

## Humanitarian Relief Operations

- 6.1 The 2000 Defence White Paper confirms the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is not specifically structured to support humanitarian relief operations. The priority force structure determinants for the ADF are the defence of Australia and contributing to the security of our immediate region. The ADF is also tasked with supporting Australia's wider interests and objectives by being able to contribute effectively to international coalitions of forces to meet crises beyond our immediate neighbourhood. To achieve these tasks, the ADF will maintain and further develop an integrated and balanced joint force that can provide capabilities appropriate to the two highest tasks listed above.<sup>1</sup>
- 6.2 In addition to the aforementioned core tasks, the ADF is also called upon to undertake a number of routine peacetime national tasks such as support to surveillance operations and the interdiction of suspected illegal entry vessels. The ADF is also called upon to provide support in the case of domestic emergencies such as major bush fires and to form a major part of the national response to international emergencies or humanitarian operations.<sup>2</sup> While the 'ADF is not specifically structured, nor is its personnel specifically trained for, humanitarian relief', the ADF's military training and equipment means that it is often able to support Government requests for humanitarian relief operations at short notice.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, 2000, p. XII.

2 Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, 2000, pp. XI-XII.

3 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 5.

- 6.3 The review of the Defence Annual Report 2003-04 was a timely opportunity to review the ability of the ADF to continue to respond to humanitarian emergencies and recognise the substantial contribution Defence made as part of the whole of government contribution to assist Indonesia following the devastating 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami and the Nias earthquake on 29 March 2005.

## Background

- 6.4 While the ADF is structured for war fighting it trains to meet contingencies across the spectrum of operations. This spectrum is shown graphically in Figure 6.1. The 'spectrum of operations' extends from assisting with emergency relief to matters of national survival. It is underpinned by the concept of 'likelihood versus consequence', namely: operations to the left of the spectrum are more likely, but their consequences are relatively limited; and operations to the right of the spectrum, while although they might be relatively unlikely, the consequences may be catastrophic for Australia.<sup>4</sup>
- 6.5 Recent operations across this spectrum have included mid-intensity war fighting in the contribution to coalition operations in Iraq, peacekeeping in East Timor and support to whole of government nation building in Solomon Islands. The ADF contribution to the national response to the Boxing Day Tsunami and the Nias earthquake demonstrate an additional dimension to ADF capability.
- 6.6 The ADF can be called upon by Government, or requested by other civil authorities or Government departments, to provide a range of emergency and non-emergency assistance to the Australian Government and community in non-combat related roles. Some of the tasks the ADF may be requested to deliver include:
- emergency assistance;
  - search and rescue;
  - disaster recovery;
  - surveillance; and
  - security or non-emergency law enforcement roles.

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4 Department of Defence, *Force 2020*, <http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/f2020.pdf>, 2002 (accessed 4 February 2005).

- 6.7 The ADF can be requested to undertake law-enforcement tasks where the use of force by Defence personnel may be required (these tasks are categorised as Defence Force Aid to Civilian Authorities).

Figure 6.1 The spectrum of operations



Source Department of Defence, *Force 2020*, <http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/f2020.pdf>, (accessed 4 February 2005) 2002, p. 9.

- 6.8 Defence routinely provides a range of peacetime national support tasks which include surveillance of the Australian coastline relating to illegal immigration, smuggling and quarantine evasion. Defence also routinely contributes to search and rescue tasks both on land and at sea. In relation to national security, defence is poised to provide a range of counter-terrorist responses in support of the national counter-terrorism plan.

## Defence Assistance to Civil Community

- 6.9 Defence Assistance to the Civil Community comprises the following six categories:

### Counter-disaster and emergency assistance

- Category 1 – local emergency assistance - emergency assistance for specific tasks provided by a local commander or administrator, from within his or her own resources, in localised emergency situations when immediate action is necessary to save human life, alleviate suffering, prevent extensive loss of animal life or prevent widespread loss of damage to property.

