

# Chapter 17

## Working with participating countries

17.1 Many benefits derive from countries forming a coalition to undertake regional peacekeeping operations. These include being able to amass the considerable resources needed to mount an operation. The mission as a whole is also able to draw on a wider range of experience, specialist skills and capabilities; share costs and equipment including technology; and enhance its credibility by having a broader support base. A coalition, however, also presents challenges. Two Defence personnel described coalition building as 'a demanding task'. They suggested that conducting coalition operations requires 'patience, negotiation, trust and confidence together with guaranteed sources of finance and specialised military response'.<sup>1</sup>

17.2 In this chapter, the committee considers the importance of the relationship between the partners in a peacekeeping coalition. Its focus is on the factors that contribute to a good working relationship between participating members and the means of integrating different peacekeeping capabilities into an effective coalition. The committee is concerned predominately with regional missions where Australia takes a leading role. It considers some of the key challenges in forming a coalition including:

- promoting common understandings of the objective of a mission and how it is to be achieved; and
- overcoming the cultural and professional differences between the various national components in a peacekeeping contingent, resolving command or management difficulties and managing different standards of training and levels of competency.

### Common understandings

17.3 At the operational level, personal relationships and familiarisation with the way each of the components of a peacekeeping mission operates have a major influence on the overall effectiveness of a mission. Referring to RAMSI, DFAT stated that 'Cultural differences exist not only between contributing countries and the Solomon Islanders but also among the various contributors to RAMSI'.<sup>2</sup> Lt Gen Gillespie made a similar observation. He noted in his 2007 speech at the Australian War Memorial:

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1 Brigadier Steve Ayling and Ms Sarah Guise, 'UNTAC and INTERFET—a Comparative Analysis', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 150, September/October 2001, pp. 47–56, <http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/dfj/adfj150.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2008).

2 *Submission 15*, p. 13.

We must remain vigilant, and our training and force preparation must continue to ensure that our peacekeepers are fully aware of the differing cultures they may encounter during operations. In preparing our troops, we now understand it is not just the culture of the host country we must be cognisant of, but those of other nations' peacekeepers, the institutional cultures of the UN agencies and increasingly Non Government Organisations, even how our own cultural behaviours may impact on others.<sup>3</sup>

17.4 Although forces from contributing countries to a peacekeeping operation serve under the same mandate, they come from diverse backgrounds. As the committee noted earlier, an integrated mission requires a shared vision among the participating members as to the strategic objectives of the mission and a common understanding of the operating environment. They should also have reached agreement on how to maximise the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the operation's mandate. In Chapter 7, the committee noted, however, the findings of international studies showing that mission mandates are regularly interpreted in different ways at strategic, operational, and tactical levels.<sup>4</sup> One study concluded that 'a lack of common understanding of the purpose and ROE of a mission is, unfortunately, familiar territory'.<sup>5</sup>

17.5 This potential for varying interpretations extends beyond key mission documents and permeates through all levels of a peacekeeping operation where personnel from different cultural backgrounds work together. It is particularly acute in crisis situations where, for personal and collective safety, those involved in restoring peace and order need to have a common understanding of operating procedures.

17.6 The previous chapter showed that working with the local people to build peace and develop local capacity requires on the part of peacekeepers a sound understanding and respect for cultural differences and appreciation of different norms and customs. This requirement for understanding and respecting each other's cultural differences also applies to participants in peacekeeping operations who, drawn from different countries, come together in partnership to help achieve the operation's objectives.

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- 3 Lieutenant General Kenneth Gillespie, 'The ADF and Peacekeeping', speech at the conference 'Force for Good? Sixty Years of Australian Peacekeeping', Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 13 September 2007, MSPA 70913/07, <http://www.defence.gov.au/media/SpeechTpl.cfm?CurrentId=7061> (accessed 14 November 2007).
  - 4 International Peace Academy, 34<sup>th</sup> IPAA Vienna Seminar on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, *Peace Operations in Africa*, Final Report, New York, 2004, paragraph 3.1.1.
  - 5 Victoria Holt and Tobias Berkman, *The Impossible Mandate? Military Preparedness, the Responsibility to Protect and Modern Peace Operations*, The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2007, pp. 91–92.

