

**Land Warfare Studies Centre**

**Study Paper No. 304**

**‘PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES AND  
PRIMARY RISKS’**

**Australian Defence Force Participation in the  
International Force East Timor**

**by**

**Alan Ryan**

**November 2000**

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## **National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Entry**

### **Land Warfare Studies Centre Study Papers**

ISSN 1442-8547

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABCA	American–British–Canadian–Australian Armies (Agreement)
ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADHQ	Australian Defence Headquarters
AO	area of operations
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CDF	Chief of the Defence Force (Australia)
CENTCOM	Central Command (US)
CMOC	Civil–Military Operations Centre
DAA	defeating attacks against Australia
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DJFHQ	Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (Australia)
FLSG	Forward Logistic Support Group
FPU	Force Preparation Unit
HQAST	Headquarters Australian Theatre
HQINTERFET	Headquarters International Force East Timor
HQNORCOM	Headquarters Northern Command (Darwin)
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
KFOR	Kosovo Force (NATO)
LO	liaison officer
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-government organisation
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UN)
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAF	Singaporean Armed Forces
SOP	standard operating procedure
TCN	troop-contributing nation
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army)
UN	United Nations
UNAMET	United Nations Mission in East Timor
UNNY	United Nations New York (UN Headquarters)
UNOSOM	United Nations Operations in Somalia
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
US	United States
USPACOM	United States Pacific Command
VCDF	Vice-Chief of the Defence Force (Australia)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a work of contemporary history, this monograph would not have been possible without the unstinting assistance of many of those whose efforts resulted in INTERFET. I would like to acknowledge and thank Admiral Chris Barrie, AO, RAN, Chief of the Defence Force; Air Marshal Douglas Riding, AM, DFC, former Vice Chief of the Defence Force; and Major General Peter Cosgrove, AM, MC, Commander INTERFET, for their generosity with encouragement, time, advice and source material. I would also like to thank Brigadier Stephen Ayling, AM, former Director-General INTERFET, for briefing me and providing key research materials.

I am grateful to the representatives of the overseas contingents in INTERFET, who agreed to be interviewed by me and who provided me with their unique perspectives on the operation. These representatives included Major General Songkitti, Deputy Commander INTERFET; Brigadier General Khalid Saad, Malaysian contingent commander; Brigadier General Cornacchione, Italian contingent commander; Colonel Felix Cabrerros, commander of the Philippines contingent; Colonels Sakda Sangsrit, Prasopchai Kongburan and S. Yosporn of the Royal Thai Army; Lieutenant Colonel Derry Fitzgerald, Irish contingent commander; Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler of New Zealand, Chief of Staff, Dili Command; Lieutenant Colonel 'Rocky' Lacroix of Canada, who worked in the plans cell HQINTERFET; and Major Fernando Fernandez, Brazilian contingent commander. I also wish to thank Mr Vicente Ximenes, a senior FALANTIL commander, who provided me with an East Timorese vision of INTERFET.

Australian members of INTERFET who took time out of their busy schedules to be interviewed by me included Colonel David Morrison, AM, Colonel Operations, HQINTERFET; Lieutenant Colonel Lance Ensor, liaison officer with the contingent from the Republic of Korea; Lieutenant Colonel Lance Collins; Major Mark Richards; Major Mark Mackay; Major Clay Sutton; and Major Bronwyn Worswick. To them and the many other members of the headquarters who assisted me in my research I extend my very sincere thanks. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Lieutenant Colonel Bill Houston, Army History Unit, for extending me his hospitality, guidance and services as an armed escort in Dili.

In the writing of this monograph, I received the thoughtful and critical assistance of Mr Shane Carmody, Head, International Policy Division in Australian Defence Headquarters; Colonel Mark Kelly, Chief of Staff, Headquarters INTERFET; Commander Richard Macmillan, Staff Officer, Operations, to the VCDF; Colonel Gary Bornholt, CSC, defence attaché at the United Nations during the formation of INTERFET; Colonel Frank Colley, CSC of INTERFET Branch in Australian Defence Force Headquarters; Lieutenant Colonel Richard Millington, Staff Officer Grade 1, International Engagement, in Army Headquarters; Lieutenant Colonel David Coghlan, Staff Officer Grade 1, Organisation, in Army Headquarters; and Mr Graham Turner, Senior Analyst in Capability Analysis Division in Australian Defence Headquarters. Special acknowledgment is due to Mr Alan Behm, Head, Strategic Policy and Plans in Australian Defence Headquarters for his pithy and trenchant comment on an earlier draft of this paper. I wish to thank the UN Cartographic Section for permission to reproduce Map No. 4111 (Revision 5, December 1995) and the Defence and Armed Forces of the Philippines for permission to reproduce the photograph of Colonel Felix Cabreros distributing aid in Manatuto.

At the Land Warfare Studies Centre, I benefited from the critical assistance of Colonel David Horner and Lieutenant Colonel Neil James. Mr Ara Nalbandian and Mrs Linda Malaquin provided invaluable editorial and administrative support. The staff of the Deployed Force Support Unit—Darwin also deserve a special word of thanks for their hospitality and for enabling me to get to my destination.

A work of this kind depends on the input of a great many people, and I apologise to any I may have left out. Of course, responsibility for the conclusions reached in this work remains solely my own.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The experience of acting as lead nation for the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) provided the greatest test yet of Australian Defence Force (ADF) capabilities and strategic direction. This monograph examines the process that the ADF played in helping to form and manage the coalition and deploy troops to East Timor. It concludes that INTERFET was successful but that, to provide for Australia's security in an unstable region, the ADF needs to improve its ability to engage in multinational operations. Effective and positive engagement with the region will only be enhanced by developing a more conscious 'whole-of-government' approach to national security that recognises that Australian security cannot be guaranteed by a unilateral approach to the defence of the country's interests. The crisis in East Timor reconfirmed that Australia's interests remain bound up with its regional neighbours and its traditional alliance partners.

The involvement of the ADF in East Timor, especially during the period covered by INTERFET, has marked the commencement of a somewhat altered relationship between Australia and other countries in the region. It is too early to conclude what the true significance of Australian involvement will be and what are the long-term implications of Australia's actions. From an operational point of view, however, the success of INTERFET has done much to reinforce and strengthen bilateral military relationships between those involved in the coalition. Success also provides government and policy makers with evidence to enhance Australia's contribution to more mature multilateral regional security relationships.

In the current global strategic environment, military operations gain legitimacy through the broad-based participation of members of the international community of states. The United States (US) is probably the only country in the world that is

capable of maintaining a full suite of capabilities to meet any contingency anywhere. Other countries need to form coalitions. Achieving adequate interoperability with key regional partners will have to become a priority for the ADF in a region that seems unlikely to develop an effective multilateral security architecture in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, the ADF needs to develop means and modalities for the standardisation of communications, logistic arrangements, and command and control systems with its most likely partners. In the past, it was sufficient to make detailed preparations only for combined operations with our English-speaking alliance partners; in the future we will need to place increased emphasis on cooperation with a wider variety of regional forces. Australia's involvement in INTERFET demonstrated that we still have some way to go in achieving effective functional and cultural interoperability with regional and non-traditional partners.

The fact that Australia took the initiative in responding to events in East Timor enhanced its credibility in the region and beyond. Despite the opposition to Australian involvement that was expressed by some regional politicians and domestic foreign-affairs commentators, the success of INTERFET has consolidated international perceptions of the ADF as a force that is capable of contributing to shaping the regional security environment. Leadership of a coalition demonstrates that Australia belongs to its region in a practical way. It also demonstrates that regional engagement needs to be built on realistic, firm notions of reciprocity rather than idealistic expectations that confidence and security-building measures will be sufficient to make Australia popular with its neighbours. This particular crisis was only one of a number of recent outbreaks of communal violence that have prompted international intervention. The equivocal stance adopted by the international community in response to slaughter and destruction in crises ranging from Rwanda and Bosnia to Sierra Leone was fortunately not replicated in the rapid deployment of INTERFET. Not for nothing did Kofi Annan,

Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) hold up the INTERFET mission as a model peace-enforcement operation.

The ADF needs to develop specific doctrine for coalition operations and conduct even more training for coalition operations with its potential partners. It needs to prepare for true unified command with a combined headquarters that can be assembled and deployed at short notice. We need to recognise that, while we expect to be represented on the headquarters of any multinational force to which we make a contribution, other countries have the same expectation. Although junior members of a coalition do not expect to be part of the core decision-making group, there can be no wholehearted participation unless all participants are given at least some consultative role on the force headquarters. While liaison officers (LOs) are essential to the operation of a coalition, the political element of coalition operations ensures that reliance on their efforts alone is not enough to establish an integrated coalition force.

Importantly, the ADF needs to prepare for coalition operations by ensuring that it has sufficient language-trained and culturally prepared officers to provide the human element necessary to facilitate command and communications in a multinational force. Although the lack of these capabilities did not prove critical on this operation, it was evident that the ADF relies on the language skills and cultural awareness of its coalition partners. Had INTERFET experienced a higher operational tempo, this deficiency could have hampered the force's ability to control the pace of events. Enhancing the cultural and linguistic literacy of the ADF will be a force multiplier. Although the provision of this training has significant career management and resource implications, the pay-off in increased interoperability would greatly outweigh the investment.

There remains a tension between Australia's desire to integrate itself and other countries into coherent, cohesive coalition forces

and the reticence among many of our regional neighbours to establish a precedent for what may be perceived as intervention. Regional engagement will not be aided by our making a pat assumption that INTERFET will be the model for future regional multinational operations. In particular, the sensitivities expressed by some members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) about noninterference in member states' internal affairs need to be considered. Such a consideration does not mean that we do not prepare for combined operations, rather that we need to emphasise those relationships that are stronger, and to devote less energy to those relationships that proved weaker. INTERFET was a litmus test of our relationships with countries in the region. Our defence relationships with key participants in the coalition should be fostered as a result of the valuable affinity established during the existence of INTERFET. It should also be remembered that the political situation in the region is in flux. The very success of efforts such as INTERFET is likely to compel future regional political leaders to establish better relations with each other.

Operations in East Timor demonstrated the fact that, even in a maritime concept of strategy, the requirement to undertake extensive ground-force operations in the littoral environment in our north demands that Australia and its regional partners have guaranteed access to sufficient strategic lift to mount such operations. INTERFET was only made possible because the US was able to provide the participants with strategic lift-capabilities. If the US had been heavily committed elsewhere, INTERFET might not have been able to deploy as quickly or even at all.

Similarly, the experience of funding Operation *Stabilise* in East Timor demonstrated that only a great power could assume sole responsibility for the cost of an operation of this size. Even then, the resources of the US are not infinite. Australia would do well to take the lead in seeking the establishment of standing trust-fund arrangements to subsidise United Nations Chapter 7–

mandated peace-enforcement operations. Accepting the role of lead nation implies an acceptance of financial liability—a fact that had not been fully appreciated in Australia prior to this operation. While countries are unlikely to commit funds in advance for unknown contingencies, it is possible to establish ‘in principle’ commitments to particular types of operations.

Finally, Australia’s role in INTERFET demonstrated the need for constant re-evaluation of the basis of our strategic planning. In a complex security environment, the least likely contingency that Australia might have to face is the self-reliant defence of the Australian mainland against major attack. Australian and regional security can be best guaranteed by sound relationships with neighbours; contributions to maintaining a secure, legitimate global system; and a commitment to helping enforce the international rule of law. Always making ‘defeating attacks on Australia’ our core force-structure priority is an inefficient way of providing national security. Rather, the ADF can optimise its capabilities by developing the ability to integrate capabilities held by our partners and providing complementary support to them. INTERFET demonstrated that the will to work together to maintain regional security is present in the Asia Pacific. It is time to consolidate and reinforce the security benefits resulting from the ADF’s role in INTERFET.



# **‘PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIMARY RISKS’**

## **Australian Defence Force Participation in the International Force East Timor**

*In the Pacific we have primary responsibilities and primary risks . . . I look forward to the day when we will have a concert of Pacific powers, pacific in both senses of the word . . . It is true that we are not a numerous people, but we have vigour, intelligence and resource, and I see no reason why we should not play not only an adult, but an effective part in the affairs of the Pacific.*

Robert Gordon Menzies, 27 April 1939<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

The creation and almost immediate deployment of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) in September 1999 saw Australia take on the leadership of a multinational peace-enforcement operation under a United Nations (UN) mandate. This was the first time that the ADF had accepted the operational role of lead nation in a military coalition of this size. In doing so, Australia assumed ‘primary responsibilities and primary risks’ for the conduct of a complex combined operation, the success of which will have significant implications for Australia’s image in the region. Acceptance of the mantle of peace enforcer will have long-term consequences for the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The precedent set by Australian leadership of the multinational force will help determine the future roles and structure of the ADF, as well as the way it operates.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 24.

