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DEFENCE NEWS

Australian Defence Force Posture Review

The Institute made a submission to the Australian Defence Force Posture Review in September last year¹. On 3 May 2012, the government released the Review's final report which found that Australia's changing strategic environment does not require widespread changes in the location of Australian Defence Force (ADF) bases, but that some adjustments should be made to meet future needs. There are some weaknesses and risks associated with the capacity of ADF bases and training areas; and with our ability to sustain high-tempo operations in northern Australia, our neighbourhood and region.

The Review addressed the range of present and emerging global, regional and national strategic and security factors requiring careful consideration. These include: the rise of the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean rim as regions of global strategic significance; the growth of military power projection capabilities of countries in the Asia-Pacific; the growing need for provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief following extreme events in the Asia-Pacific region; and energy security, and security issues associated with expanding offshore resource exploitation, in our north-west and northern approaches.

The report's recommendations are mainly longer-term options, many involving substantial additional investment. Decisions on them will be made as part of the 2013 White Paper process. Some of the conclusions and proposals are:

- The expansion of maritime capabilities will significantly influence Australia's future force posture. The joint amphibious capability will have a transformational effect on Navy, Army and the ADF generally, driving force posture considerations.
- Although permanent Navy bases in the north-west are not operationally necessary, Defence should examine options involving investment to enhance Broome, Darwin and Cairns as naval bases.
- Defence should proceed with its plans to homeport the air-warfare destroyers and landing helicopter docks at Fleet Base East in the short term, but also develop additional options involving Brisbane and Fleet Base West.
- While Air Force bases are well-located, many currently lack the capacity to fully support new platforms, and some air bases in northern Australia face significant logistics constraints.
- Defence should upgrade bases at Edinburgh, Learmonth, Pearce, Tindal and Townsville to enable unrestricted operations by KC-30 and P-8 aircraft; and should upgrade Curtin, Learmonth, Tindal and Townsville, with Scherger as a lower priority, to support future combat aircraft operations.
- Defence's international engagement is a significant strategic asset.

Doug Roser

¹ *United Service* 62 (4, December), 5, 7, 16, 2011.