**Figure 1: Defence spending 2024 to 2033, when Mr Marles predicts it will be at \$100B a year.**

The underspend in 2023-24 was \$1.0B. In 2024-25 it was \$1.6B, which the Government

appears unable to explain. The Government chose to allocated \$700M of the underspend to Ukraine and \$900M to retention and recruitment measures. As with current ALP Defence spending, it was not new money – and, in this case, “lost money.”



**Fig 2: Effect of Defence Cuts allowing for emergency cash injection of \$700M in 24-25 and \$1.0B increase committed to prior to the Federal Election.**

Underspends are the predictable result of cutting defence, while not maintaining budget increases (as recommended by the DSR authors, at 3% pa). Underspends are forecast to accelerate to \$2.0B in 25-26, before reducing when the Forwards Estimate increases kick in, in 2027-2028.

As currently projected, even allowing for further “one-off increases,” the Defence Budget will fall to 1.85% GDP in 2026-2027, before recovering above 2% in 29-30. Given the embarrassment to (any) Government of falling below 2% GDP in the new Trump 247 world, further emergency injections of up to \$2.0B a year may be expected prior to the Forwards Estimates kicking in. This is no way to run a Defence budget – and is likely to encourage further *Declinism*, resulting in increasing underspends.

It is unclear, beyond AUKUS and increased “D by E&I” promotions into senior Defence positions, what this Government’s commitments are. An objective assessment would be that they have failed to meet the clear requirements set out in the DSR – and, by most measures (including size of force) – Defence is going backwards.

In sum, the current Government has a limited vision or strategy for Defence. It has failed to deliver the DSR. It has not invested in the QUAD and has equivocated on vital spending (or cuts) for the *Collins-class* LOTE, the *Hunter-class*, and the Tier 2 Frigates. Which the Navy (and NLA) clear recommendation is the *JMSDF Mogami-class*, built by Mitsubishi Heavy Industry. Apparently, Navy made this recommendation, for it to be turned down by the Government – specifically DFAT and Treasury, who reintroducing the (German) TKMS option. Showing where ALP factional power lies. Which would be another “pantomime horse option” (like the excellent

French *Attack-class* submarine), where the front and back of the ships could never talk to each other.

ALP spending on NDIS has increased by up to 20% pa in recent years. To sit, in 2024/5, at about \$49.0B a year. If it increases at the same rate in future years, it will be greater than the Defence budget in 2025/6. If the ALP can reduce increases to 10% pa, by 2026/7. In either case, this is where ALP focus remains, and has been for the last 3 years. Placing welfare and social security before warfare and national security.

Currently, up to 1/3 of the Defence budget may not actually leave Canberra – being vested in the APS/Contractor workforce of about 50,000, administered largely from Canberra. In addition to the offices and HQs run from there. This may amount to up to \$20.0B a year. The fight will be from the front-line states and their bases – not Canberra. A significant emphasis needs to be placed by the next Government on getting funding and Defence out of Canberra and to the States. A reduction of \$11.0B a year, taking the Canberra impost to 20% of the Budget, or \$1.0 in CBR for every \$4.0 on Navy, Army, and Air Force. Something a future DOGE may examine.

Mr Dutton rightly claims that Labor has removed significant funding from Defence, through to 2032/3. Allowing for “emergency cash injections (\$700M and \$1.0B), this amounts to almost \$60B to 2032. If extra funding and increases allowed for in Forward Estimates are not implemented, this could be as high as \$80B. The current Defence Budget deficit (cuts and underspends, allowing for Defence Cost Inflation), is running at about \$6.0B a year.