Reflecting on the success of the coalition six months after it passed authority to a UN administration, Admiral Chris Barrie, the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), pointed out that the ADF had been able to draw on extensive experience of peace operations. Admiral Barrie also noted that the ADF had acquired a high level of professional knowledge about the demands and pitfalls of such multinational forces.<sup>2</sup> He concluded that the coalition was assembled and deployed with unparalleled speed and efficiency, had a well-defined exit strategy and that the operational task was undertaken rapidly. The fact that results were obtained so quickly enabled the transition of authority to occur. Perhaps most interesting was his observation that: 'It would be quite untrue to say that we knew what we were going to go and do—we didn't'. At the beginning of 1999, nobody predicted that Australia would have to undertake responsibility for a large UN-mandated expeditionary peace operation. To do so, the ADF displayed extraordinary flexibility and an ability to operate at a higher level than might have been expected of an organisation of its size. Admiral Barrie ascribed the degree of competency displayed by all three services and the supporting defence bureaucracy to the fact that:

We make a study of military operations in this country—ranging from the warfighting tasks to having a peacekeeping centre . . . we don't regard this as a one-off—it is built into the system . . . Over the last ten years, maybe fifteen years, the impact of the rule of law on the conduct of military operations has been at the forefront of much of our military training and education. There are few other countries in the world that devote as much effort to it as we do, and frankly, I think that we are very good at it.<sup>3</sup>

The experience of undertaking this operation will continue to have significant repercussions for Australia's international profile

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<sup>2</sup> Interview by author with Admiral Chris Barrie, AO, RAN, Australian Defence Headquarters, Canberra, 31 July 2000.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



as well as for the way the ADF structures itself to meet future requirements. The very unexpectedness of this contingency provides students of Australian security and strategic policy with much food for thought. As Admiral Barrie pointed out, serious study of operations such as this one can only pay dividends the next time Australian forces participate in an offshore deployment. A number of significant lessons have emerged from the central role the ADF played in mounting the multinational operation in Timor (Operation *Stabilise*). The first of these is the considerable professionalism displayed by the men and women of the ADF. In the interviews that formed the basis for this monograph, the constant refrain of the leadership of the other national contingents was to express their admiration for the high standard of the ADF's human capital. Second, despite the high quality of ADF personnel, it must be admitted that the ADF had not expected to have to provide the leadership to a large multinational force. In a strategic environment where any major military endeavour is bound to be as a part of a combined operation, the ADF requires more preparation if it is to dovetail into a multinational force—particularly if circumstances require it to provide military leadership.

To a certain extent Australia's political involvement in East Timor was favoured with luck, in that its efforts to end the violence there were widely supported by the international community and were accompanied by a positive shift in Indonesia's internal political arrangements. This does not derogate from the highly professional response made by the ADF as a joint team in mobilising and sustaining a force overseas. However, it must be recognised that INTERFET encountered minimal armed resistance and the coalition did not have to address the stresses of sustained combat.<sup>4</sup> In part this was

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<sup>4</sup> Some comparison between the Timor commitment and Australian involvement during 1964–65 with Confrontation in Borneo is inevitable. There, Australian troops did have to bear the pressures of a higher operational tempo; they were, however, only one member of a multinational force that possessed a far-greater doctrinal

probably due to the overwhelming military superiority underlying the deployment and the resolution to use force if confronted. Nonetheless, the problems encountered while leading an elective coalition of disparate states exposed gaps in Australia's preparedness to undertake such missions and demonstrated the limitations that our restricted national resource base places on participation in off-shore military operations. Australia cannot afford to make up for this deficiency by continuing to depend solely on the efforts and capacity of its human-resource base.

The experience of forming and sustaining INTERFET provides defence planners, politicians and scholars with the opportunity to question the way in which the ADF does business and to consider the form that future operations are likely to take. To assist in this process this paper sets out to:

- consider the background to the ADF's assumption of the leadership of INTERFET;
- describe the role that the ADF played in the formation and design of the INTERFET coalition;
- discuss the particular operational culture arising from the combination of forces comprising INTERFET;
- discuss the transition to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET); and
- outline some lessons arising from the ADF's role in INTERFET.

Writers commenting on military operations after the fact often forget that decisions made in 'real time' are considerably more difficult than assessments made with the luxury of hindsight. During INTERFET and in the time since then, there has been

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common ground than was the case in INTERFET. Moreover, the technological and capability gap between opposing forces was much narrower in Confrontation than it was in Timor. The distinguishing characteristics of this recent operation have been the degree of control exercised by Australia and the high level of the Australian contribution.

considerable soul-searching about what was done and whether it could have been done better. This is healthy; however, it is worthwhile maintaining a sense of perspective about the operation. Interviewed in early January 2000, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler, the New Zealand Chief of Staff of Dili Command, noted:

What surprises me is the level of criticism that Australian forces do on their capabilities. Yet when you consider that this is 120 days: you've built up a force of over 9000 people; you've probably conducted the most successful international peacekeeping force in the last half century and you are passing over to a UN force which would sorely like to emulate you and will not be able to because of its bureaucracy . . . I don't think, necessarily, that a lot of the criticism is well founded.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, analysis of the record of INTERFET must acknowledge the great success of the coalition in achieving its mission. However, success should not disguise those areas where the ADF might have been better prepared for, or more culturally attuned to, the requirements of providing leadership to a disparate international force.

### **Creating the Historical Record**

Almost forty years ago Geoffrey Barraclough, the brilliant British historian, identified a school of thought that maintained that:

The very notion of contemporary history . . . is a contradiction in terms. Before we can adopt a historical view we must first stand at a certain distance from the happenings we are investigating. It is hard enough at all times to 'disengage' ourselves and look at the past dispassionately and with the critical eye of the historian.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler (NZ), Chief of Staff, Dili Command, INTERFET, Dili, 15 January 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1967, pp. 14–15.

He went on to ask the question whether it was at all possible to be objective ‘in the case of events which bear so closely upon our own lives’. Barraclough answered his own question, by pointing out that the events of the present are firmly grounded in the past and that influences from past epochs continued to coexist with the present. While most readers of a brief historical analysis such as this one are not interested in the methodology and approach that led to its creation, it is important that the readers appreciate the benefits and limitations of constructing a contemporary historical narrative.

This work is not intended to be definitive. It is written from an ADF perspective rather than with access to all the source material that will ultimately become available. Because of the immediacy of the crisis in East Timor, as a researcher I had the rare privilege of watching events unfold and of interviewing many, but certainly not all, of those involved in creating the coalition. Often gaining access to key decision-makers was as much a matter of serendipity as good planning. Consequently, this research encompassed a vertical slice of representational views and included not only those uniformed members of the ADF who were involved in creating INTERFET, but coalition commanders from participating countries, ADF officers in Timor, members of non-government organisations and one former FALANTIL<sup>7</sup> commander.

Historians are justly sceptical of the urge to race into print. A completely authoritative account of the formation and performance of INTERFET would take some years to collate. Like any work written from the contemporary record, this monograph is an incomplete account. An ‘official’ history of the operation would include the experiences of the political leaders who forged the consensus necessary for the operation to take place. It would report on the work of the diplomats and the defence officials who worked behind the scenes to bring the countries involved on board and who provided political–military guidance and developed strategic policy. That work has yet to be

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<sup>7</sup> Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste.

written. Despite the immediacy of this account, there is great value in recording the perceptions of those involved in the operation at the time that the events occurred. While not writing a ‘whole-of-government’ account or a truly international history, the role played by the ADF was sufficiently central to merit focused investigation. That this investigation does not involve all key players reflects the immediacy of this research. Future work will be able to fill in the gaps and, undoubtedly, add more to our understanding of those harried weeks leading to the deployment of coalition forces.

This monograph is indeed history ‘as it happened’ with all the inadequacies of only partial exposure to the available sources. On the other hand, the availability of sources is the conundrum that faces every historical researcher as the passage of time rapidly obscures the memories of participants, and then removes them altogether. Documentary sources are more lasting, but require critical analysis and an appreciation of their limitations as truthful evidence. Even poorly written expression can play havoc with the historian’s ability to interpret written sources. Accordingly, even a hurriedly created contemporary account—provided that it includes guidance to the context in which events occurred—can shed valuable light on what actually happened. In this case developing an understanding of how the ADF performed at the very least requires us to consider the strategic guidance in place before the mission; its international context; and the force structure philosophy that created the force that went to East Timor.

We must also ask how closely we are wedded to the ‘institutional truths’ that pervade any organisation. The ADF performed very well in East Timor and, as a whole, Australia weathered the crisis quite well. Despite this outcome, operational success should not obscure the fact that Australian involvement in East Timor was the consequence of a radical change in government policy. The role Australia undertook in forming an expeditionary coalition force refuted the basis of many of the assumptions that had

formed the basis of Australian defence policy for at least the previous fifteen years. While the specific circumstances that resulted in Operation *Stabilise* are unlikely to recur, in a region marked by political and social instability it is quite possible that Australia may need to be involved in future multinational peace operations in the not-too-distant future. For this, if for no other, reason we need to preserve the immediate memories of INTERFET before the vagueness brought on by time starts to conceal the problems that the ADF encountered in its first operational role as coalition lead-nation. It is an uncomfortable fact that the hard-won lessons of experience are often also inconvenient and as a result have to be relearnt time after time. With the comfortable perspective provided by operational success, future analysts and planners must not forget how unprepared Australia was to mount a major multinational peace-enforcement operation.

# 1 THE ADF AND THE ASSUMPTION OF LEADERSHIP OF INTERFET

## The ‘Pebble in the Shoe’: Synopsis of Events Leading to the Deployment of INTERFET

The deployment of the UN-mandated INTERFET came about as a consequence of a sequence of events extending back to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor on 7 December 1975. Since that date, East Timorese resistance to Indonesian occupation had continued and was characterised by a drawn-out guerrilla campaign. Australia, bound by the tacit support provided by Prime Minister Whitlam to Indonesian incorporation of East Timor, rapidly moved from de facto recognition of Indonesia’s claim in January 1978 to de jure recognition in February 1979. Most other members of the UN did not go so far, the UN adopting resolutions each year between 1976 and 1982 demanding that Indonesian Forces be withdrawn and that the right of self-determination be given to the East Timorese.<sup>8</sup> Beginning in 1982, at the request of the General Assembly, successive Secretaries-General of the UN sponsored regular talks between Indonesia and East Timor’s former colonial master, Portugal, to resolve the status of the territory. Despite the talks, the issue of East Timor did not figure high on the international agenda, and the Indonesian occupation was implicitly tolerated. On the Indonesian part, Foreign Minister Ali Alitas could famously dismiss the province as ‘just a pebble in the shoe’. Like most pebbles, though, it was undeniably uncomfortable, and the resolution of this issue was to result in the removal of the Habibie

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1990s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 206, see pp. 194–229; see also Derek McDougall, *Australian Foreign Relations: Contemporary Perspectives*, Longman, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 212–19.

government from office and initiate a rapid move towards democracy in Indonesian politics.

The Indonesian occupation was undoubtedly oppressive. James Dunn, former Australian Consul in East Timor, even went so far as to submit a report in which he concluded that:

the military seizure of East Timor has been a bloody operation, in which atrocities of a disturbing nature have been committed against the civilian population. Indeed, these accounts of Indonesia's behaviour in East Timor suggest that the plight of these people may well constitute, relatively speaking, the most serious case of contravention of human rights facing the world at this time.<sup>9</sup>

Estimates for East Timorese deaths from military action, famine or disease out of a population of 630 000 ranged between 100 000 and 230 000 for the period 1976–80. Indonesian military casualties remain unknown, but some estimates for the same period went as high as 10 000.<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, the tempo of guerrilla operations waned, but urban civil unrest in centres such as Dili and Baucau increased, though the plight of East Timor remained a peripheral issue in international fora. The issue refused to disappear, however—important foreign visitors to Dili were invariably greeted with anti-integration demonstrations—most notably when Pope John Paul II visited in October 1989.

The fact that the East Timorese had not accepted Indonesian sovereignty and that the Indonesians were still behaving as colonial masters was tragically demonstrated by the Dili massacre on 12 November 1991. During the funeral of a pro-independence supporter killed by Indonesian security forces, an Indonesian army unit opened fire on the funeral procession. The official

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<sup>9</sup> James Dunn, 'The East Timor Situation: Report on talks with Timorese Refugees in Portugal', Legislative Research Service, Australian Parliament, Canberra, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, p. 205.



Indonesian investigating commission put the death toll at fifty, with ninety-one wounded and a further ninety unaccounted for. Other estimates ran much higher. Whatever the final numbers, the massacre had the effect of bringing Indonesian policy to world attention, the event having been videotaped by an English cameraman. Footage of the massacre was broadcast around the world and received unfavourable coverage, particularly when compared with the lack of remorse demonstrated by senior officers in the Indonesian military.<sup>11</sup>

In retrospect the Dili massacre appears to have been a watershed in international appreciation of the intractable nature of Indonesia's position in East Timor. After 1991, East Timor was more frequently brought to international attention. President Suharto was forced to express publicly his regret for the killings and extend condolences to the families of those killed. In late 1992, the FALANTIL resistance leader Xanana Gusmao was arrested, and his trial in May 1993 provided the pro-independence movement with a media bonanza. In March 1993, the UN Human Rights Commission censured Indonesia for its poor human-rights record in East Timor; from 1995 talks involving Indonesian, East Timorese and Portuguese representatives were held under UN auspices on an annual basis in Austria.<sup>12</sup>

After 1991, Australian governments appeared to give greater support to the prospect of East Timorese self-determination, though continuing to support Indonesian sovereignty. However, after President Suharto's removal in May 1998, Prime Minister John Howard called on Indonesia to allow East Timor greater autonomy, and in June of that year President B. J. Habibie stated that he would be willing to consider granting limited self-government, but only in the context of East Timor remaining a province of Indonesia.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211–17.

