



Submission No 69

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

Organisation: Department of Defence

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Submission

To the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

INTRODUCTION

This submission by the Department of Defence is in response to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste.

Australia has a clear strategic interest in supporting the security and stability of our immediate region. Timor-Leste's close proximity and our shared history emphasise the strategic importance of maintaining a strong bilateral relationship. As part of Australia's whole-of-government efforts, Defence assists Australia's strong leadership role in supporting long-term stability in Timor-Leste.

The International Stabilisation Force (ISF) drawdown, completed March 2013, presents an opportune time to reflect on the future of Australia's bilateral relationship with Timor-Leste. In a broader regional context, the drawdown is occurring as global economic power shifts to the Asia Pacific. As economies in our region grow, Timor-Leste and its neighbours will be able to modernise and grow their military capabilities. This will pose challenges for both Australia and Timor-Leste, but also opportunities as the region seeks to balance these shifts through increased dialogue and cooperation. We look forward to a maturing defence relationship with Timor-Leste that acknowledges our shared interests in regional security and builds upon the close links Australia has established with the Timor-Leste Defence Force (F-FDTL) and Secretariat of Defence.

Following the ISF's drawdown, our Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) will underpin Australia's maturing defence relationship with Timor-Leste, and form the foundation for advancing our shared interests. The DCP's overarching aim is to support the development of the F-FDTL and Secretariat of Defence through training, education, infrastructure development, mentoring and exercises.

Through the DCP, Defence has worked with Timor-Leste to achieve significant outcomes. These include infrastructure development; education and training in areas including engineering and

English language; participation in multilateral activities and exercises; and a program of senior-level visits to facilitate and strengthen personal links. Subject to the agreement of our Governments, future DCP engagement could include further development of the F-FDTL's maritime component, as well as increased opportunities for the F-FDTL to undertake multilateral activities with partner nations. We will also deepen our relationship with the Secretariat of Defence. In addition, Defence is in the process of negotiating a Defence Cooperation Agreement with Timor-Leste, which will provide the legal framework for our bilateral relationship.

As a developing state, Timor-Leste faces socio-economic and environmental challenges which may affect Australian engagement goals in the future. The F-FDTL and Secretariat of Defence are newly formed, and the F-FDTL is historically based on guerrilla warfare. It is now adjusting to a more conventionally structured defence force, as well as direct civilian oversight by the government and parliament. The Government of Timor-Leste's development plans for the future F-FDTL are articulated in *Force 2020*, and while some of its key objectives are aspirational, the full implementation of this plan is restricted by resource and capacity constraints in the short term and the challenges of building public infrastructure in the long term. While some of these challenges may be overcome with foreign assistance, large international interest in Timor-Leste has resulted in a crowded donor environment.

DEFENCE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH TIMOR-LESTE

Security Operations

Australia has consistently been the largest provider of personnel to UN-mandated missions in Timor-Leste. Australia initially made a critical contribution to the multilateral International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) in response to the security crisis that emerged after the UN-sponsored referendum in 1999. Most recently, Australia took leadership of the ISF at the request of the Government of Timor-Leste to help restore stability following the 2006 crisis in Dili. The security situation in Timor-Leste is now stable, and during the national elections in 2012, domestic security forces responded well to minor incidents of unrest, with UN Police assistance and the ISF present only in a standby capacity.

Over the past fourteen years, ADF security operations in Timor-Leste have included:

- Operation WARDEN: ADF contribution to INTERFET involving the deployment of 4,500 to 5,500 troops from September 1999 to February 2000;
- Operation CITADEL: ADF contribution to UN Mission in Support of East Timor, involving 990 troops from February 2002 to May 2004;
- Operation ASTUTE: ADF contribution to the ISF involving 2,000 personnel and aviation assets, from May 2006 to November 2012; and
- Operation TOWER: ADF contribution to UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) from August 2006 to December 2012.

On 31 October 2012, the Australian-led ISF was awarded Timor-Leste's highest national honour, the Order of Timor-Leste, to acknowledge its significant contribution to security and stability since May 2006.

The ISF's drawdown aligned with the Government of Timor-Leste's view that the elections were a natural decision point for domestic security forces to assume primary responsibility for Timor-Leste's security needs. Its transition has been coordinated with the Government of

Timor-Leste, the United Nations, and our ISF partner, New Zealand. Prior to commencing its drawdown, the ISF continued to conduct some non-security tasks in Dili and regional areas focusing primarily on community engagement.

On 22 November 2012, the ISF ceased operations with drawdown of security forces commencing on 23 November 2012. While the majority of ADF troops returned to Australia at the end of 2012, some personnel currently remain in Timor-Leste to finalise base remediation and the repatriation of equipment. Defence expects the ISF's drawdown to be complete by the end of March 2013.

Defence Cooperation Program

The primary aim of the DCP is to support the development of a professional and capable F-FDTL and Secretariat of Defence. Since its commencement in 2001, the DCP has provided over \$90m in assistance to the conduct of exercises, infrastructure, education, training and mentoring programs. There are currently 24 Australian DCP personnel (2 civilian and 22 military) in Timor-Leste, who engage with the F-FDTL and Secretariat of Defence to build capacity in a range of areas, including engineering, English language proficiency, infrastructure, maritime security, logistics, communications and governance.