**LNP ELECTION COMMITMENTS**

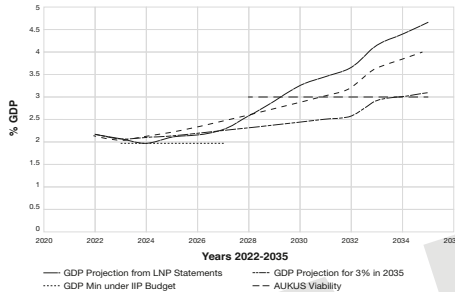
The LNP have supported the additional \$1.0B in Defence spending and to restore the 2.5% GDP target. Mr Dutton’s clear commitment is \$3.0B for a fourth squadron of F-35 joint strike fighters to add to the 72 now in service. As the NLA President makes clear, a more astute option would be “to split the 28 aircraft purchase into RAAF and RAN lots. Ten F-35A for RAAF and 18 F-35B for Navy (Fleet Air Arm)/RAAF, [to be based at HMAS ALBATROSS (Nowra)]. As a cost mitigator and roadmap to capability, any pilot or armourer or maintainer moving onto the B model from the A only needs a conversation course as the aircraft are identical in combat systems and most flight and engine controls.”

The President was too polite to say – but Tony Abbott’s hidden (2015) report apparently makes clear – converting the LHD (CANBERRA and ADELAIDE) to operate F-35B could be done relatively simply, at limited cost. It is what we would be doing if we were at war – and would provide immediate interoperability with the USMC, the USN, and



the JMSDF. In addition to operating with our other QUAD aircraft-carrier capable partner, the Indian Navy.

If this capital injection was made in 2025, to build and sustain F-35B as a carrier-borne element, a significant reversal of Defence futures would occur.



**Fig 3: Effect of LNP Defence Injection of funds to support F-35A and F-35B acquisition and conversion of LHD, through life.**

While F-35B/LHD funding will help to stabilise the defence budget at 1.93% GDP in 2027/8, and the 3% GDP target will be brought forward, it is simply not enough. The LNP proposals currently lack substance and imagination. They will not in themselves address Defence’s systemic lack of investment and failures, over the previous three decades. Nor will they deliver the DSR (IIP or NDS). They may though give ADF a better fighting chance by 2027.

**GREEN ELECTIONS COMMITMENTS**

The Green’s are the one party to announce a Defence manifesto “Plan B,” prior to the Federal election.

They argue, “with the modest reinvestment from defence savings, the Greens will not only create a *Plan B* to end AUKUS, but can also remove Australia from the global weapons trade and end [AS] reliance on the US and Israeli armaments industries. To reduce U.S. reliance and “disengage us from the dangerous Trump-led US military,” the Greens will:

- Reallocate \$4 billion from over \$77 billion in savings from cancelling AUKUS and several US weapons purchases towards domestic production capabilities of defence material strictly for defensive purposes.
- Remove ADF reliance on US, UK and Israeli weapons supplies.
- Use \$73 billion of the savings from this announcement, and from cancelling AUKUS, to invest in social and environmental programs to address climate change and inequality.



JMSDF frigate JS NOSHIO (FFM-3) comes alongside Fleet Base West in Western Australia (Image ABIS Connor Morrison).

- Save \$2.4 billion from cancelling the M1A2 tanks and the Black Hawk projects.
- Remaining savings for reallocation will come from the estimated spending of \$375 billion on AUKUS, including \$18 billion over [the next] five years.

It is hard to examine in detail the impact of the Greens on Defence spending. Its cumulative impact is likely to be five-fold:

1. Withdrawal either by rejection or request, from 5 Eyes, and;
2. ANZUS, and;
3. the QUAD;
4. Reduction of Defence spending to 1.5% GDP, or less;
5. Reduction of ADF to a regional presence disaster relief force, with about 50,000 full time service personnel.

**ALP - GREEN MINORITY GOVERNMENT**

If ALP forms the next Government with the Greens, the likely cost will be to AUKUS, which will be key to any negotiations. In addition to removal of the USMC from the Northern territory.

Withdrawal from AUKUS – with all its implications – may actually force a ALP-Green Government to spend more on Defence, more rapidly. Particularly given the implications this will have to long-standing alliances and commitments, such as 5 Eyes, ANZUS and the QUAD. The ALP previously has not been supportive of the QUAD – but its claims for bipartisan support for ANZUS, would be severely tested. The rejection of the USMC from its Northern territory annual roulement would come at significant cost. For example, other security access and privileges – including to the F-35s – may be “switched off”. In the new Trumpian world, the costs of these cuts would leave Australia significantly vulnerable and exposed. It would be no position to negotiate with Trump, let alone the Chinese.