<sup>12</sup> McDougall, *Australian Foreign Relations*, pp. 216–17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

During 1998 the Australian Government's desire to facilitate a resolution of the East Timor situation became more manifest. Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer wrote that throughout that year:

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, at various levels from the Departmental Secretary Dr Ashton Calvert down, had been considering ideas that might move the East Timor agenda forward. After the October elections, these ideas were developed further and crystallised in . . . [a] . . . letter proposal that Alexander Downer took to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser, Michael Thawley, and others in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, also became involved in finetuning the proposal.<sup>14</sup>

The result was a letter dated 19 December 1998 from Prime Minister Howard to President Habibie. While reaffirming Australian support for Indonesia's sovereignty in East Timor, the letter pointed out that 'a decisive element of East Timorese opinion is insisting on an act of self-determination. If anything, their position—with a fair degree of international support—seems to be strengthening on this'.<sup>15</sup> The approach suggested to President Habibie recommended the adoption of a package that would first allow the East Timorese autonomy while guaranteeing them a referendum on their future after a number of years.<sup>16</sup>

It is impossible to assess how influential the Australian position was in Jakarta. Certainly, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Ali Alatas expressed anger at what he saw as Australian intervention in Indonesia's affairs. From Australia's point of view, the letter was

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Fischer, *Ballot and bullets: Seven Days in East Timor*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> The model suggested was along the lines of the Matignon Accords, which enabled a compromise political solution to be implemented in New Caledonia while deferring a referendum for a number of years.

undoubtedly significant as it represented the Australian Government's commitment to remove 'a pebble in the shoe' that had long created irritation in the relationship between the two countries. It would appear that important segments of the Indonesian leadership had come independently to the conclusion that no real progress was being made to reach a final settlement of the issue of Indonesia's authority in East Timor and that the cost of holding the province far exceeded its value. There was also some concern that, by holding onto the province, Indonesia would be committing itself to a further investment of resources with no guarantee that the East Timorese would not ultimately choose independence. Most importantly perhaps, President Habibie's concession of the possibility of autonomy for East Timor broke the deadlock in the talks between Portugal and Indonesia at the UN, and negotiations then made rapid progress.

Whatever the reasoning, on 27 January 1999 President Habibie offered the East Timorese people a referendum to enable them to choose between autonomy within Indonesia and independence. On 5 May Indonesia and Portugal signed an agreement in New York, whereby the two governments entrusted the Secretary-General with organising and conducting a referendum in order to ascertain whether the East Timorese people accepted or rejected special autonomy within the unitary Republic of Indonesia.<sup>17</sup> By Article 3 of the same agreement the Government of Indonesia accepted responsibility 'for maintaining peace and security in East Timor in order to ensure that the popular consultation is carried out in a fair and peaceful way in an atmosphere free of intimidation, violence or interference from any side'.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, elements within the Indonesian Government and military, through the medium of a number of East Timorese 'businessmen', began to organise a number of small militia groups, with the intention of influencing the referendum result by

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<sup>17</sup> *Agreement between the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal*, New York, 5 May 1999, Article 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 3.

intimidation. In the months before the referendum on 30 August, these groups set about a campaign of orchestrated violence to intimidate the local population to vote in favour of remaining part of Indonesia. As early as April, while on a visit to Jakarta, the Senior European Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan raised his concern with President Habibie that militia violence could frustrate the electoral process.<sup>19</sup>

To conduct the ballot, the Security Council of the UN established the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). UNAMET's achievement was considerable, though ultimately it did not have the mandate or the force to guarantee security in the transition period after the vote. This, of course, was not its role, the Indonesian Government having already committed itself to maintaining order. The UN website pointed out that:

Despite an extremely tight time table, a high level of tension, and the Territory's mountainous terrain, poor roads and difficult communications, UNAMET registered 451,792 potential voters among the population of over 800,000 in East Timor and abroad. On voting day, 30 August 1999, some 98 percent of registered voters went to the polls deciding by a margin of 94,388 (21.5 per cent) to 344,580 (78.5 per cent) to reject the proposed autonomy and begin a process of transition towards independence.<sup>20</sup>

Following the announcement of the results of the ballot, the pro-integration militias, with the tacit and often direct support of the Indonesian military (TNI<sup>21</sup>), commenced a campaign of violence, looting and arson across East Timor. UNAMET personnel were targeted, and the Indonesian police (POLRI) failed to provide protection. Most UN staff were evacuated by 8 September, leaving only a handful remaining in Dili. An unknown number of

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<sup>19</sup> Fischer, *Seven Days in East Timor*, p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> *East Timor—UNTAET Background*,  
<http://www.un.org/peace/etimor/UntaetB.htm>  
(Downloaded 2 June 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army).

East Timorese were killed, and as many as 500 000 were forced to leave their homes, many taking to the interior, while others were forcibly deported to West Timor and other parts of Indonesia.<sup>22</sup>

The scale and ferocity of the violence shocked the world, as did the fact that the Indonesian authorities in East Timor and elsewhere did nothing to prevent it. Within the UN, the Secretary-General and the Security Council were active in pressuring Indonesia to meet its obligations under the agreement with Portugal and the UN. On 7 September Kofi Annan gave Indonesia twenty-four hours to restore order or risk international intervention.<sup>23</sup> A Security Council Mission visited Dili and was shocked by the extent of the destruction. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer were particularly active in seeking support for a multinational force able to restore order in the territory and thereby to extricate Indonesia from the morass into which it had fallen. After initial reassurances of their ability to restore order and refusal to accept multinational intervention, the Indonesian Government agreed to accept a UN-authorized multinational force in East Timor. The Security Council then authorised the creation of INTERFET under Australian leadership, with the mission of restoring peace and security in the territory; protecting and supporting UNAMET in carrying out its tasks; and, within force capabilities, facilitating humanitarian-assistance operations. In a remarkably short time, the ADF was presented with its greatest challenge since the Vietnam War, though this time it was tasked with providing leadership to an elective, disparate and, at that stage, unformed coalition of states.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Don Greenlees and Robert Garran, 'Marching into Tragedy', *The Australian*, 8 September 1999, p. 1.

## The ADF and Multinational Peace Operations

Stepping down from the strategic picture, Australia's assumption of the leadership of a multinational peace operation created an operational challenge for the ADF. Operational success should not lead us to forget or underestimate the extent of that challenge. The decision to offer to lead a coalition force challenged many of the accepted verities about the role to be played by the ADF in contributing to regional security. In the post-Cold War world, peace operations are increasingly common and attract cosmopolitan participation. Peace operations rely on wide-ranging support from members of the international community. Moreover, it has been persuasively argued that the legitimacy gained from a broad-based membership is a more significant factor than force in achieving ultimate success.<sup>24</sup> Peace operations generally place less weight on achieving success in battle than implementing or enforcing security. Consequently the political dimension of forging and sustaining consensus among disparate and potentially mismatched forces assumes precedence over the utilitarian rationale determining the structure of warfighting forces. Although many professional soldiers resist what they see as the constabulary function inherent in peace operations,<sup>25</sup> it is a job that realistically only soldiers can do—as only they can bring, or threaten to bring, sufficient force to bear to enforce security. The bottom line remains that, though coalition peace operations require broad-based participation from the international community, there is a baseline of professional competence and capability below which a force cannot fall. To ignore this requirement is to court disaster.

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<sup>24</sup> David R. Segal and Robert Waldman, 'Multinational Peacekeeping Operations: Background and Effectiveness', in *The Military in New Times: Adapting Armed Forces to a Turbulent World*, ed. James Burk, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1994, chap. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Morris Janowitz, 'Civic Consciousness and Military Performance', in *The Political Education of Soldiers*, eds Morris Janowitz and Stephen D. Wesbrook, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA, 1983, pp. 55–80.

The problem of enforcing peace in East Timor exposed the flaws in much of the populist thinking about Australian involvement in peace operations. Although, in the event, INTERFET encountered minimal armed resistance, it had to be prepared to fight in order to uphold its mandate. Furthermore, it is clear that the collapse of the militias had as much to do with the knowledge that they faced a sharp and determined response as it did with the putative withdrawal of TNI patronage. The withdrawal of that patronage was clearly influenced by INTERFET's determined posture. Although the overall level of operational intensity remained low, some components of the force<sup>26</sup> were required to maintain a high level of combat readiness and were engaged in fighting at very little notice. Theirs was hardly a simple peacekeeping function: their personal security and the security of the population under their protection relied on their being trained, armed and prepared for warfighting. That level of preparedness has proven a potent deterrent to aggression. Clearly, the ability to prosecute combat operations remains integral to, but does not completely satisfy, the broad-based cohesion required of peace enforcement forces. The lead nation in a multinational force needs to forge a sustainable political consensus that will survive the shock of battle as well as field a force that is capable of achieving its mandate effectively and efficiently.<sup>27</sup>

The commander of INTERFET, Major General Cosgrove, made a special point of addressing the future level of preparedness of the ADF not long after his return from East Timor. In a lecture at Georgetown University in the United States he identified a popularly held point of view in some strategic circles:

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<sup>26</sup> Particularly those deployed on the border with West Timor [West Force or WESTFOR] and in the Oecussi enclave.

<sup>27</sup> For further discussion of the problem of maintaining and providing viable military response options to government see Alan Ryan, 'The Challenge of "New Times": Developing doctrine for an uncertain future', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 142, May/June 2000, pp. 49–54.

if the most likely recurring ‘off shore’ role for a defence force is to be some kind of coalition peacekeeping employment, then why retain high order capabilities and training regimes? Why not lighten up the force structure to specialise in the sort of ‘policing plus’ role which typifies most peacekeeping missions?<sup>28</sup>

His perspective is uncompromising:

Our experience in East Timor is enlightening. We found there . . . that forces structured and equipped, ready if necessary, for war were actually very effective, probably more effective than had they been less capable. Our troops were able to starkly demonstrate to all interested parties the penalties and sanctions that would accompany any attempt to deliver on the wealth of violent rhetoric. Our high-end capabilities meant that with battlefield mobility and surveillance systems we were able to seem ubiquitous. I believe the very capable structure and training inherent in the force actually was a major factor in restraining the number of casualties on both sides. A force optimised for peacekeeping would have in my view invited more adventurist behaviour by our adversaries. A quick and relatively bloodless success is always to be preferred to the alternative, even if some might see the background investment and the particular cost for force structure reasons, expensive in dollar terms.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to the East Timor commitment, forming and leading an international peace-enforcement coalition was not one of the military-response options required of the ADF by the Government. When, early in 1999, the Army released its core doctrine, *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*<sup>30</sup>—which in turn sought to implement the strategic guidance offered by the

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<sup>28</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University, 4 April 2000 (transcript).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Land Warfare Doctrine 1: The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, Doctrine Wing, Combined Arms Training and Development Centre, Puckapunyal, Vic., 1999.



Government in *Australia's Strategic Policy* (ASP97)<sup>31</sup>—many commentators argued that Australia would never again have to dispatch a combat force overseas. What was termed an ‘expeditionary mentality’ received widespread criticism from those who felt that the appropriate role for Australia’s military should be confined to the defence of the Australian mainland. Others argued that the Army ‘would be better utilised being prepared and maintained primarily for . . . peacekeeping operations’.<sup>32</sup> However, it is notable that both those that adopted the isolationist mentality and those that wished to convert warfighting capabilities to a constabulary function were often the most vociferous in calling for military intervention in East Timor by the international community. Some of these commentators even called for unilateral intervention by Australia—an option that could only have provoked armed conflict with Indonesia. Similarly, the United States (US) was singled out for criticism for not being seen to assume a more prominent role in assembling the force; however, once again, the detractors of the US seemed to be the very same people that generally oppose the concept of a unipolar world system dominated by American power.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, the formation of INTERFET has an even broader significance than its undoubted implications for the region. Enlisting the support of a wide range of international participants, Australia—at best a middle-level regional power—formed a multinational force with the support of the UN and assumed the role of leadership usually undertaken by a great power. The assumption of this role was made possible only by the post–Cold War redistribution of power, which has ended the tendency of the

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<sup>31</sup> *Australia's Strategic Policy*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 1997.

<sup>32</sup> Graeme Cheeseman, ‘Army’s Fundamentals of Land Warfare: A Doctrine for “New Times”?’, *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 139, November/December 1999, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> In fact, as discussed in Chapter 2, the US contribution to the force was critical in ensuring the success of the operation.

superpowers to acquire influence by monopolising decision making, and by US reluctance to take on yet another overseas entanglement. The willingness of the UN Secretary-General to support the Australian initiative and his encouragement to other contributing nations to join such a partnership further distinguished INTERFET from other UN-sponsored operations.

Australia came to assume the leadership of a regionally based coalition as a consequence of a policy vacuum among other states in the region and due to the hardening of Australian domestic resolve. As the crisis in Timor escalated after the ballot of 30 August 1999, no other regional state or organisation proved to be capable of establishing the most basic consensus on the issue. Lieutenant General Sanderson, former Chief of Army and former Commander of the military component of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), has pointed out that Australia proved to be the only country in the immediate region that was capable of building a 'coalition with strong regional representation' for both the peace enforcement and peacekeeping missions.<sup>34</sup> General Sanderson's observation reflects a simple reality and is not an example of Australian triumphalism—in many ways the Australian involvement was deeply embarrassing. Australians are belatedly coming to terms with the fact that their government had been quick to recognise Indonesian sovereignty in East Timor and both major political parties had maintained a bilateral accord on the issue over twenty-four years.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, having accepted that the situation in the territory was intolerable, Australia moved fast to establish a 'coalition of the willing'. Conceding that Australia

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<sup>34</sup> John Sanderson, 'We should embrace leadership: A new role beckons in Asia', *The Australian*, 2 December 1999, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> See Paul Monk, 'East Timor: Truth and Consequences', *Quadrant*, January–February 2000, pp. 33–40; Paul Kelly, 'Policy failure our legacy in East Timor', *The Australian*, 13 September 2000, p. 25; Scott Burchill, 'Canberra's criminal complicity', *The Australian*, 14 September 2000, p. 27.

would naturally assume the role of lead nation, Thailand's Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan pointed out that: 'It is apparent Australia is the best prepared, the most willing and has the closest troops'.<sup>36</sup> Although Australia has attracted some criticism for the supposedly aggressive operational culture adopted by INTERFET, much of the criticism came from ASEAN members that were incapable, for a number of reasons, of responding with sufficient force and urgency to the crisis in their midst. Even within ASEAN, in the wake of their annual meeting, held in Bangkok in July 2000, there was a palpable feeling that the group had not come to Indonesia's aid when it most needed it.<sup>37</sup>

The conferring of operational lead-nation status on the ADF was all the more unexpected as a consequence of the US disinclination to take on that role. The US was widely and unfairly criticised in the Australian media for not assuming command, or at least not providing substantial ground forces to the coalition, but in retrospect there is little reason why the US military and not a regionally commanded force needed to accept command. The expectation that the ADF would almost inevitably assume a junior role in a US-led multinational force was a product of historical experience as well as an appreciation that the US is increasingly reluctant to subordinate its forces to the operational control of a foreign commander. Indeed, US doctrine seems to assume that this could not happen outside a UN or a NATO operation.<sup>38</sup> However, since the US withdrawal from Somalia in 1994 and in the wake of the expensive operations in

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Alford, 'Feeble response makes mockery of ASEAN claims to solidarity', *The Australian*, 16 September 1999, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Alford, 'No praise for ministers basking in fading glow of sunset', *The Australian*, 31 July 2000, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> See FM 100-23, *Peace Operations*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 30 December 1994, pp. 21-30; FM 100-8, *The Army in Multinational Operations*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 24 November 1997, pp. 2-7 - 2-14.

