

AWDs

A Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) Block 1B interceptor missile is launched from the guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70). (U.S. Navy photo/Released)



# AIR WARFARE DESTROYERS: NEW CAPABILITIES FOR A NEW ERA

GEORGE GALDORISI // WASHINGTON D.C.

## STRATEGIC CONTEXT: AUSTRALIA'S PROSPEROUS - BUT DANGEROUS - NEIGHBOURHOOD

*'One of the fundamental responsibilities of any Australian Government is to protect and defend our people and protect and enhance our national security interests. This requires making complex strategic judgments about risks and opportunities in the international strategic environment. It means providing for an effective and efficiently run Australian Defence Force which is able to make its contribution to meeting strategic challenges.'*

*Minister's Foreword*

*Defence White Paper 2013*

As the inhabitants of the only country comprising a continent surrounded by water, Australians recognize

the 21st Century represents a decided shift "from Mackinder to Mahan." Said another way, perhaps the most profound difference between the 20th and 21st centuries is this: Europe is a landscape, East Asia is a seascape. The nexus of world power is shifting dramatically to the Asia-Pacific region and Indo-Pacific Ocean. As the only country-continent fronting both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Australia is a critically important player in this region and is increasingly being looked upon as an important regional partner in the world's most dynamic region.

The Asia-Pacific region and Indo-Pacific Ocean global commons continue to undergo extraordinary economic and social change. There is no question that globalization has transformed this region more than any other in the world. It has brought prosperity that few would have dreamed of a generation ago. This region is the location of unprecedented growth that has seen

some countries, including China, India, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea transformed within a generation. The "Asia-Pacific Century" is clearly upon us.

But this region has not been peaceful. For example, there have disputes between China and Southeast Asian nations in the South China Sea; disputes between China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea; North Korea's sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan; as well as other areas of conflict; to say nothing of ongoing illicit trafficking in people, weapons, drugs, and WMDs. The ADF must confront a plethora of threats - and do so with a sparse funding profile.

## AUSTRALIA'S ANSWER - AN AMBITIOUS NAVAL BUILDING PROGRAMME

As Australian naval analysts Jack McCaffrie and Chris

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## AWDs

*Sailor from HMAS Sydney conducts training with the Aegis Combat System onboard USS Kidd to prepare for the arrival of the new Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyers to the Royal Australian Navy Fleet. Credit: CoA*



Rahman pointed out in the U.S. Naval War College Review, during the past decade Australia has shifted from fielding a defence force with a continental focus to building one that is predominantly focused in the maritime arena. And because the Indo-Pacific oceans and the global commons are vitally important to Australia's security and prosperity, one of the most prominent and visible ways change is being manifested is in the substantial expansion of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Indeed, the ADF is undertaking an ambitious naval building programme of first-class naval vessels. The Defence White Paper 2013 put it this way:

Recognising the strategic importance to Australia of maintaining a strong Australian shipbuilding industry, the Government is committed to a program of naval shipbuilding that will retain required national skills and capacity to support Defence needs over the long-term. Government decisions on specific maritime projects will take full account of this objective.

However, these ambitions run straight into uncomfortable budget realities. The government has cut Australia's defence spending as a share of GDP to its smallest level since 1938, at a time when the trend among major Asian powers, including China, is to increase defence spending. Australia's defence budget is set to be 1.56% of GDP, down from 1.8% last year. And this is occurring as the total defence spending in Asia this year is projected to overtake that of Europe for the first time since the industrial revolution. For a country confronting increasingly scarce resources for defence, changes in national spending priorities must be done carefully and only after important policy documents such as The Defence White Paper 2013 are analyzed, fully understood and embraced.

Therefore, hard choices will need to be made. Now that the broad outlines of the new ships, aircraft, and major systems the RAN plans to buy have come sharply into focus, the difficult work begins. The Australian Government, the ADF and the RAN must

make many decisions over the next decade as to what "kit" – that is, the systems, subsystems, components and capabilities – the RAN acquires to make these platforms as capable as they possibly can be. And as arguably the most technically complex ship the RAN has ever fielded, the Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyer should be the first candidate for this analysis and examination.

#### THE HOBART CLASS AIR WARFARE DESTROYER - FACING THE AIRCRAFT AND CRUISE MISSILE THREAT

While most readers of Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter are generally knowledgeable about The Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyer some basic information is instructive here. The Hobart Class AWD is a ship class of three air warfare destroyers being built for the Royal Australian Navy. Planning for a class to replace the Adelaide class frigates and restore the capability last exhibited by the Perth class destroyers began by



2000, initially under acquisition project SEA 1400, which was re-designated SEA 4000. Although the designation "Air Warfare Destroyer" is used to describe ships dedicated to the defence of a naval force, in addition to assets ashore, from aircraft and missile attack, the planned Australian destroyers would also be able to operate in anti-surface, anti-submarine, and naval gunfire support roles.

Planning for the Australian Air Warfare Destroyer (as the class was known until 2006) continued through the mid-2000s, with the selection of the Aegis Combat

*Australia's major surface combatants will remain the most versatile platforms of the naval fleet, with broad utility across the full spectrum of maritime operations.*

System and ASC as the primary shipbuilder in 2005. In late 2005, the AWD Alliance was formed as a consortium of the Defence Material Organisation, ASC, and Raytheon. Between 2005 and 2007, Gibbs & Cox's Evolved Arleigh Burke class destroyer concept and Navantia's Álvaro de Bazán class frigate competed for selection as the AWD design. Although the Arleigh Burke design was larger and more capable, the Álvaro de Bazán design was selected in June 2007 as it was an existing design, and would be cheaper, quicker, and less risky to build.

Three ships were ordered in October 2007, and are being assembled at ASC's facility in Osborne, South Australia from 31 pre-fabricated modules. ASC, NQEA Australia, and the Forgas Group were selected in May 2009 to build the blocks, but within two months, NQEA was replaced by BAE Systems Australia. Errors with the first hull block and growing delays in construction led the AWD Alliance to redistribute the construction workload in 2011, with some modules to be built by Navantia. An option to build a fourth destroyer was included in the original contract, but has not yet been exercised. Lead ship Hobart will enter service in March 2016 (two years later than originally predicted), Brisbane is due to commission in September 2017, and Sydney should be operational by June 2019.

#### BUT WHAT ABOUT BALLISTIC MISSILES?

Australia's major surface combatants will remain the most versatile platforms of the naval fleet, with broad utility across the full spectrum of maritime operations. As the Adelaide and ANZAC Class frigates, which form the current major surface combatant fleet today, are progressively retired as part of a transition to the future surface fleet, the Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyers and future frigates will be the ships providing integrated air and missile defense for the RAN - and especially for Australia's two new Canberra Class Landing Helicopter Dock ships.

Defense against hostile aircraft and cruise missiles is an important first-step, but today - and especially tomorrow - it may not be enough. Given the dangerous neighborhood Australia finds herself in in this century, and especially with regional nations armed with ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Australia's decision to purchase the Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyer equipped with the U.S. Navy Aegis Weapon System directly addresses the aircraft and cruise missile threat to naval forces - and positions the RAN to also address the ballistic missile threat.

The need for effective ballistic missile defense (BMD) has increased dramatically in the 21st Century. In 2014, more than 30 countries have deployed ballistic missiles, compared with only nine in 1972. Nations with hostile intentions toward their neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region possess ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and today's rogue leaders often view WMD as weapons of choice, not of last resort. Recent ballistic missile launches, especially in the short-to intermediate-range category, were particularly pronounced in the People's Republic of China, North

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