Over the past decade, the DCP's major achievements in-country have included:

- Construction of a 600 personnel military training centre (completed 2001) and an English Language Training Centre (completed 2003) by the Australian Army's 19th Chief Engineer Works;
- Establishing a Specialist Training Wing at Metinaro (completed 2008) that doubled student capacity and enhanced the English Language Training Centre (ELTC). In addition to the provision of specialist training courses, the ELTC offers pre-deployment peacekeeping training through the F-FDTL's recently-established Peace and Stability Operations Cell;
- Constructing the F-FDTL Engineer Headquarters and an English Language Training Facility extension at the Specialist Training Wing (completed 2010);
- Building secure weapons armouries at F-FDTL bases in Metinaro and Baucau (completed 2011-2012); and
- Strengthening the F-FDTL's engineering capabilities through training, project management oversight and funding the acquisition of engineering equipment for the F-FDTL Engineer Company.

In addition to these in-country activities, the DCP facilitates various training opportunities for F-FDTL and Secretariat of Defence personnel in Australia, notably:

- Providing education and training through the Defence Cooperation Scholarship Program, the Royal Military College at Duntroon, the Navy New Entry Officers Course, the Australian Command and Staff College and Macquarie University;
- Sponsoring F-FDTL junior officers and soldiers during on-the-job experience programs at Defence establishments.
- Facilitating cooperative Defence engagement through F-FDTL attendance at multilateral Defence forums including the Sea Power Conference, Chiefs of Defence Conference, Pacific Armies Management Seminars and Chief of Army Exercise; and
- Enhancing bilateral relations and people-to-people links between the F-FDTL, Secretariat of Defence officials and their Australian counterparts through senior visits.

The DCP continues to encourage the F-FDTL's development in a manner consistent with the Government of Timor-Leste's direction and our shared interests. It has established a sound basis for cooperation into the future. In addition to Australia, several nations contribute significantly to Timor-Leste's defence development, including Portugal, the United States and New Zealand, as well as a number of other partners such as China, Indonesia and Brazil.

OUTLOOK FOR THE DEFENCE RELATIONSHIP

Australia will plan future activities based upon the current defence priorities of Australia and Timor-Leste, including the continued development of the F-FDTL's maritime component, multilateral engagement activities, and increased engagement with the Secretariat of Defence. Possible areas for foreign donor engagement in the defence and security sector, based on the current environment, may include maritime assistance or provision of infrastructure.

Defence is seeking opportunities to prepare the F-FDTL to participate in multilateral activities with partner countries. This could take several forms, including peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities, other military exercises or maritime activities.

Our assistance to the F-FDTL's Naval Component has to date been low level and focussed on training and the provision of equipment to assist in covering capability gaps identified by the two Royal Australian Navy members assigned to support the F-FDTL Naval Component. Future maritime engagement opportunities include continued training for the F-FDTL Maritime Component, such as sea-riding and boarding party training in Royal Australian Navy vessels (pending vessel availability). In light of Timor-Leste's recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, we could also provide assistance to facilitate increased Timorese participation in international workshops on maritime security. As a precursor to greater cooperation in the maritime environment, Navy is investigating developing a closer relationship with the F-FDTL Naval Component.

We will also maintain close ties with the Secretariat of Defence, and seek to build on our extant program of bilateral engagement. This may include more opportunities for senior-level visits by Secretariat of Defence members to Australia, provision of assistance to further develop its human resources capability and provision of training in areas such as governance and finance. Engaging with the Secretariat of Defence will enable Defence to interact closely with emerging future leaders, build valuable people-to-people links and promote best practice security policy development.

Our DCP with Timor-Leste is under continual evaluation, and Defence works closely with Timor-Leste to develop a program of activities that is tailored to both countries' defence engagement interests. To this end, Defence conducts annual Australia – Timor-Leste Defence Cooperation Talks, which provide a forum for reviewing DCP activities, as well as agreeing future activities. We are also in the process of negotiating the Defence Cooperation Agreement, which will provide the legal basis for Defence's continued engagement in Timor-Leste. The Minister for Defence, Stephen Smith, provided a draft of the Agreement to senior Government of Timor-Leste officials in April 2011, and we continue to provide advice and assistance to the Government of Timor-Leste as we await a formal response.

CONCLUSION

Defence's strong relationship with Timor-Leste will not end with the drawdown of the ISF, but will shift focus to capacity development through our longstanding DCP. Future defence

engagement will flow naturally from current DCP initiatives, and will also reflect the priorities of the Australian Government and Government of Timor-Leste. We will continue to develop a sustainable and professional F-FDTL that is able to contribute to regional stability, as well as strengthening our relationship with the F-FDTL and Secretariat of Defence. Defence, together with many Australian Government agencies, remains committed to strengthening its bilateral relationship with Timor-Leste.