Bosnia and Kosovo, US security strategy had begun to revert to terms not dissimilar to the more cautious Weinberger–Powell doctrine that had emerged during the Reagan–Bush administrations. The preconditions for US military involvement have since been spelt out in the most recent version of the document *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* completed in December 1999 and released by the White House in January 2000. In that statement of current security strategy it is stressed that:

The decision to employ military forces to support our humanitarian and other interests focuses on the unique capabilities and resources the military can bring to bear, rather than on its combat power . . . In all cases, the costs and risks of U.S. military involvement must be commensurate with the interests at stake . . . Our involvement will be more circumscribed when regional states or organizations are better positioned to act than we are. Even in these cases, however, the United States will be actively engaged with appropriate diplomatic, economic and military tools.<sup>39</sup>

In this case the US contribution was significant. US forces contributed a number of niche capabilities that were important to mission success and which they alone possessed. They also provided significant funding and strategic-lift assets that made it possible for many of the contingents to deploy.

The paradigm change in US policy was confirmed by US Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre in an informal address to some members of the Parliament of the Northern Territory in November 1999. Referring to US participation in Operation *Stabilise*, he expressed admiration for the confidence that Australia exhibited in assuming the lead. He noted the supporting role played by the US and explained that this was a result of a certain weariness resulting from the years of leading peace operations following the end of the Cold War and, most recently,

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<sup>39</sup> *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, The White House, Washington DC, 5 January 2000, p. 19.

carrying the greater part of the burden of the NATO action in Kosovo. He concluded by emphasising that the time had come for the US to become comfortable with playing a supporting role in operations where US participation is clearly called for and where another nation with the will and ability to take the lead is available.

Undeniably, the US remains strategically focused on Europe, South-West Asia and East Asia, and less on South-East Asia and Oceania. In circumstances where few important US interests were involved, it was hardly surprising that the US Government resiled from yet another expensive commitment the extent and duration of which was far from certain. Far better that their close allies, the Australians, should accept coalition leadership and receive technical and diplomatic support that would give the force leverage far beyond its actual size. The shallow value judgments that were expressed widely in the Australian media were, quite simply, beside the point.<sup>40</sup> Like any other state, the US is the best judge of its own interests—taking on the burden of responsibility for the resolution of the crisis in East Timor was not commensurate with American interests. According to stated US policy, Australia and its neighbours were ‘better positioned to act’ than it was. As Her Excellency Genta Hawkins Holmes, the US Ambassador in Australia pointed out:

the lesson of Timor is that the Alliance works—and works beautifully . . . Demonstrating your value as an ally once more, Australia stepped forward to take the lead in organizing the force which became INTERFET. East Timor is on Australia’s doorstep, and Australia has strong

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Paul Kelly, ‘Shattered Myths’, *The Weekend Australian*, 11–12 September 1999, pp. 8; 25; The Editorial, ‘Timor tragedy shows where we stand’, *ibid.*, p. 24; Greg Sheridan, ‘A holocaust of Canberra’s making’, *The Australian*, 16 September 1999, p. 7; Greg Sheridan, ‘Puppet without a master spells disaster’, *The Australian*, 24 September 1999, p. 15.

emotional ties to the territory. Under such circumstances, it was entirely appropriate for Australia to take the lead.<sup>41</sup>

Accordingly, when the UN Security Council met in the evening and early morning of 14–15 September 1999 to consider the resolution authorising the formation of the force, Australia was able to offer to lead the proposed multinational force in East Timor and to give a commitment to make a substantial contribution to the force itself.<sup>42</sup> Foreign Minister Downer informed the Secretary-General that Australia had been active in encouraging a wide range of countries to participate in the force, and looked forward to working with regional and other countries to help resolve the situation in East Timor. As an interim measure, the Australian Government proposed fielding a force immediately to help bring the UN-mandated tripartite process back on track until such time as a UN peacekeeping operation could be deployed.<sup>43</sup>

### **The INTERFET Mandate**

INTERFET had the benefit of one of the most strongly worded mandates given by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations since Resolution 678 authorised the expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait. The ultimate authority for INTERFET was Security Council Resolution 1264, which was agreed to unanimously on 15 September 1999. The Security

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<sup>41</sup> Her Excellency Genta Hawkins Holmes, 'The Australian–American Alliance in the 21st Century', Address to the United Service Institute of the Australian Capital Territory, 12 April 2000, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia*, vol. 21, May 2000, p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from the Foreign Minister of Australia, Alexander Downer, to the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, dated 14 September 1999, UN Security Council Document S/1999/975.

<sup>43</sup> *Security Council authorizes multinational force in East Timor*, Press release SC/6727, 15 September 1999, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/1999/> (Downloaded 15 February 2000).

Council authorised the establishment of a multinational force under a unified command structure tasked to:

1. restore peace and security in East Timor;
2. protect and support UNAMET in carrying out its tasks; and
3. within force capabilities, facilitate humanitarian-assistance operations.

Not pulling any punches, the Security Council authorised INTERFET to *take all necessary measures* to fulfil this mandate.<sup>44</sup> This last point is significant as it demonstrates a recognition that forces despatched on peace-enforcement missions require a mandate to apply proportional, but often deadly, force if they are to achieve their mission. This represents a considerable improvement on the Chapter 7 mandate of the NATO-led international security force in Kosovo (KFOR), which authorised the participating states to provide the force ‘with all necessary means to fulfil its responsibilities’.<sup>45</sup> Means do not equate to measures, but even that mandate was a significant advance on that given to the UN Operation in Somalia in March 1993 (UNOSOM II); the latter mandate had not even attempted to define the extent to which force could be used.<sup>46</sup>

Ultimately the resolution did emulate the mandate granted to the multinational force formed to intervene in Haiti in July 1994. There are definite parallels between the two mandates. In both

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<sup>44</sup> *UN Security Council Resolution 1264 (1999) on the situation in East Timor*, 15 September 1999, Art. 3, <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1264.htm> (Accessed 30 November 1999). Author’s emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> *UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) on the situation relating to Kosovo*, 10 June 1999, Art. 5, <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1244.htm> (Accessed 7 December 1999).

<sup>46</sup> *UN Security Council Resolution 814 (1993) on the situation in Somalia*, 26 March 1993, Art. 7, <gopher://gopher.undp.org/00/undocs/scd/scouncil/s93/15> (Accessed 7 December 1999).

cases the Security Council had reached the end of its patience with disrupted states in which conditions of security and order had broken down, and in both cases a regional lead-nation undertook, at the Security Council's behest, to restore stability and legitimacy. It is not surprising that this resolution took the earlier operation's lead and used almost the same language to authorise 'the establishment of a multinational force under a unified command structure'.

The concept of a 'unified structure' did not denote a combined structure, but relied on the precedent of the Haiti operation to suggest that command would follow the US model of an operational command that was responsible to a lead-nation headquarters.<sup>47</sup> In the US it is set in law that unified joint commands such as Pacific Command (USPACOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM) answer directly to the President. The existence of component commands within these forces allows the Services to influence operations.<sup>48</sup> The same principle applies to combined operations (those involving a number of countries) as it does to joint operations (those involving two or more services). Although it might not have been appreciated by many members of the Security Council or by countries contributing forces, the mandate represented a key decision about the degree of autonomy to be exercised by the lead nation. At the stage that the wording of the mandate was determined, it was not settled that Australia would be the lead nation, and it is notable that nowhere in the Security Council resolution was Australia confirmed as such.

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<sup>47</sup> While the conclusions that follow are my own, my attention was drawn to the Haitian precedent by Colonel Gary Bornholt, Australian Defence Attaché at the UN in New York during the negotiations resulting in Security Council Resolution 1264. Colonel Bornholt also assisted by explaining the origins and significance of the use of the phrase 'unified command' in this context.

<sup>48</sup> John H. Cushman, *Command and Control of Theatre Forces: Adequacy*, AFCEA International Press, Washington D.C., 1985, pp. 73–5.



Instead, the resolution left enough scope so that the state that commanded the force would have sufficient autonomy to fulfil its mandate without undue interference from bystanders. It also intimated that the national components of the force would effectively be component commands, capable of exercising indirect influence on the operation according to their significance. While none of this is clear on the face of the document, the lack of specific details armed the lead nation with a great deal of latitude in exercising its mandate.

From Australia's point of view, a number of lessons were learnt in the process of hammering out the resolution in New York. The wording of the UN mandate is critical to the success of the mission, but unlike a military mission statement it is more a legal than an operational directive. 'Unified command' is not a universally accepted part of the vocabulary of coalition operations in the same way as are 'lead-nation command', 'parallel command' and 'hybrid command'. Security Council resolutions are the product of compromise; it is therefore unrealistic and inadvisable to include too much prescriptive detail. While it might have felt more comfortable to include limitations on the duration of the operation in the resolution, these could have been later interpreted as 'report lines' by the Security Council rather than termination dates. Australia might even have abdicated its ability to draw down the INTERFET operation had UNTAET not felt itself ready to commence operations. Again, the use of general, non-specific language granted the force commander and his national command greater freedom of action than a more prescriptive injunction.

From an operational point of view, the stipulation that the force be a unified command determined the command-and-control structure of the operation. The fact that it was a multinational force meant that the issue of command had to be treated in a unique way. It was not possible to subordinate a unified command to the ordinary Australian command structure. While

Headquarters Australian Theatre was ultimately responsible for Operation *Warden* (the Australian component of the operation), the overall UN operation (Operation *Stabilise*) was commanded by Major General Cosgrove. A direct chain of command existed from General Cosgrove as Commander INTERFET to Admiral Barrie as the Australian CDF. Complaints from some quarters in the ADF that this arrangement circumvented the usual Australian command structure were misplaced. Instead, all the national contingents had to be placed under the operational control (OPCON) of General Cosgrove, who was directly commanded by the CDF. Any other arrangement would have involved adding a superfluous layer of command and would not have been acceptable to the other troop-contributing nations (TCN).<sup>49</sup> As it was, the national contingents had a direct link to their own national command authorities, and those authorities had direct access to the CDF. In those circumstances the personality and political skills of the force commander were crucial. To create a coherent, integrated coalition that was capable of carrying out its mission without constant reference to the individual national command authorities required a command style that emphasised the personal contacts that existed between the national commanders.<sup>50</sup>

The lessons learnt in earlier UN-mandated operations had a very definite influence on the INTERFET mandate. Following so sharply on the heels of the intervention in Kosovo, the outraged response of the international community further strengthened the acceptance of a relatively new precept in international law: the primacy of common humanitarian interests over the absolute

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, existing ADF doctrine recognised that the DJFHQ, when deployed offshore as an operational-level headquarters, would generally report directly to the CDF and not through Commander Australian Theatre.

<sup>50</sup> Briefing by Brigadier Steve Ayling, Director General INTERFET Branch, Strategic Command, Australian Defence Headquarters, 19 November 1999.

sovereignty of individual states. While this notion is imperfectly applied and has proved no consolation for the citizens of Chechnya, the UN is displaying an increased sensitivity about its responsibilities to citizens as well as states.

It was no coincidence that Kofi Annan accepted his part of the blame for the genocide in Rwanda soon after INTERFET was deployed. In his public statements he expressed his awareness of, and regret for, the failure of the international community to intervene in Rwanda. Pointing out that there ‘was a United Nations force in the country at the time, but it was neither mandated nor equipped for the kind of forceful action which would be needed to prevent or halt the genocide’, the Secretary-General expressed his determination that the UN would find ways to ‘intervene more promptly, and more effectively, to prevent or halt massive and systematic violations of human rights’.<sup>51</sup> Not long after, speaking about INTERFET, Annan stated that it was ‘almost a record that a UN [sic] force is able to go down within two weeks of a crisis. It is mainly to do with the leadership, the organisation, the professionalism of the Australian army and its leadership’.<sup>52</sup>

These remarks complemented Kofi Annan’s earlier announcement in Bangkok that the UN required a rapid-response capacity that present standby arrangements had not satisfied. He argued that

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Kofi Annan emphasizes commitment to enabling UN never again to fail in protecting civilian population from genocide or mass slaughter’, Press release SG/SM/7263 AFR/196, 16 December 1999.

<sup>52</sup> UN Newservice, ‘Secretary-General thanks Australia for taking lead in helping East Timor’, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/page2.html#22>, 21 February 2000 (Downloaded 23 February 2000); Lincoln Wright, ‘Annan heaps praise on Howard, military’, *The Canberra Times*, 22 February 2000, pp. 1–2. (The force was not a UN ‘blue helmet’ force as is its successor UNTAET, and it is significant that no such UN force could deploy so rapidly. If anything, the fact that INTERFET was a force assembled under a Security Council mandate but commanded by Australia enabled its speedy insertion into East Timor.)