**ALP - TEAL MINORITY GOVERNMENT**

If the ALP were to form Government with the Teals, it is unclear exactly where they stand on Defence – as with many other things. However, it is likely that they will align with the anti-AUKUS and Nuclear factions, in the ALP. Perhaps not pushing for rejection but renegotiation or further deferral of AUKUS. While saving membership of 5 Eyes, ANZUS and the QUAD – the Teals would probably align with the Greens push for a reduction of Defence spending to 1.5% GDP, or less. With the ADF reducing to a regional only force, with about 50,000 full time service personnel.

**AN ALTERNATIVE DEFENCE BUDGET**

Based upon the Department of Defence, *Portfolio Budget Statements 2024-2025, Related Paper No. 14A, Defence Portfolio, 15 May 2024*, and other related information in the public domain, while the emphasis of Defence spending is on Basing & Operating activities, Crewing (Workforce) and Capability (Acquisition) funding may be significantly underdone (imbalanced). By up to \$2.6B a year. Explaining, in part, the failure to retain and recruit in recent years – apparently reversed by Trump (in the U.S.), in recent months.

To bring into balance, suggests a choice of cutting bases and operational demands to fit workforce and capabilities, or increasing Crewing and Capability budgets in line with Basing and Operating demands.

The ADF may be “running hot” – essentially meeting demand from a budget 15% below cost: a \$64.4B Defence Force for \$55.7B. The impact, potentially being seen in recruitment and retention – at a time of high cost/wage inflation.

Examination of the Defence budget, against standard accounting criteria, suggests ADF Crewing (Workforce) and Acquisitions (Capability) funding, may respectively be between \$1.4B-\$4.0B, and \$3.9B under



resourced, when compared with Sustainment (Basing & Operations) commitments. Which may be comparatively over-resourced, by up to \$2.6B.

The Defence Budget is set to grow in the Forward Estimate to \$100B by 2033/4. An estimated spending increase of 10% pa, from 2028. Which (as suggested) may be unmanageable and unaffordable.

### An Adaptive Budget

Historically, adaptive Research, Design (Development) and Experimentation (RDE) funding of at least 15% of the budget is allocated. An assessment for RDE at 5% is based on the current DSTG core budget of about \$500M and other RDE funding lines. The figure of 5% may be high. Other estimates, suggest Defence RDE may be as little or less than 2.5% of the budget.

Defence Spending in real terms – based on cuts and Defence Cost Inflation (DCI) – is set to decline until 2027.

An adaptive, balanced budget at 15% spent on RDE with a budget of \$1.5B for DSTG, suggests that the current budget, might be fixed and imbalanced. It may not change from within. An adaptive budget would potentially cost \$75.1B, necessary to sustain current basing and operating commitments. Suggesting a 1/3 increase of the current budget. Such a “preparedness budget” may also raise questions as to “how funds are spent and resources allocated, differently.”

Fundamental to achieving a balanced budget is an adaptive workforce with the reflective capacity provided by RDE to invent and innovate.

Defence forces generally fall behind in comparative and absolute wage terms during periods of high inflation. They are often the last to gain public service awards, and the first to feel rising costs. Although not yet an issue (at the top of shop), it is likely to become one under the next Government – with potential impact on recruitment and retention. ADF potentially needs to commence early planning to configure and scale itself to meet whatever the future brings.

No Party is currently committed to this type of Defence spending and returning the budget to balance, with respect to crewing, basing, and capability.

### AN ADAPTIVE NAVY BUDGET

An estimate of the Navy Budget, indicates it is 17.5% of the Defence budget. While current emphasis is on Basing & Operations – and Capability (Acquisition) is broadly “in line” – the Crewing/Workforce budget may be significantly under resourced. To the tune of almost \$0.5B (5.25%) a year.

Present Research, Design (Development), and Experimentation (RDE) funding is estimated at 5% of the AFB. Representing a “tithe” on the principal funding lines of 5%.

To achieve balance by increasing Basing & Operations funding in line with Crewing and Capability, suggests that the current Navy budget – necessary for balancing across the principal funding lines – may be under-resourced by up to 14%. Navy’s ability to crew its ships and submarines may be critically underfunded?