- Category 2 – general emergency assistance - emergency assistance in a more extensive or continuing disaster where action is necessary to save human life or alleviate suffering, prevent extensive loss of animal life or prevent loss or damage to property and when state or territory resources are inadequate.
- Category 3 – civil emergency or disaster recovery - assistance associated with a civil emergency or disaster recovery, which is not directly related to the saving of life or property.

#### Non-emergency assistance

- Category 4 – public events of significance and general non-emergency assistance - non-emergency assistance provided to the other government departments or authorities, to the states or territories, local government or other authorities or organisations, commercial enterprises, non-profit organisations or individuals or bodies in the general community.
- Category 5 – minor non-emergency assistance - non-emergency assistance of a minor nature, excluding flying tasks, provided to local organisations and which is within the capacity of a local commander or administrator's resources and authority.
- Category 6 – non-emergency law-enforcement-related tasks - support to civil authorities in the performance of non-emergency law-enforcement-related tasks where there is no likelihood that Defence personnel will be required to use force.<sup>5</sup>

6.10 This review will confine its observations of ADF involvement in Category 2 and 3 operations. Category 2 operations in the recent past have included the ADF support to the ACT and Victorian bush fires in January 2003. Under category 3, the ADF has played an integral part in Australia's relief contribution to Banda Aceh following the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, and Nias island after the earthquake on 29 March 2005. Defence's support for the tsunami relief effort is known as Operation Sumatra Assist, and the assistance to Nias, Operation Sumatra Assist – Phase II.<sup>6</sup> Operation Sumatra Assist has been the ADF's largest humanitarian operation in recent years.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Department of Defence, *Annual Report 2003-04*, p. 88.

6 Department of Defence, 'Disaster relief operations: Operation Sumatra Assist', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/optsumamiassist/default.htm>> (accessed 12 April 2005).

7 Senator the Hon Robert Hill, Media release, 13 January 2005, <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/Hilltpl.cfm?CurrentId=4540>> (accessed 7 February 2005).

## Budget allocation

- 6.11 The small-scale humanitarian relief efforts undertaken by Defence are usually absorbed within Defence's annual budget allocations.<sup>8</sup> For major international humanitarian relief efforts, such as the Boxing Day tsunami disaster, Defence is usually supplemented for the net additional cost of its contribution to these operations.<sup>9</sup>
- 6.12 The historical net cost of Defence's contribution to national support tasks, including emergency and non-emergency assistance to the Australian community in non-combat roles, is \$17.558m.<sup>10</sup> This amount represents the three-year average of the costs Defence incurs in its contribution to humanitarian tasks, since the commencement of reporting by outputs in 2002-03 as detailed in Figure 6.2. These amounts were not subject to separate appropriation, and were absorbed from within the Defence's annual budget.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 6.2 Contribution to National Support Tasks since 2002-03

| Financial Year | \$m           |
|----------------|---------------|
| 2002-03        | 15.530        |
| 2003-04        | 20.575        |
| 2004-05        | 16.570        |
| <b>Average</b> | <b>17.558</b> |

Source Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

## Structure and capabilities of ADF for national support tasks

- 6.13 The force structure of the ADF is aimed at providing the most cost-efficient and operationally effective mix of capabilities for achieving the Australian Government's strategic objectives, including being prepared to undertake lower-level operations such as disaster relief.<sup>12</sup> Defence stated the force structure developed for defending Australia is appropriate for these lower-level tasks. Defence stated:

8 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

9 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

10 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

11 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

12 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 35.

In preparing to defend Australia, the ADF has to be, and is, a flexible and mobile force with sufficient levels of readiness and sustainability to achieve outcomes in relief operations. The skills and the capabilities that we need to deploy to sustain our forces for war fighting are fundamentally very similar to those required for humanitarian relief; so we can and do easily adapt our war-fighting force for these types of operations.<sup>13</sup>

