

Overview

Australians have been serving with distinction in peacekeeping operations since 1947. But greater demands are being placed on them. The main message contained in Part I of this report is that peacekeeping operations have become increasingly complex and multidimensional and that today's peacekeepers face new challenges. Against this background, the committee considers Australia's engagement in peacekeeping.

In Part II of the report, the committee identifies the main criteria against which Australian decision makers should assess whether or not to commit to a peacekeeping operation. The committee is of the view that the Australian Government should be satisfied that the mission's mandate has:

- clearly identifiable and achievable objectives;
- adequate resources and level of commitment to meet these objectives;
- proper legal underpinnings;
- force protection that matches the needs on the ground; and
- an exit strategy.

The committee accepts that in the real world compromises are reached in order to achieve an agreement on the nature and composition of an operation which may then produce a mandate that does not fully satisfy the criteria. Even so, the committee is of the view that, where Australia is taking a key or lead role in the proposed mission, the government should ensure that the terms of the mandate are consistent with the above criteria.

In particular, the committee underlines the importance of Australia having an exit strategy. The committee, however, is not convinced that government agencies fully grasp the meaning of exit strategy—that specifying an end date or end state for withdrawal is not of itself an exit strategy. The committee argues that an exit strategy:

- provides a roadmap—a structured plan for achieving the stated objective; and
- contains milestones or benchmarks against which progress toward the objectives can be measured—the benchmarks go beyond what is termed 'technical achievements' such as an election or number of homes restored but take cognizance of, and mark progress toward, the ultimate goal of *sustainable* peace.

An exit strategy is an important evaluation and accountability tool which is the major concern of Part VI of the report.

Parts III and IV of the report focus on the effectiveness of the whole-of-government, whole-of-nation approach to Australia's participation in peacekeeping. The committee finds that there is much scope to improve the preparation arrangements for Australian peacekeepers across the government and non-government sectors. In particular, the report emphasises the importance of interoperability at all levels and between all elements of an operation. It suggests that better planning, communication, training and

joint exercises, and collaboration in developing shared doctrine would help to improve coordination between all participants, including partner countries, in a peacekeeping operation.

In Part V of the report, the committee's main concern relates to the accessibility of data on the health of Australian peacekeepers, inadequacies in the ADF's health records management and post-deployment care of peacekeepers with mental health problems. The report makes a number of recommendations to rectify identified deficiencies.

Part VI of the report notes that:

- government agencies and the government as a whole do not have effective processes for converting lessons from a peacekeeping operation into policy or practice—due in large measure to inadequate evaluation mechanisms, particularly the absence of effective performance indicators;
- current reporting practices can be improved to provide greater transparency and accountability—indeed the fragmentary reporting on Australia's engagement in peacekeeping provides an incomplete account of these activities;
- there is a compelling argument for a white paper on Australia's engagement in peacekeeping; and
- considerable scope exists to make the Asia–Pacific Centre on Civil–Military Cooperation an internationally recognised institute and for it to have an integral role in developing a culture of learning and improvement in those involved in peacekeeping.