

LBMS as an SSN alternative



AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE LAND-based maritime strike (LBMS) capability, committed to by the Government as part of the 2024 *National Defence Strategy* (NDS), seems to have taken on an increased priority in light of the recent news that the maintenance and sustainment of Australia's Collins-class diesel-electric submarines is likely to face increasing pressure as it moves through its life-of-type extension (LOTE).

In understanding the strategic risks associated with the Collins LOTE, it is essential to note that maritime strike is no longer merely a responsibility for the Navy; all elements of the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) joint force now contribute to maritime strike as a function of the NDS' deterrence strategy. Australia's geographic position as



an island nation necessitates a robust maritime defence strategy, and the temporary reduction in its submarine capability heightens the need for other forms of maritime deterrence. In this instance, LBMS assets can fill critical gaps, providing defensive and offensive capabilities to safeguard national interests and project power into the region.

Land 8113 Phase 2, the Army's quest for a LBMS capability, is an early option for Defence and the Government to rapidly field a maritime strike

capability that can help the ADF partially mitigate the challenges of maintaining its maritime strike capability over the coming decade. A future LBMS capability would complement and enhance other non-Navy strike systems, including aircraft equipped with long-range anti-ship missiles and other existing capabilities in the surface combatant fleet.

The LBMS solution will be capable of being deployed rapidly and enjoy persistence and concealability, allowing Australia to protect its sea lanes and coastal areas as well as undertake sea denial and sea control actions without relying exclusively on sea-based assets like submarines and surface ships. This is particularly vital when Australia's submarine force is undergoing modernisation as part of the LOTE program and AUKUS Pillar One, reducing its operational capacity in the short to medium term. LBMS platforms provide flexibility, redundancy and a layered defence approach to keeping Australia's northern approaches secure and creating and maintaining the deterrence-by-denial ambitions as set out by the NDS.

Australia's Collins-class submarines remain essential to its maritime strategy until the mid-2030s; the pressure to maintain their operational rate-of-effort throughout LOTE can be partially offset by accelerating the acquisition of LBMS capabilities via Land 8113 Phase 2. These systems offer a scalable, responsive and relatively cost-effective way to safeguard Australia's maritime interests, protect its maritime approaches and project power. **DTR**