## Frequently used ADF resources

6.14 The ADF resources that are frequently used for category 2 and 3 national support tasks include:

- C-130 Hercules aircraft. C-130 aircraft have supported disaster relief as far afield as the Bam earthquake in Iran in recent years. This capability is also in heavy demand as an enabling resource for many routine ADF operations. Emergency search-and-rescue tasks and disaster-relief operations put additional pressure on the capability. Emergency tasking can affect routine ADF training operations across all three services.
- ADF helicopters. Helicopters are frequently called upon for search-and-rescue tasks such as the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht race disaster. In addition Sea King and Chinook helicopters are suited to disaster relief operations such as large-scale floods because of their significant lift capability. Emergency helicopter usage has the same flow on effect on training as that for the C130 fleet.
- Amphibious ships. The Navy's amphibious ships are amongst the most versatile assets in the ADF. They have recently operated at the height of the Iraq war in the northern Arabian Gulf in a demanding, high-threat environment. More recently, the HMAS Manoora has been the centre of the ADF contribution to Operation Sumatra Assist phases I and II. Manoora and her sister ship, Kanimbla, have integral helicopter and surface transport capabilities and a level-three medical facility capable of conducting surgery. They can also transport and sustain the other ADF assets suited to humanitarian operations. These two ships have operated at a particularly high tempo since their re-commissioning into the RAN.

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13 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 36.

- Medical Support. The ADF medical units have recently been in heavy demand for incidents across the spectrum of operations. These have included a lengthy commitment in East Timor, an ongoing commitment in north-central Iraq and a range of emergency-support operations. This demanding period of high-tempo emergency-support operations commenced with Operation Bali Assist and is ongoing. Many of the medical officers and specialists within the ADF medical support capability are reserve personnel. This group have a finite ability to contribute as part of the ADF without impacting elsewhere in the national health system. Regular personnel are in equal demand during routine training and combat operations with other ADF units. Enhancements to the Deployable Medical Capability are addressed in the *Defence Capability Plan 2004-14* as project JP 2060.
- Army and RAAF engineers have also been heavily committed to operations and national support tasks. While the ATGIS Army Community Assistance Program (AACAP) and the regional Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) are not emergency tasks they have placed significant demands on the ADF engineering capability over recent years. Engineers are particularly suited to support emergency and humanitarian relief tasks as they have the ability to produce clean drinking water, to clear obstructions and undertake vertical construction. Their soldiers and equipment are capable of operating under the most demanding conditions. Operation Sumatra Assist drew on a number of these capabilities.
- P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft and Fremantle-class patrol boats routinely support the civil surveillance program; and
- Defence planners, transport and logistics operations staff and general personnel are used to provide infrastructure and support in a wide range of domestic and international emergencies. Service accommodation and victualling has also been provided in emergency evacuee centres for victims of major bush fires.<sup>14</sup>

## Reservists

6.15 The ADF Reserve forces have traditionally been held on low readiness for Defence of Australia tasks. Their equipment and personal readiness requirements usually exceed 90 days Notice to Move (NTM). The 'come-as-you-are' nature of emergency support

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 5.

operations therefore seem at odds with the structure of the ADF Reserves. Despite this apparent dichotomy, members of the reserves regularly make significant contributions to emergency and humanitarian operations. Reserve units close to the scene of a domestic emergency frequently 'crash through' NTM requirements and provide both Category 1 and 2 support. Individual members of the reserve, in critical trades such as medical staff, are also regularly called upon to support Category 1,2 and 3 operations.

- 6.16 There are clear benefits in utilising Reservists in national support operations. In domestic emergencies Reserve units are frequently closest to the scene of the incident and members will often have high levels of local knowledge. In humanitarian relief operations, Reservists provide specialist skills not readily available in the permanent forces, such as specialist medical skills. Reservists can also augment the permanent force. Defence stated:

To date, the willingness to volunteer has been outstanding as has the support extended by Reservists' employers. But difficulties can arise for Reservists and their employers if the requirement continues for extended periods. Using the medical profession as an example, hospital waiting lists and contractual or business obligations can generally sustain only short periods of disruption.<sup>15</sup>

## **Possible increased frequency of National Support operations**

- 6.17 While it is beyond the scope of this report to attempt to predict whether the number of humanitarian disasters is likely to increase in the future, it is possible to predict whether the ADF will be increasingly called upon to provide support in the case of such events.
- 6.18 It is reasonable to extrapolate current trends in which both business and governments adopt 'just-in-time' practices – holding only enough vehicles, equipment and stocks for their immediate needs. This is sound economic practice but it is not suited to unforeseen emergencies. In an emergency, agencies must respond with what they have to hand. They must continue to provide existing levels of service, thus preventing them from diverting existing resources. Defence is

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15 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.



therefore increasingly isolated as the holder of the nation's spare emergency capacity.

