

# PATHFINDER

AIR POWER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE BULLETIN



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## THE AIR CAMPAIGN AND THE JOINT TASK FORCE

The security of Australia's national interests rely on gaining and maintaining the freedom to manoeuvre our air, land and maritime forces in places and at times of our choosing and restricting adversaries from doing the same. Through the application of air power, the air campaign provides the joint force with the speed, flexibility, responsiveness, reach and perspective needed to ensure Australia's security.

The Australian Defence Force is normally employed as a joint task force (JTF) to achieve military objectives through the application or threat of force in support of national policy. JTFs may be called upon to deter or defeat attacks on Australia or its interests, contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and East Timor, contribute to military contingencies in the Asia-Pacific region, and/or contribute to military contingencies in support of global security.

This range of responsibilities may require a number of JTFs operating in different areas, or theatres, concurrently.

Air power is most effective in meeting the joint force commander's objectives when applied through the conduct of an air campaign. An air campaign can be required to support multiple JTFs; however, the conduct of each air operation is tailored to meet specific joint objectives. In effect the air campaign is the planning, coordination and execution of air component activities within the joint campaign.

The air campaign is the integrated application of the RAAF's air power to create effects that are harmonised with the actions and effects of the other joint force components to achieve joint campaign objectives. Air campaign planning is synchronised with the land and

maritime components' plans to develop an air strategy that identifies air objectives required to achieve the desired joint force outcomes (ends), the effects and tasks to achieve these objectives (ways), and the resources required to conduct the tasks (means).

JTFs vary in size and shape with the force structure determined by the type and scale of conflict. Thus, the character of an air campaign is shaped by the nature of the operation, and thereby the degree to which air power's enduring roles of control of the air, strike, ISR,

and air mobility contribute to the joint campaign.

While no one aspect of the air campaign stands alone, history has consistently demonstrated control of the air is usually essential to gain sea control, undertake land and air manoeuvre, and conduct air activities. However, Australian forces have not

been challenged from the air in recent history, leading to an assumption of air superiority leading to operational complacency.

Air Power is inherently offensive and is most effective when employed to defeat hostile forces in their bases, in staging areas, or in transit. Striking enemy forces as far away as possible from our own allows room to manoeuvre and achieve JTF objectives.

The air campaign seeks to establish the necessary degree of control of the air through offensive or defensive activities prior to the onset of major land or maritime actions. This is a prerequisite to allow the required freedom of operations to the joint force and could create decisive effects in a dynamic operational environment.

Control of the air can provide a major asymmetrical advantage in most forms of conflict. As evidenced during recent Libyan operations, a well resourced conventional



force can be defeated by a small rebel army that has dominant air power on its side.

Alongside control of the air, the air campaign provides JTFs with the ability to reduce an adversary's ability to fight, through air strikes on centres of gravity away from the battlefield or against enemy forces that directly threaten friendly actions.



Success or failure of the JTF can rest on the ability to get the right information and intelligence, to the right people, in the right format, at the right time. Airborne ISR provided through the air campaign can enable the JTF to operate against an adversary with a definitive decision advantage.

Deploying and sustaining any joint force is a major undertaking in itself, and air mobility, delivered through the air campaign, underpins the manoeuvre capability of the JTF.

Australia's force projection capabilities have been enhanced with the introduction into service of the Landing Ship Dock (LSD) HMAS *Choules*, and will significantly expand with the induction of Landing Helicopter Docks (LHD) HMAS *Canberra* and *Adelaide* in 2014-16. These amphibious ships will have the capacity to deploy and sustain land forces via organic air mobility (helicopters) and landing craft. This enhanced amphibious capability will allow the projection of combat teams (220 personnel), up to a medium-weight battle group (2200 personnel), and their armour, fire support, logistics and battlefield rotary-wing assets. In recent years HMAS *Tobruk*, *Manoora*, and *Kanimbla* have formed the mainstay of Australia's amphibious capability, but the introduction of the LHD's raises our force projection capabilities to a whole new level.

Like the air campaign, the amphibious capability provides the expeditionary force commander with more than a means to move land and mobility elements from one location to another. It provides the mechanism for logistic resupply, C2, and medical facilities.

The ability to project this power must, in turn, come with the ability to protect it. The Air Warfare Destroyer (AWD) will provide localised air and sea defence for the modestly protected LHD's. However, in areas that are anything less than permissive, a more robust layered approach to defence may require submarines, frigates, mine counter measures and various ground based ISR and strike aircraft. These assets together may form only a part of a JTF.

The deployment of combat teams as a JTF is not new, but Australia's capacity to project these teams as an integrated element from the sea is a new capability. Thus, the *amphibiousness* of this element of the joint force brings new challenges for an integrated approach to joint operations.

Australia projects military power through the deployment of joint task forces; the air campaign is the JTF's means of delivering the right type of air power, at the right time, at the right place to achieve the right effect. Like air power, the amphibious element also cannot be considered in isolation; rather it has to be viewed as an essential element of the overall military capability of the joint task force.

- *The joint task force is established to harmonise the activities of two or more components in order to achieve a common set of military objectives.*
- *The air campaign is the conduct of air operations to meet JTF objectives.*
- *Air and amphibious elements will form integral parts of future Australian JTFs.*

*To commit troops to a campaign in which they cannot be provided with adequate air support is to court disaster.*

Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck



**Air Power Development Centre**  
TCC3, Department of Defence  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ph: 02 6266 1355 Fax: 02 6266 1041

Email: [airpower@defence.gov.au](mailto:airpower@defence.gov.au)

Web: <http://airpower.airforce.gov.au>

The views expressed in this Pathfinder are not necessarily those of the RAAF