‘the speedy deployment of UN peacekeepers was an “absolute necessity” if conflicts were to be contained. At present it is as if when a fire breaks out we must first build a fire station in order to respond’.<sup>53</sup>

Future historians may well have cause to mark the East Timor operation as a key turning point in our conception of international security. At the same time as the force prepared to deploy to East Timor, Kofi Annan called for states to be more prepared to form coalitions for intervention in humanitarian crises. He pointed out that:

The world has changed in profound ways since the end of the cold war, but . . . our conceptions of national interest have failed to follow suit. A new, broader definition of national interest is needed in the new century, which would induce states to find greater unity in the pursuit of common goals and values. In the context of many of the challenges facing humanity today, *the collective interest is the national interest*.<sup>54</sup>

Kofi Annan points out that international security must ultimately be enforced by states that are ‘ready and willing’ to act in coalition; he also notes that ‘it is essential that the international community reach consensus . . . on ways of deciding what action is necessary, and when, and by whom’.<sup>55</sup> The success of the INTERFET coalition—thrown together at such short notice—sheds some light on the processes that military coalitions will need to observe in the future.

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<sup>53</sup> UN Newservice, ‘On Thai visit Kofi Annan urges creation of UN rapid response capacity’, <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/page2>, 11 February 2000 (Downloaded 14 February 2000).

<sup>54</sup> Kofi Annan, ‘Two concepts of sovereignty’, *The Economist*, 18 September 1999, pp. 49–50. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

## **Regional Security and the Future Employment of the ADF**

The INTERFET commitment also calls into question notions of security based on the defence of the sovereign integrity of Australian territory. While in the ultimate analysis the protection of Australian citizens and property on the Australian landmass is the most significant responsibility of the ADF, it is also its least likely task in the foreseeable future. Some refer to planning for the defeating attacks against Australia (DAA) as the hundred-year flood—one has to prepare for it, but the question remains how to balance long-term insurance with more immediate priorities. Despite a long tradition of defining ADF priorities in terms of providing security by defending the ‘Sea–Land–Air Gap’, the ADF has found itself engaged, once again, in projecting land power off-shore in the company of a disparate group of coalition partners. As recently as 1992 the introduction to an Australian Defence Studies Centre publication claimed that:

It is both incongruous and illogical that in 1992 an island continent with access to immensely flexible, high technology weapons systems focuses much of its attention and severely limited resources on low-level, manpower intensive contingencies that are irrelevant in the context of maintaining national sovereignty.<sup>56</sup>

Although a ‘silver bullet’ solution that would maintain Australian shores free of another state’s troops would be convenient for defence planners, the current strategic reality is not one where Australian sovereignty is threatened by potential invasion. Rather, the Asia-Pacific is host to more disrupted states than any other region in the world. None of these states, or even their neighbours, has the capacity or the motivation to mount a conventional attack

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<sup>56</sup> Alan Stephens (ed.), *Defending the Air/Sea Gap: Exploiting Advanced Technology and Disproportionate Response to Defend Australia*, Australian Defence Studies Centre, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, 1992. The point remains that regional peacemaking—the prophylactic approach to security—requires preparation for low-level, manpower-intensive operations.

on Australia. However, continued instability in the region poses an ongoing threat to Australian interests. The situation in Timor provides a precedent that cannot be ignored. Not only did Australia have the responsibility to offer its assistance to help resolve an intolerable situation as a good neighbour and significant regional power, but it was not in Australia's interests to have a breakdown in civil order on its doorstep. The same can be said for the other regional powers that contributed forces to INTERFET.

Notions that each country must provide an independent and totally credible deterrent against the possibility of losing their sovereignty ignore the fact that the international community does not accept aggressive war being waged by one state against another viable, legitimate and established state. The protection afforded to established states such as Australia by the existence of international collective security calls into question the institutional truth that DAA must constitute the unchallengeable foundation of Australia's security strategy. In any circumstance where Australia is in the right and its sovereignty is under threat, it is highly likely that it will receive the assistance of the international community in general and the US in particular. However, Australia and its neighbours must continue to be prepared to deal with threats to regional security that do not involve direct attacks on their territorial integrity. These circumstances include disrupted states, displaced populations, and a range of peace and humanitarian operations. In many circumstances it is not reasonable to expect external assistance. This reality requires defence planners to reconsider the order of Australia's strategic priorities.

It is increasingly unlikely that Australia (or any democracy) will mount military operations unilaterally. In most cases, the legitimacy of military action requires more than mere consent; it requires the active participation of members of the international community who are in good standing with their peers. Not only did East Timor become the number-one priority for the ADF at short notice, but with limited resources it was an operation that needed to be undertaken in coalition with other forces. At least initially

INTERFET planners were more focused on attracting numbers than building a balanced force. They did not accept all offers of contributions, but before the contributions reached an adequate level for the task, the planners could not afford to reject many offers. A key force-structure determinant was the need to field an international force whose broad-based composition reflected its international political legitimacy. Providing a force ‘mix’ that met the actual operational requirements of the mission was a major challenge to the personnel, both civilian and military, who had to convince troop-contributing countries to send useful skill-sets and capabilities. Although it is necessary to question whether ad hoc coalitions formed in the future need to be as accepting of offers of contribution as they have been in the past, the principle that peace making is an international—and specifically regional—responsibility is here to stay. It would not seem unreasonable to suggest that the international community is going to have to come up with a better way of constructing forces for rapid deployment on peace operations.

The formation of INTERFET involved Australia as a central player and is distinguished from earlier peace operations by two key differences. First, the East Timor crisis occurred on our doorstep, not in some remote theatre; and, second, Australia was the force convenor. One lesson arising from the international response to the crisis has been that in the appreciable future the ADF will have to be prepared to participate in, and perhaps lead, similar regional multinational deployments. Given the significance that these operations have in providing for regional security and stability, it is essential that we reconsider the priority we accord to preparing for such tasks.

## 2 FORMATION AND DESIGN OF INTERFET

Having broadly considered the Australian political and strategic implications of the ADF's employment in a regional-security operation, we now turn to focus on the role played by the ADF in forming the multinational force. It is necessary to stress that the ADF's part in the construction of the force was only a part of efforts that began with the UN Secretary-General and involved a number of heads of government and their foreign and defence ministers. Australia's Prime Minister John Howard played a central role in assembling force commitments from a wide variety of countries. In Australia the administrative load was shared by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of Defence. Despite the broad distribution of responsibility, from an operational perspective, it is worth assessing what the ADF was called upon to do—not least because it had never had to assemble a coalition force of this type before.

Indonesia's recognition of the failure of martial law in East Timor and acceptance of a peacekeeping force on 12 September 1999 led almost immediately to the formation of the UN-mandated International Force East Timor (INTERFET) under Australian command. Australia's formal offer to lead and manage the coalition was received by Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 14 September; however, it was merely a formality as the Secretary-General had already requested that Australia perform that role.<sup>57</sup> The next day Prime Minister Howard confirmed that Australia would be involved in the operation. These bare facts conceal the reality that the formation of the multinational coalition came at the end of a frenetic period of lobbying by the

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<sup>57</sup> Alexander Downer to Kofi Annan, 14 September 1999 (S/1999/975); Paul Kelly, 'Howard builds force; is it one to be reckoned with?', *The Australian*, 13 September 1999, p. 2.



Australian Government and the Secretary General. The effectiveness of their advocacy of the cause of East Timor can be judged by the commitment made by a disparate group of nations to deploy forces almost immediately—in some cases within the week. On 20 September 1999, INTERFET commenced operations in East Timor. Within a week over 4000 coalition personnel were deployed, and by 1 November over 8200 troops constituted the force.

On 9 February 1999, the National Security Committee of Cabinet agreed that DFAT would, in consultation with the Department of Defence and PM&C, prepare a diplomatic action-plan to respond to events in East Timor. The ADF had been aware of the possibility that it might be involved in an overseas deployment since 11 March, when the Minister for Defence John Moore MHR had announced that a second brigade (based in Darwin) would be brought to twenty-eight days operational readiness.

On 29 April, Admiral Barrie appointed Brigadier Mike Smith as the Director-General East Timor in Australian Defence Headquarters (ADHQ). Brigadier Smith's role at this early stage was to assist the Government to shape initiatives in relation to East Timor by monitoring all aspects of the situation in East Timor and Australia's response to it; develop proposals for the Defence contribution to achieving the Government's objectives; and liaise with government departments and agencies to progress agreed policies and approaches. It was possible that the Director-General East Timor might, should events require it, become Australia's nomination for command in any future UN or multinational peacekeeping force. In the event, Brigadier Smith did not command INTERFET, but when President Habibie approved the formation of an international force he was immediately promoted to Major General and flew to New York to head the INTERFET liaison staff at UN Headquarters. He was later chosen as Australia's senior officer in, and Deputy Commander of, UNTAET. Reassigned from a posting as the

Army's Director-General Future Land Warfare, Brigadier Smith (as he then was) played a key role in setting up and facilitating the negotiations leading to the formation of INTERFET.

Perhaps the most likely contingency that the ADF expected to have to prepare for was a unilateral services-protected evacuation to withdraw Australian civilians, international observers and UNAMET personnel if the situation deteriorated. When it became obvious in early September that a more concerted international effort was required, the planning for this contingency was modified to form the basis for the planning of the deployment of the multinational force. Reflecting on the speed with which the crisis had escalated, General Cosgrove later admitted that:

Although we in the military had turned over in our minds the 'what ifs' attendant upon a UN evacuation and a consequent potential vacuum of international presence in East Timor, this was far from the depth of planning desirable for an emerging military contingency. A frantic round of concurrent, round-the-clock planning and consultation began. The ADF prepared plans to be the core of what was emerging as likely to be a UN-mandated, multi-national force of unknown composition and structure, with crucially the extent and strength of the mandate also unknown. [As Commander of the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ)] I took the high-end evacuation plan and modified it to require the insertion of a light infantry brigade through Dili and expanded it to include some more robust capabilities and of course a logistics component, which in the short duration-footprint version for the evacuation operations was unnecessary ashore.<sup>58</sup>

As the crisis in East Timor escalated after the ballot on 30 August, the ADF began to build up its forces in Darwin, ready for deployment into East Timor. As a result, when an

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<sup>58</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, *The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University*.

international force was required, Australia was the only country with forces ready, available and in reasonable proximity to East Timor. It was also the only country that had contingency plans ready to implement such a deployment, although those plans were for a mission to be conducted by the ADF alone, and not for a multinational operation. It is worth noting that these plans had been developed originally for an evacuation, not a sustained presence in East Timor. No other country displayed the combination of military preparedness and political will to make an immediate commitment to ending the violence on the island.

The developing crisis in East Timor confronted the Defence Organisation with its greatest challenge since the end of the Vietnam War. 1999 was also a time of great organisational upheaval in Defence, the Secretary of the department Mr Paul Barratt being dismissed in July and replaced on a permanent basis by Dr Allan Hawke only in mid-October. The uncertainty that accompanied this transition certainly did not assist the management of the crisis; nor for that matter did the fact that the crisis in East Timor exposed the weaknesses inherent in Australia's 'threat based' defence policy. The CDF Admiral Chris Barrie remarked on the limitations of pre-existing policy in an address to the US National Defense University in Washington DC:

The traditional threat/defence paradigm as the primary driver for defence planning frankly is very tired and is almost to the stage of having little real relevance . . . We have found that our military links provide a very useful entrée for our national activities in the region. This provides Australia with what I believe is a very privileged opportunity to play a major role in helping to build peace and stability within our region. The ties we have already developed have made it possible for Australia to define its security in and with the Asia-Pacific region. Importantly we no longer see our security being remote from events in our region.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Admiral Chris Barrie, 'From economic and political turmoil, to a new age in the Asia-Pacific region', Speech to the National Defense University, Washington DC, November 1999,

## The Coalition Management Structure

The task of establishing and sustaining an effective INTERFET coalition at the strategic level was managed by superimposing crisis-specific organisations on the pre-existing administrative structure. The three key organisations that managed this process were the East Timor Policy Unit in ADHQ; INTERFET Branch, Strategic Command—also in ADHQ; and the DFAT East Timor Crisis Centre. The DFAT Crisis Centre was responsible for providing political direction; in the early stages of the operation the centre also provided regular briefings and background information essential to the people who had the responsibility for signing up coalition partners. Within the Department of Defence the East Timor Policy Unit (ETPU) provided political–military guidance and policy support to the Minister for Defence and the Defence Executive. Established on 7 September, the ETPU was headed by Mr Mike Scrafton, Director-General Regional Engagement Policy and Programs in International Policy Division of ADHQ, and his deputy was Mr Peter Jennings, Director-General of Strategic Policy in Strategic Policy and Plans Division. INTERFET Branch was located in Strategic Command, which was under the command of Major General Michael Keating. The practical business of managing the offers of contributions was the task of INTERFET Branch, led by Brigadier Steve Ayling.<sup>60</sup> Brigadier Ayling had substantial previous experience of coalition operations, having served as commanding officer of the Force Communications Unit with UNTAC. Given the operational perspective of this monograph, most of the comment that follows relates to the functions performed by INTERFET Branch.

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[http://defweb.cbr.defence.gov.au/cdf/Speeches/NDU\\_Washington.htm](http://defweb.cbr.defence.gov.au/cdf/Speeches/NDU_Washington.htm) (Downloaded 15 March 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Briefing by Brigadier Steve Ayling, Director-General INTERFET Branch, Strategic Command, Australian Defence Headquarters, Canberra, 19 November 1999.