An adaptive, balanced budget – with RDE at 15% of the budget – suggests increasing the budget by 25%. This may give Navy an opportunity to shape its future budget and to envision what an adaptive (warfighting) budget might look like. If spending were to be brought forward urgently.

### A FIGHTING CHANCE BUDGET

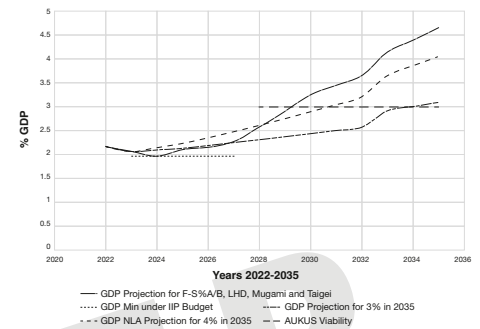
There is some suggestion that Defence, as encouraged by the previous CDF (still in the wings by all accounts), is moving to a Joint, edifice with subordinated Navy, Army, and Air Force. A form of Canada-lite model, that did so much damage to the CDF in the 1970s. This at a time when recruitment and retention is falling. And when diversity, identity, and equity appear to count more than affinity with ship, regiment, and squadron. At the exact moment, when old allegiances and “The Colours” need reinforcing, this requires urgent rejection.

There is also grim indication of “D by E&I” senior appointments in Defence. That have potentially removed the fighting and operational expertise from senior commands. This also needs to stop. The thinking-fighters are rarely promoted by DEI.

For Navy, a fighting chance budget might do three things:

1. Immediately approve the \$11.0B Tier 2 Frigate purchase of eleven *Mogami-class* frigates, 2026-2031.
2. Discontinue the expensive and hi-risk *Collins-class* Life of Time Extension (LOTE), costed at \$4-6.0B;
3. Negotiate, as part of the *Mogami-class* acquisition, the purchase of six improved *Taigei-class* submarines at a cost of \$7.2B, for introduction into service 2026-2031, as a *Collins-class* replacement, prior to *Virginia* and *AUKUS* class acquisitions, 2032-2045.

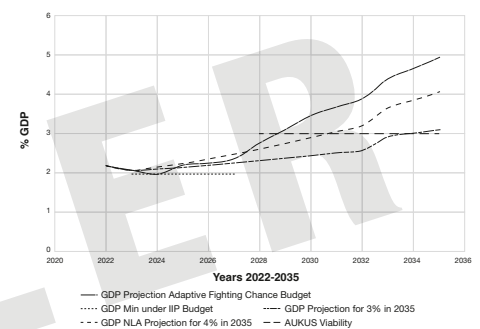
The above acquisitions, if implemented in 2025, would increase the Defence budget to 3% GDP by 2030. The acquisition of the *Taigei-class* being a return to the Abbott-era proposals. Given the close relationship between Japan and the U.S., the *Taigei-class* would be no “pantomime horse”. Both ends could talk to each other.



**Fig 4: Defence budget reflecting F-35A and F-35B acquisition, conversion of LHD, and Mugami and Taigei class acquisitions, through life.**

### More radical still

Imagine restoring fighting and thinking capacity to the front line. An adaptive budget for each service. Rather than concentrating funding in the hands of Canberra, why not provide this funding locally and immediately to the front-line commands. To research, design, and experiment. Essentially by providing \$500M to each front-line commander (Navy for anti-access denial and minehunters), Army (for Littoral Manoeuvre Force), Air (for 6th Gen and Ballistic Missile Air Defence), plus Joint Capability Group (for Cyber and Space) and Joint Operation Command (for a secondary HQ) to invest as they see fit. Be it in crewing, capability, or basing. So also taking funding out of Canberra and placing it where the thinking needs to take place, for deterrence to succeed.



**Fig 5: Defence budget reflecting forward acquisitions, through life and adaptive funding to front-line commands.**

The inclusion of all four measures, would restore capability and adaptation to Defence, in addition to creating an effective fixed-wing carrier force, equipped with modern ships and submarines in the essential 2025-2028 timeframe. In this budget, 3% GDP would be reached by 2029 – providing a platform for AUKUS. Or, a negotiated way back down – based upon a strengthened ADF. Capable of fighting, thinking, and winning across any domain. ■



## HMAS PERTH (I) NATIONAL MEMORIAL DEDICATION

A fitting memorial to HMAS PERTH (I) and its crew was completed and opened on the 1st March 2025 the 83rd anniversary of her sinking in the Sunda Strait on 1st March 1942. The opening was attended by 300 visitors and dignitaries.