- 6.19 Such reliance on Defence is possible during periods of low operating tempo, in fact during such periods Defence may even regard the experience gained on such tasks as an advantage, gaining training and operational experience in a wide variety of challenging geographical locations and often in extremely adverse weather conditions.<sup>16</sup>
- 6.20 However, in a period of uncertainty, during which many of the assets listed as suitable for emergency operations in this report are heavily tasked higher on the spectrum of operations, it may not be possible to continue to rely on Defence assets without exposing them to the risk of equipment failure and personnel exhaustion.
- 6.21 Defence currently advise the committee that pressures on these resources are manageable and that no capability adjustments are necessary beyond those already forecast in the Defence Capability Plan. Defence suggests, however, that pressures caused by emergency assistance in Australia 'might be alleviated by increased funding by state governments in the fields of disaster relief and emergency management.'<sup>17</sup>

## Significant successes

- 6.22 Defence stated that one of the most important reasons the ADF is able to successfully undertake humanitarian operations is due to the individual quality of ADF personnel, particularly their compassion and understanding. In relation to Operation Sumatra Assist, Defence reflected:

Most recently, in my observation of those qualities in Banda Aceh, I was once again struck by the human touch that our men and women bring to these sorts of operations. Their empathy, their compassion and their understanding for the plight of others were very evident in Banda Aceh, as they have been in every other humanitarian operation.<sup>18</sup>

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16 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

17 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

18 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 39.

- 6.23 Defence advised that the ADF personnel in this Operation have also been:

...buoyed and lifted. Certainly during my brief visit I saw that they were very proud of what they were doing. Those who have returned remain very proud of what they have been able to achieve. They see the direct results of their efforts. I think it has been a very positive impact on their self-confidence, self-esteem and belief in themselves.<sup>19</sup>

## Support and entitlements for ADF personnel

- 6.24 Noting the concurrency of the excellent contribution by ADF personnel in recent years to humanitarian operations and the increased operational tempo since 1999, the committee sought assurance from Defence that adequate structures were in place to ensure the health and safety of personnel.
- 6.25 The ADF has one of the largest workplace mental-health systems in Australia. The mental health support services routinely available to ADF members include Defence medical officers, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses and military chaplains. The ADF has 23 Regional Mental Health Teams tasked to coordinate mental health service provision and currently 2 Operational Mental Health Teams.<sup>20</sup>
- 6.26 Defence also provides an All Hours Support Line that is available to members and their family 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a confidential triage telephone support line staffed by tertiary-qualified health and mental health professionals who have the capacity to respond to members and family members in crisis.<sup>21</sup>

## ADF operational mental health support

- 6.27 ADF personnel deployed on Operation Sumatra Assist receive comprehensive mental-health support including pre-deployment briefings, embedded mental-health support, return to Australia

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19 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 42.

20 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

21 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

briefings and post operational mental-health screening.<sup>22</sup> Defence stated:

We are very conscious of the issues that our people have to face. Throughout the operation we have had support in place on the ground in Banda Aceh. We have had psych teams there to support as well as chaplains. In addition to being on the ground in Banda Aceh we have had similar teams in Butterworth who have either conducted visits into Banda Aceh or have been in Butterworth as people have come out of Sumatra. They go through a debriefing cycle in Butterworth. These people of course will monitor their wellbeing for many months in the years to come.<sup>23</sup>