The rationale behind the creation of novel structures and processes—most notably the creation of the Policy Unit—was that it would give ADHQ greater flexibility and create a flatter decision-making structure. While on the whole it seems to have worked well, the lack of a central coordinating, cross-departmental body does not appear to have created the whole-of-government synergies necessary to maximise administrative effort in managing a coalition. A significant problem that the unit faced was that it did not possess its own dedicated facility—being temporarily set up in a conference room in ADHQ, the ETPU required more infrastructure to carry out its tasks. Although every crisis will require a degree of flexible response, the existence of a standing policy-support team that could ‘plug in’ to specialist expertise in time of emergency might prove a more efficient model.

In retrospect it appears that across government there was a lack of preparation to deal with an international crisis of the type that the East Timor situation represented. This was hardly surprising, given that our historical position within alliances has been as junior partner. Australia had never had to lead a coalition before; therefore it was unclear which department should provide policy leadership. The personal involvement of the Prime Minister in the crisis meant that PM&C had *de facto* leadership; however, the issue of how departmental responsibilities were divided was never fully resolved. Although all parties simply got on with doing their jobs, a warning note was sounded. A more complex and dangerous crisis might not be resolved using the same administrative machinery.

### **Building INTERFET**

Australian political, diplomatic and military efforts were ultimately responsible for the creation of INTERFET. The inability of the Security Council to maintain and deploy dedicated multinational forces for peace operations meant that, while it could authorise the formation of such a force, some state had to

assume responsibility for the carriage of the operation. By default the only country capable of mounting the operation—by virtue of political will as well as geography and military preparedness—inherited the mantle of command. Australian efforts were aided greatly by the coincident meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum leaders in Auckland, which commenced on 13 September. Prime Minister Howard was able to take advantage of the neutral environment and make direct personal approaches to build support for the force among those present. The ‘in principle’ promises of support that he gained in Auckland proved essential in the later negotiations to translate those offers into firm commitments.<sup>61</sup> The concurrent convening of the General Assembly of the UN in New York, which opened on 14 September, also provided a forum for world leaders to exchange information on the issue. The Foreign Minister Alexander Downer travelled to New York for the occasion and, supported by Australian staff at the UN, took full advantage of the opportunity to lobby for support.

The motivations of the countries that offered contributions varied considerably, the traditional humanitarian concerns of the peacekeeper prevailing. The three most substantial ASEAN contributors—Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore—all publicly emphasised the humanitarian-relief task over the security task. However, given that the first priority of the force was to restore peace and security, a peace enforcement force with teeth was required. With this in mind, the Vice Chief of the Defence Force (VCDF) Air Marshal Doug Riding conducted a whistle-stop tour through South-East Asia from 14 to 18 September to solicit troop contributions from regional forces. This trip was necessary to confirm the actual commitment to be made by potential donor nations. There was also a distinct need to influence the nature of the contributions to help shape the structure and capabilities of the force. Most importantly, Air

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<sup>61</sup> Richard McGregor, ‘PM no slouch at Kissinger shuttle’, *The Australian*, 13 September 1999, pp. 1–2.

Marshal Riding had the task of bringing some ASEAN members into the coalition fold, as without strong and committed regional representation the authority and legitimacy of INTERFET remained open to question.

Although the intention behind the trip was to recruit regional countries in order to provide a significant ASEAN presence in INTERFET, most countries had already decided on the nature and extent of their contribution. However, the trip was essential to reassure potential contributors about the way that their forces would be used, as well as to broaden the strategic-level flow of information beyond that which was usually handled by the diplomatic posts and defence attachés. The need to provide reassurance about Australia's intentions was particularly important given that Indonesia's ASEAN partners wished to characterise their involvement as not only providing assistance to East Timor, but as extracting Indonesia from a difficult situation. This element of the mission should not be forgotten in the atmosphere of justifiable outrage at the role of elements of the TNI in organising the carnage. Western media reports represented the deployment of INTERFET as a moral crusade, which in large part it was. However, as a peace enforcement mission the legitimacy of INTERFET was dependent on achieving a high degree of international consensus. This legitimacy was demonstrated by establishing a strong regional core membership in a truly cooperative international force. The members of ASEAN were particularly concerned that their participation not damage their relationship with Indonesia—ASEAN's largest member.

It rapidly became obvious to Air Marshal Riding and his team that the tendency to adopt an ADF-centric approach served only to emphasise the difference between Australia and its regional partners. This approach placed an unnecessary level of stress on the coalition. In part it was unavoidable, for to build such a disparate coalition at short notice, Australian planners could only work with what they knew and what they were used to.

Unfortunately, the uncertainty that characterised the planning process carried over into the conduct of the operation—a common complaint of otherwise well-disposed coalition partners was that there was a tendency to plan all activities from an Australian perspective and forget the needs of the other partners.<sup>62</sup> Despite the many other issues demanding action, force planners agreed that the need for inclusive and comprehensive planning for the integration of regional forces should be made a priority from the very beginning.<sup>63</sup>

One way of facilitating the planning process is to develop a set of templates for coalition operations. In a sense the VCDF's trip occurred in a vacuum—UN Resolution 1264 was only passed on 15 September while the team was in Malaysia, and it was not at all clear what form the command structure of INTERFET would take. This was not later assisted by the potentially confusing use of the phrase 'unified command structure'. It appears that most parties involved in the negotiations assumed that command would be exercised by a combined headquarters with an integrated staff including at least a senior representative from each nation. Although this was not possible at the time of deployment as these personnel were not yet available, the fact that this expectation was not fulfilled was later to cause some dissatisfaction among some non-Australian contingents.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler; interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel 'Rocky' Lacroix (Canada), HQ INTERFET, Dili, 13 January 2000.

<sup>63</sup> These comments are based on feedback from Air Marshal Riding and discussions with two members of his team: Commander R. M. McMillan, RAN, the VCDF's Staff Officer (Operations) and Lieutenant Colonel D. P. Coghlan seconded from Army Headquarters.



## **Funding Commitments and the Formation of INTERFET**

Of particular concern in the negotiation phase was the issue of funding. Few of the ASEAN countries are particularly affluent, and the Asian economic crisis had left them in a position where many could not afford to make commitments that they could not meet. The same consideration applies to many other developing nations, such as Fiji and Kenya, both of which made a force contribution. Even Thailand and the Philippines, which had confirmed their plans for their initial deployments prior to Air Marshal Riding's trip, were reassured by Prime Minister Howard's commitment that Australia would meet the deployment cost of detachments dispatched in time to deploy in the initial force. Similarly, the special role of the ASEAN contributors was emphasised by Air Marshal Riding's advice that Australia would propose that ASEAN countries have first access to the UN Trust Fund established by Resolution 1264. As in earlier UN operations, the question of the trust fund remained a key strategic issue, the importance of which was not fully recognised in Australia. The trust-fund model of funding-mandated operations creates a number of problems. The UN has a poor reputation for the refund of costs incurred on such operations, and there is no guarantee that the funds contributed will be sufficient to meet the actual costs.

In this case, Japan's pledge of US\$100 million did much to float the fund; however, even that came with strings attached, the Japanese stipulating that they wished developing countries to be given preference for funding support. While this did help meet the stated need for 'as many flags on the ground as possible', it was not a requirement calculated to attract the capabilities that the force required.

As much of the cost incurred by Australia has been on behalf of other contingents, Australia undertook from the start to assume much of the financial 'risk' associated with mounting the operation. Although these costs are reimbursable from the trust

fund, the ADF planners found that assuming the initial responsibility for these expenses was a direct corollary of Australia's role as lead nation in the coalition. In seeking to attract force contributions, Australia had to be careful not to be understood to accept 'personal' responsibility for all costs incurred.

Balanced against the unwelcome precedent of underwriting the expenses of contingents from some less-wealthy countries was an awareness that, not only did their presence add to the force's legitimacy, but these contingents often provided a capability at far less cost than could be managed by a force from a developed country. In Australia's case the discrepancy in the cost of forces constituted a particular problem, as the relatively generous package of allowances granted to Australian troops enhanced their unit cost over that of a similar capability provided by another capable force—the well-trained and highly interoperable Fijians being a good example.

Revealingly, when Australia sought financial contributions to the trust fund set up to support INTERFET, it became obvious that no-one had a clear idea of the prospective cost of the operation, much less how to calculate it. In discussions with the Japanese, who had indicated their preparedness to provide substantial support, this lack of clarity produced confusion and some concern over Australia's ability to prosecute the mission. The costing mechanism utilised by the UN for its missions—whereby agreed costs attach to contingent-owned equipment—was initially overlooked; thus Australian planners and their opposite numbers in other forces were not even speaking the same language.<sup>64</sup> The delay experienced in coming to terms with pre-existing arrangements for multinational operations did not enhance confidence in Australia's ability to manage the coalition. In the final analysis, the initial uncertainty about the costing of the mission was obviated by the success of the deployment.

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<sup>64</sup> This observation was made by a number of officers involved in initial negotiations concerning the costing of the mission.

The complexity of assuming lead-nation status in a coalition had not been fully appreciated when Australia took on the task. Not only does the lead nation need to make a substantial personnel contribution and accept the risk that it will have to bear proportionate casualties, but it also takes on a substantial financial burden. How to defray these costs while still retaining the authority of a major player in the coalition is an issue for further study. It is certain that there are few easy answers. In an operation such as INTERFET, the smooth disbursement of moneys from a voluntary trust-fund is essential to the maintenance of confidence among many troop contributors. As lead nation, Australia was responsible for authorising claims on the fund. While the lead nation does not possess an untrammelled discretionary ability to determine the distribution of trust funds, a reputation for generosity, probity and fair dealing will greatly enhance Australia's ability to form future coalitions. It must, however, be recognised that, if smaller powers are to assume the function of coalition leadership (which was previously the province of the Great Powers), then they will need to attract greater financial support from the international community. As things now stand, this funding cannot be assumed, thus limiting which countries can afford to lead coalitions.

### **Negotiations with Regional Powers**

Some consideration of the negotiations that shaped the formation of the force will assist in developing an understanding of the role that Australia is capable of playing in a regionally based coalition. It is not possible to describe the entire process in a work of this kind; however, it is possible to use examples of the activities that occurred to highlight some of the salient features of the negotiations that took place. Although not well reported at the time, the series of visits VCDF Air Marshal Riding undertook in order to recruit regional participants for the force was the point at which the composition of the force became obvious. These visits were only one part of the overall international effort to create INTERFET. However, if we are to understand regional countries'

motivations concerning their willingness to make a contribution to the force, then some consideration of these high-level, face-to-face negotiations is valuable.

On 14 September, the day that Air Marshal Riding arrived in Jakarta for talks with his counterpart Admiral Widodo, the deputy chief of the Indonesian military, the Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas announced that Indonesia would impose no conditions on the make-up of the international force. The Indonesian Government did, however, continue to voice its preference for an Asian nation to lead the force. It appears that, since agreeing to the deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force on 13 September, the Indonesian Government had become rapidly reconciled to the idea of divesting itself of any responsibility for its troubled province. This public stance of the Indonesians helped to minimise any loss of face. At the same time the Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* was arguing that UN peacekeepers should be deployed in East Timor only after the TNI had restored order and that the force should only be equipped with light weapons.<sup>65</sup> However, the fact remained that the part TNI played in the crisis obviously precluded them from having a role in its resolution. The level of violence called for active peace enforcement, which only a combat-ready and adequately armed force could do. As no ASEAN country was willing to risk its relationship with Indonesia over the issue of East Timor, Australia found itself in the unique position of having no choice but to provide leadership to the region's countries. In New York and in the region, Australia was the only country that was actively signing up recruits for the force; it was therefore inevitable that the ADF would have the responsibility for mounting and managing the operation.

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<sup>65</sup> *Today in East Timor—A Summary*,  
<http://www.abc.net.au/ra/etimor/features/today.htm>  
(Downloaded 20 September 1999).

Both Malaysia and Singapore—but particularly Malaysia—were placed in a difficult situation by the formation of INTERFET. Initially Malaysia indicated that it was considering a ‘significant’ contribution of troops. In the course of Air Marshal Riding’s visit the Malaysian position changed, and it appeared for a while that they would make no contribution. However, the personal intervention of the Thai Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan, and discussions involving both Malaysian and Indonesian officials, produced a compromise solution. On 16 September the Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar announced that his country would send seventeen staff officers and thirteen soldiers as part of the advance force.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the fact that Indonesia had requested assistance and had voiced their preference that an Asian nation provide leadership for the force, participation by fellow ASEAN states remained problematic. Due to the longstanding ASEAN principle of noninterference in another member’s internal affairs, and perhaps longer-term memories of the period of confrontation in the 1960s, there was an undoubted fear that ‘involvement in another ASEAN country’s internal problems may destroy the notion of cooperation and unity between ASEAN members’.<sup>67</sup> Consequently the deployment of the multinational force to East Timor constitutes a significant precedent and may mark a departure point for regional security relationships. The participation of ASEAN countries in the force did not cause the

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Nations that have pitched in’, *The Weekend Australian*, 18–19 September 1999, p. 1; Dzirhan Mahadzir, ‘East Timor—A Malaysian View’, *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, December 1999, p. 13; Peter Alford, ‘Thais take up Asia’s colours’, *The Weekend Australian*, 18–19 September 1999, p. 11; Barry Wain, ‘Asean failing to live up to E. Timor challenge’, *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 2000; Michael Richardson, ‘East Timor Leaders Oppose a Malaysian-led Force’, *International Herald Tribune*, 3 November 1999, <http://www.ihf.com/IHT/MR/99/mr 110399.html> (Downloaded 6 June 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Mahadzir, ‘East Timor—a Malaysian view’, p.13.

heavens to fall—if anything, it provided balance and enhanced the perceived legitimacy of the operation within the region.

