



# Foundation

Media Release

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## Australia's Future Surface Combatants

The Kokoda Foundation today released Kokoda Paper Number 11 – Australia's Future Surface Combatants. This paper provides insights into developments in the maritime security environment in the region to Australia's north that might have large consequences for Australia's future investment in the surface navy.

Brice Pacey, a private sector strategic and operational analyst, writes that a high priority should be attached to revisiting some of the apparent assumptions in Australia's capability development and procurement policies in the light of a rapidly evolving regional security environment.

Mr Pacey says that, against a background of generally favourable trends in the maritime security environment, there are some disturbing developments. For example, apparent disconnections between the declaratory strategies of some East Asian states and their growing force structures may prove to be unhelpful, and may progressively increase the risk of misadventures at sea or strategic miscalculations.

In a worst case scenario, some have argued that the deployment of new asymmetrical weapons and tactics in the region might put at risk the \$20 billion surface combatant force proposed in the Government's recent Defence White Paper. That conclusion may be premature, but Mr Pacey notes that there is a need for deep reflection on the issues in the period leading up to the next Defence White Paper due in 2014.

### Background

*Force 2030, Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century*, or the Defence White Paper 2009, announces the Government's intention to acquire a new class of eight Future Frigates, to purchase up to 20 new multi-role Offshore Combatant Vessels and to consider the need for a fourth Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyer. These vessels will form part of a larger force used for maintaining freedom of navigation, protecting shipping, and lifting and supporting land forces.

But the future roles for Australia's next-generation surface combatants have been contested. At the time that the Defence White Paper 2009 was drafted the weight of professional opinion supported a continuing role for surface combatants across a broad spectrum of plausible contingencies. Nevertheless, there was recognition that the main objections relating to the utility and survivability of these vessels in the 2030-2050 timeframe would need to be examined further and in considerable detail leading up to the next Defence White paper, in 2013-14.

This study examines the influences on and options for the shape and size of Australia's future surface combatant force in light of the capability priorities identified in the Defence White Paper 2009. It is designed to contribute to thinking about these major defence investments and encourage further constructive discussion and debate.

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Researching Australia's Future Security Challenges