## Cultural and professional differences

17.7 General Peter Cosgrove was of the view that without the spirit of cooperation and goodwill among the contributing countries to INTERFET, the operation 'would not have delivered the successful outcomes'. He noted that the operation was helped by participants 'knowing each other, and having gained respect for each other through past regional military engagement'. He explained:

The first return on this investment came with the appointment of the Deputy Force Commander, General Songkitti from Thailand. He and I knew each other from the British Army Staff College in the late 1980s. I had met the national commander of the American forces assigned to INTERFET, Brigadier John Castellaw, several times. I knew a number of the other national commanders and in some cases, their superiors back in their home countries. In addition, all of the regional contributors to INTERFET were accompanied by Australian officers who spoke their languages, who knew their cultures and had formed relationships with key officers in their armed forces. A number had trained with Australians in their home countries or had visited Australia for training. Consequently, these regional military leaders could rely on the ADF because they knew us and had worked with us.<sup>6</sup>

17.8 The same approach paid dividends at other levels of engagement. Again General Cosgrove noted that many Australian officers serving with INTERFET were able to establish cooperative relations with their Indonesian counterparts in East Timor because they had trained in Indonesia, or learned Bahasa or hosted Indonesian personnel who had trained in Australia. He spelt out three key operating principles learnt from the INTERFET experience—'know your coalition partners, cultivate a wide network and foster a cohesive team'.<sup>7</sup>

17.9 Lieutenant Colonel John Hutcheson drew on his experiences in Solomon Islands between March and August 2004 to note the differences between the various contingents in terms of 'perceptions about the character of the mission, levels of acceptable risk, and attitudes towards the local population'. In his opinion, the operations by the Pacific island military contingents were:

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6 General Peter Cosgrove, Chief of the Defence Force, *Facing Future Challenges to Future Operations: an ADF perspective*, published in The Rule of Law on Peace Operations—A 'Challenges of Peace Operations' Project Conference, Asia-Pacific Centre for Military Law, University of Melbourne, November 2002, p. 110.

7 General Peter Cosgrove, Chief of the Defence Force, *Facing Future Challenges to Future Operations: an ADF perspective*, published in The Rule of Law on Peace Operations—A 'Challenges of Peace Operations' Project Conference, Asia-Pacific Centre for Military Law, University of Melbourne, November 2002, p. 110.

...often hampered by differing types of doctrine, by a lack of operational experience and by diverse standards of training.<sup>8</sup>

17.10 He wrote that in-theatre training packages designed to build a collective capability helped to address the problems. Looking specifically at Australia's engagement in peacekeeping operations in the region, he also recognised the need for 'standardisation of training'. He went further to talk of a regional initiative to build capacity which is discussed in the following chapter.<sup>9</sup>

### Peacekeeping partnerships



A Malaysian policeman and an Australian Timor-Leste Battle Group soldier in the mountain area south of Dili in the district of Dare (image courtesy Department of Defence)

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- 8 John Hutcheson, 'Helping a Friend: An Australian military commander's perspective on the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands', *Australian Army Journal*, vol. II, no. 2, Autumn 2005, pp. 51–52. See also discussion on the various interpretations given to key documents such as the mission's mandate and rules of engagement in paragraphs 7.18–7.22.
- 9 John Hutcheson, 'Helping a Friend: An Australian military commander's perspective on the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands', *Australian Army Journal*, vol. II, no. 2, p. 52.

**Committee view**

17.11 The committee recommended earlier in the report that before deploying Australian personnel to a peacekeeping operation, the government ensure that all instruments covering the use of force are unambiguous, clearly understood, appropriate to the mission and provide adequate protection. Clearly, over and above this measure, the government and relevant agencies need to consider how to build rapport between Australian peacekeepers and their partners from different countries in order to minimise the risk of misinterpretations or clashes of expectations or doctrine. They also need to take account of the fact that Australian peacekeepers will be working with others who have different standards of training and levels of competence.

**Conclusion**

17.12 The previous chapter identified the major challenges to forging a constructive partnership between the host state and the countries contributing to a peacekeeping operation. Many of the same difficulties arise when endeavouring to bring together the forces of the contributing countries into an effective integrated mission. These difficulties arise mainly from a lack of familiarity with how each other operates. Cultural sensitivities and language barriers, tensions within the control and command or management structures, capability gaps or mismatched and different priorities, expectations and interpretations about the objectives of the mission may also create problems. In some cases these difficulties are magnified. In this, and the previous chapter, two critical issues became apparent:

- 1) to form effective partnerships with the host state and other participating countries in a peacekeeping operation, Australian peacekeepers must understand, be sensitive to, and accommodate cultural differences; and
- 2) to produce effective peacekeepers, Australia must prepare its personnel to be not only part of an Australian force but also a partner of the host country and a member of a coalition of participating countries. This means that Australian peacekeepers must be equipped to meet the challenges of working alongside people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, who may speak a different language, and have varying experiences of, and attitudes toward, peacekeeping operations.

17.13 The following chapter looks at the steps the Australian Government and its agencies take to develop language skills, cultural awareness and what Lieutenant Colonel Hutcheson termed 'collective capability' (see paragraph 17.10 ).