In comparison with that of Malaysia, the Singaporean response was less equivocal. Immediately after leaving Kuala Lumpur, Air Marshal Riding had a meeting with the Chief of the Singapore Defence Force, Lieutenant General Bey Soo Khiang, on 15 September. The Lieutenant General offered Air Marshal Riding the (UN) Standby Force, which the Singaporeans maintained at short readiness for UN peacekeeping operations. The fact that Resolution 1264 authorising INTERFET had been passed earlier that day further legitimised the use of this capability. Although the East Timor operation was a Chapter 7 peace enforcement operation rather than a Chapter 6 peacekeeping operation, the difference was not critical as the standby capability was a medical team. In addition, the Singaporeans agreed to provide sea-lift capacity in the form of two Landing Ships—Tank. The Singaporeans also made an ongoing commitment to provide similar forces to UNTAET.

The value of having standby forces in the region was reinforced as the Singaporeans were able to respond to the Australian request for assistance within three days. The firm relationship between the ADF and the Singaporean Armed Forces (SAF) appears to have been at least one reason for the alacrity with which Singapore agreed to join INTERFET. In addition, the relative affluence of the island-state meant that funding was not a concern for Singapore.

Despite the support ventured by the Singaporean Government, there were some obstacles to full participation by the SAF. At this early stage the force was in particular need of infantry to meet the requirement to establish security in East Timor. Another unwritten agenda was the need for an Asian combat presence to counter the racially based slurs against non-Asian armies that had appeared in some regional press comment. The Singaporean Government was constrained from offering infantry to the force

because of the potential political fall-out, should their mainly conscript force incur casualties. Similarly, the SAF was not able to contribute engineers as that capability had been transferred to civilian contractors. In retrospect we should not forget the level of uncertainty that prevailed at the time regarding the likely opposition and potential for casualties. While it is easy to recall successful coalition operations through a roseate perspective, the political implications of prospective casualties exert quite a different influence prior to an operation.

Perhaps one of the more interesting developments that occurred in the formation of INTERFET was the fairly rapid commitment of Thai troops. Despite their enthusiasm for the operation, the Thais (who currently chair the ASEAN standing committee) were not willing to become involved in the force unless the Indonesians assented to the force being deployed and the force received UN endorsement (both preconditions were also shared by the Australian Government). This latter point was as much a financial issue as a question about the legitimacy of the force. The Thai Government was willing to participate in a 'coalition of the willing' as long as it possessed a UN mandate. The Thais did, however, require a firm undertaking that the UN would pay for the operation before they would become involved. As negotiations progressed, it became obvious that this undertaking would remain a major issue for Thailand. Although Thailand emerged as one of the major contributors to INTERFET, as a developing nation it understandably required some level of subsidy from the international community. To generate support for a coalition operation in the Asia-Pacific region, the lead nation or some other accountable body has to guarantee an assured source of sponsorship from non-participating nations. Otherwise, the lead nation may find itself in the position of having to underwrite the operation substantially. The fact that leadership of a multinational coalition had previously appeared a remote possibility for Australia resulted in these expenses coming as something of a surprise. Before the terms of the trust fund

were settled on 28 September, this confusion communicated itself to a number of the other contingents and caused a great deal of misunderstanding.<sup>68</sup>

The Thai decision to make a substantial troop commitment appears to have taken place at the APEC meeting in Auckland on 13 September, a meeting attended by both Prime Minister Khun Chuan Leekpai (who also holds the Defence portfolio) and the Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan. Both leaders were engaged in discussions on the issue of East Timor while in Auckland and shared the general concern expressed by other regional leaders. Dr Surin, who has a reputation as a progressive internationalist, had also spent the crucial days after the East Timor ballot in Australia before travelling to New Zealand. In both countries there was more extensive and critical media coverage of the militia's activities in East Timor than was available in Thailand. The fact that Thailand's two most important policy-makers were also free from the more conservative atmosphere that prevailed in Bangkok enabled them to decide to make a greater contribution. It also appeared that the Thai military was influential in determining the size of the contribution. The disengagement of the Thai military leadership from domestic politics had left the armed forces with the important function of border protection and internal security as well as national development and civil action. Senior officers appeared very keen to participate in this operation to demonstrate that they were also capable of making a contribution to an international force. Hence, when asked to provide options for their contribution, the Thai Army proposed a larger force than anyone had expected.

Interestingly, many other senior Thai leaders did not share the view that Thailand should take part in a force not commanded by an ASEAN member. Dr Surin's own deputy, M. R. Sukhumbhand

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<sup>68</sup> Author's discussions with Colonel Gary Bornholt, Australian Defence Attaché at the UN, New York, during the crisis, 10 March 2000.



Paribatra, went public with ‘an expression of his own personal views’ that INTERFET should be made up exclusively or at least mainly of forces from ASEAN countries. Mr Sukhumbhand argued that:

We have always said that we don’t want other countries, especially the superpowers, to interfere in the region . . . The time has come to show that we can solve the region’s problems ourselves, with the co-operation of countries outside the region. To start with, we have to show our readiness to step forward as a united group.<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, perhaps, ASEAN reticence to be seen to intervene in another member country’s affairs precluded the possibility of an ASEAN country assuming command of the force while Indonesia still occupied East Timor.

The willingness of the Thai armed forces to participate proved to be at least partly due to the success of the relationship established under Defence Cooperation auspices in recent years. The Thai Army in particular has established a good relationship with the ADF as a result of its joint exercises, although since the dissolution of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation Thailand is not formally a traditional alliance partner. Accordingly, the joint Thai Task Force was based on the 3rd Infantry Battalion of the 31st Infantry Regiment, a unit that had recently participated in the recent Australian–Thai combined Exercise *Chapel Gold*. The Thai commanders had experience working with the ADF, and their contingent began to deploy within eighteen hours of the Prime Minister announcing their commitment. The provision of an independent, self-sufficient task force under the operational control of Headquarters INTERFET (HQINTERFET) was clearly the most appropriate way of integrating a force with a quite distinct military culture and philosophy. The issue of achieving operational synergies is addressed in the next chapter of this monograph, which considers the operational culture of

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Alford, ‘Feeble response makes mockery of ASEAN claims to solidarity’, *The Australian*, 16 September 1999, p. 7.

INTERFET. Achieving the integration of disparate forces is much more than an operational issue. Establishing functional interoperability is vital to the success of the force in the field, but without having established a firm basis for cooperation, a coalition is unlikely to attract the enthusiastic participation of regional states in the first place.

Air Marshal Riding's experience of dealing with the Philippines provided some key lessons for Australia's future defence relationship with this prominent regional country. The VCDF visited the Philippines twice, on 17 September and then one month later on 17–18 October. In common with most other regional countries, two main issues were apparent from the start: the issue of funding and the importance that the Philippines placed on maintaining its relationship with Indonesia. The problem of financing operations is compounded where countries are willing to make a contribution, but are prevented from doing so by logistical weakness or the inability to mobilise forces due to critical equipment shortfalls. In this case the Armed Forces of the Philippines were willing to play a part, but had little surplus military capacity, as most of their forces continue to be employed on internal security tasks.

Quite properly, the issue that seemed to be of greatest concern to the Government of the Philippines was the preservation of its relationship with Indonesia. Not only is Indonesia a close neighbour and a partner in ASEAN, but it has provided the Philippine Government with a considerable degree of support, particularly in negotiations with secessionist Muslim movements in the south. Despite the strong feelings that were aroused by the mistreatment of their Catholic co-religionists in Timor, the political realities of their position in the region made the Philippine Government cautious that its neighbour not misinterpret their role in the crisis. Accordingly, while the Philippines made an early commitment to involvement in East Timor, it was keen to characterise its contribution as a

‘Humanitarian Relief Task Force’. The force, comprising engineer and medical teams, did include its own security elements, but its main focus was not to contribute to the primary mandate of INTERFET to provide security. The Philippines made it very clear that it saw its role as providing a civil-affairs function.<sup>70</sup> The Philippines sought to emphasise the non-partisan nature of its role by requesting that the Indonesian Defence Attaché to Manila accompany the first Philippine troop deployment in order to bear witness to the humanitarian nature of its task. In addition the Filipinos sought to balance their contribution by dispatching a medical team to West Timor.

It is perhaps not surprising that Brunei, the last stop on Air Marshal Riding’s trip, decided not to make a contribution to the force. The Bruneians were clearly subject to conflicting motivations, including their relationship with Indonesia; the implications for their own security of the absence of a rifle company of the resident Gurkha battalion that the British had already committed to the force; and their lack of experience in such operations. It is also possible that the Bruneians felt that the dispatch of the Gurkha company, which Brunei funds, represented a contribution on their behalf.

The personal nature of Air Marshal Riding’s negotiations clearly helped to overcome many of the misunderstandings that arose as INTERFET was put together. The creation of the force was a ‘rushed job’, and it is arguable that in future this need not necessarily be the case, even bearing in mind the requirement to establish consensus in each particular situation that arises. A clearer understanding of the implications of multinational force membership by countries in the region and pre-existing commitments to provide standby forces could enable such a force

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<sup>70</sup> This interpretation was reaffirmed by Colonel Cabreros, Commander of the Philippines contingent, in an interview conducted by the author at the Philippines National Command Element in Dili, 12 January 2000.

to be brought together and deployed more rapidly. In this case, had a more developed security architecture been in place, it would also have contributed to the multinational character of INTERFET and enhanced the force's capacity to impose its will on the opposing forces in East Timor. Although there is little value in lamenting what did not occur, Operation *Stabilise* provides valuable lessons for the future. The manner in which regional politics has developed in the first half of 2000 has not favoured the development of an inclusive regional-security architecture, but in many ways the precedent provided by this operation is a positive one, demonstrating the capacity of regional—albeit dissimilar—forces to cooperate. INTERFET was favoured by a relatively low level of opposition; in other circumstances a more determined and capable opponent could have exploited coalition weaknesses and set partner against partner. From Australia's perspective, greater awareness of the unfulfilled potential inherent in the ASEAN relationship and more commitment to maintaining engagement with our major coalition partners would improve our capacity to mobilise international support.

### **Extra-regional Military Contributions**

The INTERFET coalition included a number of generally smaller contributions from states outside the region. Some—such as France, Britain and the US—had an interest in the region as a result of ongoing strategic commitments to South-East Asian and Pacific countries. Others—such as Ireland, Brazil, Canada and Italy—had no significant strategic interests involved. While the involvement of none of these countries was decisive, their presence did emphasise a number of issues attaching to multinational-force creation. First, the need to attract other 'flags' to underline the political legitimacy of a mission can provide unusual bedfellows. Australia actively sought the participation of Jordan and Egypt on the grounds that, as Muslim countries, their presence might not offend Indonesian sensibilities. Second, the lead nation is often offered capabilities that may be of little or

restricted value, but is required to accept them for political reasons. Third, despite the political pressure to attract as wide a range of participants as possible, it might be wise from an operational viewpoint to defer or even (politely) reject some offers. Finally, whatever approach the lead nation adopts, the participation of some forces will involve significant additional expenditure, while other forces can bring cut-price capabilities to the force. In marshalling the force for such an operation, force planners need to have a clear-eyed view of what they want as well as what they will simply have to accept. Of course, the same principle applies to the formation of regionally based forces, but with extra-regional contributions the imperative that drives the requirement for local representation is not so strong.

Countries' motivations for providing troops to a peace operation vary widely, but the post-Cold War period has witnessed a previously unthinkable worldwide trend of countries making military commitments to peace operations where their own interests are not directly affected. Accordingly, Jordanians and Malaysians were deployed in Bosnia; Bulgarians and Japanese in Cambodia; Canadians and Australians in Somalia. Some countries—the Scandinavian nations, Canada and now New Zealand stand out—have even made involvement in peace operations the keystone of their own security doctrine. A question that should confront force planners seeking to form and deploy a multinational force is how best to take advantage of the evident goodwill that peace operations attract.

A major factor in promoting post-Cold War peace operations is the force of public opinion. The populations of distant countries can feel more involved in a humanitarian crisis than neighbouring countries if the media coverage makes the events more immediate. This was evidently a factor in the lead-up to the formation of INTERFET. As already noted, Malaysian media coverage of Timor's decline into chaos was muted, while footage of militia members using machetes on unarmed civilians was

widely displayed in Europe and North America. It is perhaps significant that public opinion was particularly strong in Ireland and Brazil, which contributed a Ranger platoon and a military police platoon respectively. Although neither country had any national interest involved, their response has been interpreted as a sympathetic reaction to attacks on their co-religionists. Brazil was undoubtedly influenced by its Portuguese connections, and so an element of cultural empathy played a part in its commitment of troops.

Although many countries do not publicise the reasons for their involvement, it is worthwhile analysing those motivations to better utilise the resources they provide. Such knowledge can also be used to bid for more resources. Perhaps one of the clearer sets of objectives that emerged from the creation of INTERFET was that enunciated by the French. These were to fulfil international humanitarian obligations; demonstrate France's good citizenship credentials as an Asia-Pacific nation; demonstrate France's willingness and ability to act on a global basis; and satisfy French public demand for effective action.<sup>71</sup>

These objectives reflect a combination of humanitarian motivations and enlightened self-interest—an approach that reflects the French desire to maximise diplomatic, commercial and political benefit from operational involvements. It is unlikely that any country will make a substantial contribution for altruistic reasons alone, and a force planner needs to analyse national interests objectively, before emulating *Oliver Twist* and

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<sup>71</sup> See *Opération SANTAL*, Ministère de la Défense, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/operations/timor/santal.htm> (Downloaded 8 June 2000); *Crises & actions extérieures*, Ministère de la Défense, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/operations/dispositifs.htm> (Downloaded 9 June 2000); Telephone discussion with Captain Patrick Stervinou, Defence Attaché, Embassy of France, 9 June 2000.

approaching the contributing government to ask ‘please sir, can I have some more?’.