The memorial first commenced in 1967 when the first stage was completed by the Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division.

The project was managed and funded by the HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation Incorporated on behalf of The Navy League of Australia. The final stage was opened by the Governor of Western Australia Chris Dawson AC APM together with CMDR Dylan Whyte RAN Commanding Officer of HMAS PERTH (III), representing CN.

## NAVY LEAGUE COMMUNITY AWARD HMAS CAIRNS

Recently the Navy League awarded HMAS CAIRNS its 2024 Annual Community Award. The award is given to the ship or shore establishment that has contributed most to the community and demonstrated the finest traditions of naval service.

HMAS CAIRNS was up against HMAS ADELAIDE and CHOULES for this year's award. However, CAIRNS's support to the local community during and after Cyclone Jasper hit the region was a standout example of support.

The award was made on behalf of the League by the Fleet Commander, RADM Smith.

## NEW CADET UNITS

The League welcomes the establishment of the cadet New Training Ship (NTS) Supply, opened on 23 Jul 24 at the Burgmann Anglican School Forde Campus in Canberra.

NTS Supply has grown strongly to now having 49 Cadets, 5 x Officers of Cadets and 1 x Defence Approved Helper.

This adds to the ACT's other existing cadet unit, TS Canberra, which remains a very strong unit with 88 Cadets, 3 x Officers of Cadets and 3 Defence Approved Helpers. TS Canberra is the sponsor unit for NTS Supply.

Last year Navy also established NTS Oxley (Laidley QLD) on 1 Jul and NTS Bunbury on 6 Jun. Both units have grown and respectively now sit at:

- NTS Oxley: 23 Cadets, 2 x OOC and 2 x DAH
- NTS Bunbury: 10 Cadets, 2 x OOC, 1 x DAH

The Navy League of Australia established the Australian Sea Cadet Corps in the 1920s administered jointly by the Commonwealth Naval Board and has been a strong supporter

ever since. In the early 1970s the Government decided to make cadets a Defence responsibility. The name then changed to Naval Reserve Cadets. The League agreed with the decision to give management of the movement to Defence in order to give it more funding and access to Navy and hopefully see it flourish.

However, in 1975 the Whitlam government announced a policy that would see the decommissioning and disbandment of all cadet units, Army, Navy and Airforce. However, this did not affect the naval cadets as there was an agreement between the defence dept and Navy League that if the defence dept was unable to sponsor the cadets further ample time would be given for Navy League to take back control. The other two cadet services Army Cadets and Airforce cadets were subsequently disbanded. It wasn't until the election of the Fraser Government, after the Whitlam government was summarily dismissed, that the policy was reversed, and cadets again enjoyed the support and management of Defence. In later years the three services were brought together as the Australian Defence Force Tri service package known as Australian Navy Cadets, Australian Army Cadets, and Australian Air Force Cadets.

## AUKUS SUBMARINE INDUSTRY STRATEGY

The AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy, outlines the plan to uplift Australia's military and industrial capability under the timeframes of the Optimal Pathway announced in March 2023.

It identifies the conditions to develop the sovereign industrial capability needed to deliver, operate and sustain Australia's future conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines, while also ensuring the existing *Collins-class* submarines are sustained and upgraded until their eventual withdrawal from Royal Australian Navy service.

The strategy will work in conjunction with related Defence strategy and planning documents, including the Defence Industry Development Strategy and the Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Plan.

The strategy has been developed in consultation with stakeholders across Commonwealth and State Governments, the defence industry, unions and academia, and will continue to evolve as Australian industry develops and the nuclear-powered submarine program progresses.

The strategy sets out five critical lines of effort to boost Australian industry uplift including creating demand clarity and signals for industry; boosting investment attractiveness in critical areas; simplifying regulation; growing the workforce; and integrating Australian industry into US and UK supply chains.