- 6.28 Defence advised the key components of the framework are the Return to Australia Psychological Screening interview conducted at the end of the deployment, and the Post Operational Psychological Screen conducted three to six months after return. Both of these processes are aimed at enhancing the ADF's operational capability. It does this by identifying people that may benefit from post-deployment follow-up and by providing advice to commanders about the management of their unit after their return to Australia.<sup>24</sup>
- 6.29 In response to the Asian Tsunami Disaster, the Directorate of Mental Health has established a 'Managing Reactions to Major Disasters and Potentially Traumatic Events' section on the ADF Mental Health Strategy website:  
<<http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/dhs/mentalhealth/index.htm>>.<sup>25</sup>
- 6.30 In addition, Defence stated that Families of personnel deployed also receive comprehensive pre-deployment briefings and follow-up support for the period of the member's deployment.<sup>26</sup>

## Entitlements

- 6.31 Operation Sumatra Assist was conducted as a peacetime operation and therefore no special entitlements were available for ADF personnel. Defence advised:

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22 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

23 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 40.

24 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

25 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

26 Department of Defence, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

They were given a special monetary allowance to account for some of the hardship they were affected by. In this case, that was advanced. There is normally a 30-day qualifying period for what is known in my service as hard lying allowance. In this case the qualifying period was not required and amounts were set for various parts of the operation.<sup>27</sup>

## Lessons learned from Operation Sumatra Assist

6.32 As part of Operation Sumatra Assist, Defence advised a 'lessons learned' team was very quickly established by the defence warfare centre based in Williamstown.<sup>28</sup> This team will examine and report on the range of lessons learned including:

the equipment that we used; what equipment might have been better; whether better equipment was available to do the jobs that we ended up doing; whether the equipment that we took was the appropriate equipment; whether we could have done the movement slicker, faster, better; and whether our command and control was adequate.<sup>29</sup>

6.33 Defence also advised that a lesson-learned conference had been held 'across the whole-of-government for all the agencies that were involved' in the operation.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

6.34 The Committee highly commends the ADF for its outstanding support to humanitarian and emergency operations, most recently demonstrated in Sumatra and Nias. The committee also expresses its sorrow for the tragic loss of life aboard 'Shark 02' when it crashed during relief operations on Nias in April 2005. All Defence personnel

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27 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 41.

28 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 38.

29 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 38.

30 Vice Admiral Russell Shalders, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Joint Operations, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, p. 38.

deployed on Operation Sumatra Assist demonstrated empathy, determination and compassion, qualities in keeping with the finest traditions of the ADF.

- 6.35 The committee endorses the primacy of the ADF's war-fighting role in determining force structure. The principal role of the ADF should continue to be to defend Australia and its interests.
- 6.36 The range of capabilities, listed in the report, which are frequently called upon when assisting with emergency tasks are an indication that the ADF war-fighting capabilities have significant utility across a broad range of other tasks. The committee agrees with the ADF assessment that no structural changes are necessary to the ADF to enhance this ability, beyond those already forecast in the *Defence Capability Plan 2004-14*.
- 6.37 The committee also agrees there are many benefits for the ADF in undertaking Category 2 and 3 Defence Assistance to the Civil Community. Personnel receive exposure to testing operating environments and conditions which develop their core defence skills. They also experience the complex reality of other geography and cultures, many of which contain the seeds of modern conflict. ADF members exposed to such operations often emerge more mature and confident in themselves and their organisation.
- 6.38 The committee does, however, note the convergence of a high operational tempo and the increased use of many ADF resources in national and international emergency tasks. It is reasonable to expect that the ADF will remain busy in an uncertain security environment for some years to come. It is also increasingly clear that the national surge capacity is contracting in favour of a 'just-in-time' approach to logistics and infrastructure across the country. This contraction by all levels of government and industry will increasingly leave the ADF as one of the few institutions capable of responding to major emergencies. Should a high operating tempo and a series of national or international disasters coincide, the types of capabilities listed in this report will be placed under considerable pressure. This pressure risks harming the health and commitment of many service personnel and damage to defence equipment procured primarily for security tasks.
- 6.39 To counter this potential harm, it is clear that the ADF has developed a robust support structure for its personnel. This structure combines awareness of the need to provide adequate conditions of service for

deployed personnel, concurrent support for families and significant mental-health intervention on return.