The strategy intends to guide the development of an Australian submarine industrial base capable of building and sustaining a persistent, potent and sovereign multi-class submarine capability in support of Australia's national defence.

The strategy sets out five lines of effort to boost Australian industry uplift:

- creating demand clarity for the industry,
- boosting investment attractiveness in critical areas,
- simplifying regulation,
- growing the skilled workforce and;
- integrating Australian industry into U.S. and UK supply chains.

It is intended to will evolve as the industry develops and Australia's nuclear powered submarine program progresses. A Government spokesperson stated:

This will be one of the most complex and consequential industrial transformations in Australian history, and is part of the broader uplift of the sovereign maritime industrial base detailed in the 2024 Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Plan.

The strategy is underpinned by the government's investment of \$262 million to support the local defence industry uplift as part of the AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine program announced earlier in 2025.

AUKUS will, reportedly, create around 20,000 direct jobs over the next 30 years across industry and government, including between



PLAN *Fuchi-class* replenishment vessel Weishanhu Solomon Sea, Feb. 2025 (Image ADF).



Japan's *Mogami-class* peer competitor for RAN Tier 2 Frigate.

4,000 – 5,500 roles to support the build of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines in South Australia.

### DEFENCE ACCEPTS NUSHIP ARAFURA

Defence Australia has accepted the first Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel, NUSHIP ARAFURA, for further test and evaluation ahead of delivery to the Royal Australian Navy.

NUSHIP ARAFURA is the first of class vessel delivered under project SEA 1180, built by Luerssen Australia at the Osborne Naval Shipyard in South Australia.

This project will deliver six Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessels to Navy, with the first two constructed at Osborne. The remaining four vessels are under construction at Henderson in Western Australia.

The Arafura class vessels will be part of a wider Navy Minor War Vessel Fleet supporting civil maritime security and enhanced regional engagement in the Southwest Pacific and maritime Southeast Asia.

Deputy Secretary Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment Jim McDowell said the delivery of the first Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel was an important milestone in the Australian Government's investment in Naval Shipbuilding and Sustainment:

The delivery of the first of class vessel to Defence highlights Defence's commitment to working through complex projects to deliver critical capability to our Australian Defence Force, built here in Australia.

NUSHIP ARAFURA will now sail to its homeport at HMAS STIRLING in Western Australia, before commissioning into the Royal Australian Navy fleet later this year.

### DEI USNA POLICY REVERSAL

President Donald Trump's recent DEI decrees mean the US Naval Academy Annapolis will no longer consider race as a factor in admissions. The school had previously discriminated against white applicants.

The change was disclosed in March in a Justice Department legal filing in an appeal

by a group opposed to such affirmative action policies that challenged the racist admissions program at the Naval Academy, located in Annapolis, Maryland.

The Naval Academy had continued to employ affirmative action even after the US Supreme Court in 2023 rejected such policies at civilian colleges and universities.

That ruling was an outcome long sought by many Americans who noted that white and certain other applicants (including Asian Americans) were being disadvantaged.

### MYSTERIOUS UNMANNED WARSHIP SPOTTED OFF WASHINGTON STATE COAST

US trials a new unmanned naval vessel.

The 180ft, 240-ton unmanned surface vessel, a type of drone, was completed last month after a five-year development.

Construction is part of the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) "No Manning Required Ship" program alongside private maritime and operations company Serco – the primary contractor for the Defiant.

The vessel was first launched at the Nichols Brothers Boat Builders shipyard near the unincorporated community of Freeland, just northwest of Seattle, last month in preparation for a series of trials that aim to bring a cost-effective unmanned service vessel to the U.S. Navy.

The Navy primarily uses unmanned surface vessels for surveillance, reconnaissance, and to glean intelligence.

Its construction comes amid increased calls from American policymakers and combat commands for cost-effective USVs to help Taiwan defend against a potential Chinese invasion.

### CHINA WINS FROM AUSTRALIAN OVERREACTION

The deployment of a Chinese naval task group in our region is clearly aimed at sending a message and testing Australia's responses—not only on the military front, but socially and

politically. The worst misstep would be to overreact and hand China a propaganda win that could undermine Australia's legitimate military activities in the South China Sea and North-East Asia.

The deployment of a Chinese naval task group off our West and East coast has exposed our vulnerabilities as a maritime nation reliant on trade. While this reality is felt acutely, the proper response is to invest in the ships, aircraft and submarines needed to safeguard our maritime interests—not to manufacture a crisis that undermines our societal resilience and political capacity to respond to genuine challenges.

Australia is not on a major trade route or a transit point. Naval task groups rarely operate in our region—unless they are visiting Australia—so a Chinese task group is especially notable. Deployed more than 8,000 kilometres from China's coast, this three-ship task group—including one of the world's most advanced warships.

### Not surprising

While it may be surprising to see naval task groups conducting live-fire exercises in our region, warships – including Australia's – regularly do so on long deployments for training, maintaining skills or a myriad of other reasons. This is simply what warships do.

China's gunnery firing took place on the high seas, about 640 kilometres (340 nautical miles) from our coast—the distance from Canberra to Melbourne. China is well within its rights to conduct such exercises without informing Australia or New Zealand.

While no international law requires it, best practice, having undertaken many gunnery firings at sea, is that warships maintain at least 18 kilometres (10 nautical miles) from known civilian air routes during live-fire exercises. Air Services Australia reported that 49 aircraft had to be diverted because of the Chinese warships' firing exercise. Clearly, these warships were too close to these flight paths.

Warships should issue warnings to civilian aircraft and vessels several hours in advance—and at regular intervals—during the exercise. It remains unclear how early Chinese warships issued this warning, but we know from Senate estimates that it was first heard by a Virgin Airlines aircraft 30 minutes after the warships began their drills.

### Not a crisis

This is not a crisis. Treating it as one with over-the-top indignation diminishes our capacity to tackle real crises as the region deteriorates. Moreover, since this deployment was meant to test us, it signals to China that we lack societal resilience and a genuine perspective on what is a threat.



## RAN requires improved replenishment fleet.

RAN warships have limited endurance at sea due to inadequate numbers of replenishment ships, and our ability to protect sea lanes from mines is also limited—to name but a few of our challenges. We must address this and swiftly, and that means having a hard look at Defence spending.

Although conflict in our region is not inevitable, the threat is real and demands a measured response underpinned by preparedness, investment and partnerships. Warships have the right to freedom of navigation. Live gunnery firings are common. Overreaction and panic will only undermine our efforts.

## MOGAMI-CLASS – CLEAR FRONT-RUNNER

Japan's *Mogami-class* is clearly the best choice for Australia's general-purpose frigate program.

Compared with its very capable competitor, the *Meko A-200* from Germany, the *Mogami* design needs a smaller crew, offers deeper magazines and has a newer system for combat control. The project, Sea 3000, is intended to replace the *Anzac-class* general-purpose frigates with as many as 11 ships, part of a larger program to expand the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet.

Australia plans to order three ships of the chosen design from the winning contractor's shipyard, taking first delivery in 2029, and build the rest locally. This requires urgent advancing.

### Decision Now

A decision was expected in December, then deferred and hoped for before the election. The Australian Defence Force has been suffering from a recruitment and retention shortfall. The Royal Australian Navy has been especially troubled in finding and keeping people. Minimising crew sizes is therefore more important than ever as the RAN builds up to an expanded fleet of surface combatants and nuclear-powered submarines.

Because the *Mogami* class is designed for greater automation than the *Meko A-200*, it has a crew of only 90 instead of 120.

If recent experience in the Red Sea is any indicator, modern naval warfare will be frenetic and victory will hinge not only on which side has the better equipment but which has the greater magazine depth. The upgraded *Mogami* design offered to Australia has 32 vertical-launch system (VLS) missile cells, twice as many as the *Meko A-200*. The increase VLS count also gives greater flexibility in loadouts. After accounting for self-defence, the *Mogamis* would have greater capacity for offensive missiles than the *Meko A-200*.

The combination of a small crew and deep magazines results in high efficiency: a *Mogami* of the upgraded design has only 2.8 crew members per missile cell, compared with 3.4 for the US Arleigh Burke class and 7.5 for the *Meko A-200*. Between the higher efficiency and magazine depth, the *Mogami* is well positioned to support the Australian strategy of defence by denial.

A ship is only as capable as the combat management system that ties everything together, however. The *Meko A-200* is presumably being offered with a combat control system developed from the one that the RAN already uses in the *Anzacs*, offering more-seamless integration.

### Long-term Savings

The combat management system the *Mogami* utilises was developed alongside the frigate, with initial designs beginning in 2015. This newer baseline means there are potentially large long-term cost savings to be had from the *Mogami* class. The RAN would need time to adjust to the new Japanese combat management system, and there would be additional costs associated with integrating weapons that Australia uses but Japan does not. These growing pains would better position the fleet for the future.

The Japanese bid for the Sea 3000 project, represents the stronger choice for Australia. The *Mogami* offers enhanced flexibility across the board. Australia also has persuasive geostrategic and industrial reasons for choosing Japan over Germany as its partner in building as many as 11 general-purpose frigates in a priority defence program.

### Better suited

Leaving aside the question of which design is better technically suited to Australia. Japan can offer more at a strategic and industrial level than Germany can. There are three aspects to consider.

Australia and Japan both reject Beijing's moves to treat the South China Sea as its own. Australia and Japan have shared concerns over China's increasing coercive behaviour that is responsible for the deteriorating strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia would benefit from Japan's industrial capacity and maritime expertise in building advanced warships designed for the same operational environment in the Indo-Pacific. Australia's limited shipbuilding capacity demands help from partners, and Japan is well positioned to provide it quickly. A clear indication that Japan is serious came from Japan's defence chief General Yoshihide Yoshida, who said Japan would give 'priority' to Australia if the *Mogami* design was selected for the frigate program.

A related consequence of choosing the *Mogami* design would be strengthening the interoperability of the Japanese and

Australian navies: they would be using almost identical ships.

Australia stands to gain significantly by deepening its defence industrial cooperation with Japan. By forging a robust industrial partnership, both nations can enhance their defence capabilities, address shared security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and translate their strategic relationship into tangible benefits. Given their shared concerns over China's coercive behaviour, this enhanced cooperation is necessary for maintaining stability and deterring aggression in the Indo-Pacific.

## GREENWICH STATION

### Albion-class and

### HMS NORTHUMBERLAND scrapped

HMS ALBION and HMS BULWARK are to be scrapped, alongside HMS NORTHUMBERLAND.

They are to be decommissioned as part of a broader push to "modernise" the UK Armed Forces.

HMS NORTHUMBERLAND, meanwhile, has been deemed uneconomical to repair due to structural damage. Its hull being degraded beyond economic repair, as with other members of this ageing class. Considered on build, to be to inferior standards than the *Type-22 class* it preceded.

No redundancies will result from the decommissioning, with personnel being retrained or redeployed.

The retirement of both *Albion-class* ships raises questions about the future of the UK's amphibious warfare capabilities. However, the Royal Marines would remain a critical component of the UK's defence strategy.

### UK firm launches large UUV prototype

UK-based subsea craft manufacturer MSubs recently floated out a new prototype extra-large unmanned undersea vehicle (XLUUV).

The unmanned submersible Cetus is being developed as part of a Royal Navy project. It has a length of 12 metres and a displacement of 17 tonnes.

Propulsion will be by electric motor linked to battery packs mounted on the outside of the hull. The propulsion can deliver a range of 1,000 nautical miles and allow the XLUUV to dive deeper than even some of the submarines in the current Royal Navy fleet.

A payload bay is fitted at the centre of the craft. Situated between the fore and aft pressure vessels, this bay can be fitted to carry mines, small UUVs, and sensors.

An optional additional payload bay can be inserted, increasing the carrying capacity of the XLUUV and allowing the fitting of extra. ■



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## HATCH



PLAN Type 54B LUOHE (545)  
Commissioned 25 Feb 2025.

Image X via Chinese  
Social Media

## MATCH



PLA *Shuiqiao*-class Invasion  
Barges, designed after the  
Mulberry Docks used at D-Day.

Image X via Chinese  
Social Media

## DESPATCH



RFA Wave Ruler A389 (and Knight)  
to be decommissioned due to  
inability to crew RN Amphibious  
Support Oilers.

Image Royal Navy