An awareness of the domestic political situation within a potential contributing country can assist in convincing a wavering government to commit its forces. The Fijian Government initially declined to make a contribution to INTERFET. That government’s reluctance was largely due to the insecurity and inexperience of the new Labour administration. The events of the subsequent coup in May 2000 demonstrated that communications between the Fijian Indians in Cabinet and the predominantly ethnic Fijian armed forces were not good. It appears that the Cabinet was not aware that the army was keen to be included in the force. From an international point of view it was very important that the Fijians be involved. The Fijian Army has extensive experience in peacekeeping; is professional and accustomed to working with the countries participating in the American–British–Canadian–Australian (ABCA) armies program; and represents a relatively inexpensive capability. At the time, from a political point of view, Fijian participation provided a demonstration of the commitment of a major member of the South Pacific Forum to peace and security in East Timor. As José Ramos-Horta had already announced that an independent East Timor would seek membership of the South Pacific Forum in preference to ASEAN, an early demonstration of solidarity would promote East Timor’s transition to statehood.

Australia strongly lobbied the Fijian Government, reassuring them that Fiji would be remunerated for its involvement and that military involvement would be in their interest. Although the Fijian commitment came late (22 October) it provided a valuable asset that eventually became a part of UNTAET, helping to facilitate the transition of command and consolidating Fiji’s strategic relationship with Australia. At the time of writing, the Fijian political crisis has not been finally resolved and the position of the military is compromised. Until such time as Fiji

resolves its own crisis of internal legitimacy, it is unlikely that it will be asked to contribute forces to future international coalition peace operations.

Attracting a Canadian involvement was also potentially important to the force. After an initial show of enthusiasm at the APEC summit in Auckland, the Canadian commitment to provide a company group wavered. Despite the Canadian promise of a tanker (HMCS *Protecteur*) and two Hercules aircraft, Australia was keen to ensure that Canada made a 'boots on the ground commitment'. Bad experiences of poorly thought-through operations in Somalia and Rwanda had clearly made the Canadians cautious, and Australia's leadership of the coalition was an unknown quantity—despite decades of ABCA cooperation. Regardless of the Canadian reservations and despite a number of offers of light infantry from other countries, DFAT and Defence were keen to obtain Canadian infantry, seeing them as a force multiplier because of their professionalism and experience. Associated with this was Canada's status as a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and its commitment to establishing its identity as an Asia-Pacific power. The Canadians were partially swayed and provided an infantry company, a construction troop, two Hercules transport aircraft and ground staff, as well as a tanker and two helicopters. While their involvement was not crucial in this operation, the precedent it provides could possibly form the basis for future, more effective cooperation. Moreover, Canadian involvement was an important token of that government's desire to be regarded as an Asia-Pacific power and may signify a greater level of practical engagement in the future.

Not all offers of contributions were as eagerly sought. By 23 September INTERFET had all the promises of light infantry it required, and INTERFET Branch was looking at acquiring more specialist capabilities. Still, the offers of infantry continued to arrive. Clearly an infantry company or battalion represents a



relatively self-sufficient, easily deployable capability; therefore many countries see it as the simplest option. However, it is also true that many countries wished to send units that had little preparation, training or equipment for a mission in East Timor. Some of these issues are discussed in the next chapter, which deals with operational culture. The primary lesson that emerged from the experience of receiving offers of forces that were not really needed was that, in some circumstances, it is best to refuse the offer or defer it.

These experiences underline the need for a lead nation to be selective in putting a multinational force together. Although there is a need to represent the international nature of the effort in order to legitimise the operation, it can be argued that the existence of a UN mandate satisfies this condition. Whether Australia is required to be a lead nation in the future or not, it will undoubtedly need to contribute to future coalition operations. To ensure the security of the forces that it contributes, and to promote the effectiveness of the multinational force option, Australian planners would do well to advocate the existence of regional and international rapid-deployment standby forces for a broad range of contingencies.

Although the creation of such forces in the Asia-Pacific appears a remote possibility at present, the fairly dismal record of other peacekeeping operations since the end of the Cold War has prompted widespread re-evaluation of the need for streamlined processes and more rapid peacekeeping deployments. Since late 1999 Kofi Annan has actively fought for the establishment of rapid-deployment peace-enforcement forces. Subsequently the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, released in August 2000, recommended the creation of combined 'coherent brigade-size forces, with necessary enabling forces, ready for effective deployment within 30 days of the adoption of

a Security Council Resolution'.<sup>72</sup> While regional conditions may not favour the adoption of standby arrangements in the short term, the emergent consensus in the United Nations is that the future of peace operations depends on guaranteeing greater certainty and more rapid response.

## **Coalition Management and Preparation prior to Deployment**

Marshalling and deploying an ad hoc international force was perhaps the most novel experience for the ADF and was a responsibility that the ADF discharged remarkably well, given the short notice and rapid nature of the deployment. However, without a pre-existing set of standard operating procedures (SOP) some mistakes were made and opportunities were missed.

INTERFET Branch in ADHQ managed five aspects of the planning process:

- *Coalition planning and management prior to the call forward of a contingent to Australia.* This process included the negotiations concerning the task, size and deployment of the contingent, leading to a national decision to commit to INTERFET. Planning for the transition to UNTAET was also commenced.
- *Assisting coalition operations and management following arrival in Australia, for force preparation and deployment to East Timor.* Initially, this process included monitoring the location of all coalition personnel and setting the deployment dates (to both Australia and East Timor). INTERFET Branch handed over responsibility for coalition operations and management to Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQAST) once the respective countries confirmed their participation and Strategic Command issued the call-

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<sup>72</sup> Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (The Brahimi Report), A/55/305, 5/2000/809, August 2000, p. 20.

forward message. HQAST then became the more important contact in the coalition member's deployment from that point.<sup>73</sup>

- *Logistics planning* included personnel policy issues, logistics resupply options, in-theatre logistics support arrangements, customs/quarantine regulations, health support, and casualty treatment and evacuation. This planning was detailed in the *Guidelines for Contributing Nations* drafted by HQAST.
- *Provision of coalition planning advice to the ADHQ East Timor Policy Unit for use with DFAT and other relevant government agencies.* This aspect required the maintenance of close contact with Australian missions overseas.
- *Distribution of coalition information and the conduct of separate briefings* for each of the:
  - coalition representatives;
  - Japanese, Portuguese and Indonesian defence attachés;
  - heads of missions of ASEAN countries (coordinated by DFAT); and
  - INTERFET contributing countries' military representatives in New York.<sup>74</sup>

Each country offering forces was asked to answer the following planning questions:

- What are your intentions regarding a contribution to INTERFET?
- What will be the size and task of the contribution?

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<sup>73</sup> Correspondence from Colonel Frank Colley, INTERFET Branch to author, 17 March 2000.

<sup>74</sup> Brigadier Steve Ayling, Director-General INTERFET Branch, Strategic Command, ADHQ, *INTERFET Coalition Management*, Presentation at ADHQ to Land Warfare Studies Centre personnel, 19 November 1999.

- When will the contingent be available for deployment?
- Does the contingent have any movement requirements?
- What are the contingent's logistic-support requirements?
- Will the nation be deploying liaison officers to Australia?<sup>75</sup>

From there, the procedure that was followed was fairly straightforward. Countries that had expressed interest in joining the coalition were grouped into one of four categories. Category 1 comprised coalition members. Category 2 consisted of those countries that would probably join INTERFET but whose commitment awaited confirmation. Category 3 included all countries that had expressed an interest in joining INTERFET. Category-4 countries were those that would be joining UNTAET, either as continuing coalition members or as a new commitment. Representatives from Category-3 countries received an initial briefing on INTERFET and the coalition management requirements. If it appeared likely that they would approve a contribution, a national planning team was invited to Australia, at which time the contributing country was rated as being in Category 2.

Once in Australia, the planning teams received more detailed briefings at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. They visited Strategic Command in ADHQ Canberra, HQAST in Sydney, the Force Preparation Unit (FPU) in Townsville, Headquarters Northern Command (HQNORCOM) in Darwin and, after the first deployment, Headquarters INTERFET in Dili. These visits were designed to provide the planning teams with enough information to decide whether they would make a commitment and to commence deployment of their force to Australia.

After the initial deployment, most forces deployed to East Timor were processed through the FPU in Townsville. The FPU was a

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

temporary organisation raised from the Land Command Battle School and established on 22 September. The FPU provided a seven-day preparation program, covering reception; pre-deployment administration; orientation briefings; acclimatisation training; situational briefings (including application of the rules of engagement); field training as required; and preparation for deployment. While the training was taking place, the Contingent Commander conducted his final tactical reconnaissance in East Timor. There were some minor variations to this process, cadres from the FPU were sent to Jordan and Egypt to train their trainers, who then conducted their own training. Some contingents needed more preparation than others, particularly those that had little or no experience of operating in an equatorial environment.

Given the disparate nature of the force and the varied levels of preparation of the different contingents, the week-long program was really a minimum requirement. For forces deployed from more temperate regions, a week was not adequate to acclimatise to the extreme heat and, as the wet season drew on, the humidity of the region. Those that visited the Canadian National Command Element in Dili were generally amused to see that some artist had painted a snow scene on the wall in the foyer. For many, particularly the European forces, East Timor represented a very difficult operational environment. Although most forces accepted the environmental conditions with equanimity, ideally forces deployed into a potential combat zone would have more physical preparation for their mission.

One area where the administration process appeared to break down was in the flow of information to HQNORCOM in the early stages of mounting the operation. Darwin became the centre of a great deal of activity, with senior foreign visitors arriving at a rapid rate. The headquarters was stretched to deal with the influx of visitors having only limited linguist and liaison support. Although these deficiencies were identified and rectified, they do

demonstrate the importance of according priority to the simple task of ‘selling’ the operation to potential partners. One way of doing this selling is to have a dedicated protocol officer within the planning branch for an operation. We also need to recognise the requirement for more language-trained personnel to facilitate the progress of coalition operations.

### **Force Design and Command Authority**

A truly multinational ad hoc peace-enforcement force with a diverse membership is workable only if the mission does not involve high-intensity operations against competent opponents employing equally sophisticated weapons offensively. In this sense INTERFET was fortunate not to encounter opponents that were willing to wage war against it in a more effective manner. It should also be pointed out that it was possible to be misled as to the apparent ease by which INTERFET established its authority. The determination and efficiency that characterised INTERFET operations, particularly on the border, in the Oecussi enclave and in the vicinity of Dili rapidly nipped any opposition in the bud. If anything the firm response and coherent policy of the force demonstrated that, in order to make a force multinational without sacrificing functional interoperability, a limited number of countries need to accept responsibility for the conduct of any offensive operations that need to be undertaken.<sup>76</sup>

The higher the number of the countries that are involved, the higher is the potential for inefficiency, confusion and operational error. INTERFET was in many ways a divided force, as most of its members either imposed caveats on the use of their forces or made contributions that did not include a combat capability. Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom assumed responsibility for

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<sup>76</sup> Captain Edward J. Dennehy, Lieutenant Colonel William J. Doll, Captain Gregory P. Harper, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen M. Speakes and Lieutenant Colonel Fred A. Treyz, *A Blue Helmet Combat Force*, National Security Program Policy Analysis Paper 93-01, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1993, pp. v–vi.

the conduct of any fighting, and the areas of operations (AOs) in which their forces were deployed reflected this assumption of responsibility. In a coalition that had been assembled at short notice and deployed against an uncertain level of opposition, it was appropriate that those forces with fewer constraints on their ability to conduct operations assumed the greatest responsibility for assuring security.

The reality is that, on peace operations, contingents are likely to refer orders from the coalition commander to their national command authorities for approval. This proved to be a problem for UN Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM)—particularly UNOSOM II from May 1993 when the operational tempo increased, but national contingents continued to be limited by the caveats imposed by their governments. In many cases, too, contingents were limited by a *peacekeeping* rather than a *peace enforcement* mindset. Given that UNOSOM II was a Chapter 7 peace enforcement operation, this inhibition was quite inappropriate. However, Somalia provides an example of what could have gone wrong in East Timor if INTERFET had encountered determined opposition from the militias or from other rogue forces.

The command authority provided to INTERFET proved appropriate for the level of operations that the coalition forces had to carry out. It is well established that on peace operations the authority of a force commander varies according to the operational tempo.<sup>77</sup> A roundtable conference sponsored by the Strategic Studies

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<sup>77</sup> See Kenneth Allard, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, National Defense University Press, Washington DC, 1995, chap. 2; Major Harold E. Bullock, *Peace by Committee: Command and Control Issues in Multinational Peace Enforcement Operations*, Air University Press, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1995, chap. 2, pp. 13–4; William H. Lewis and John O. B. Sewall, ‘United Nations Peacekeeping: Ends versus Means’, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Summer 1993, pp. 48–57; General Robert W. RisCassi, ‘Principles for Coalition Warfare’, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Summer 1993, pp. 58–71.

Institute, US Army War College, and the US Army Peacekeeping Institute in 1993 concluded that in coalition peace operations:

When violence is limited, constraints on a force commander are minimal. As hostility escalates, the authority of the force commander declines. In peace enforcement operations which emulate war, the authority of the commander again rises.<sup>78</sup>

If circumstances had imposed a higher operational tempo on the force, Australia and New Zealand would have found themselves bearing the brunt of combat operations. As is demonstrated in the next chapter, the coalition's strategic centre of gravity was the degree to which the collective will of its member states could be maintained. The level of violence directed at some elements of the force—most notably those on the border and in the Oecussi enclave—was certainly hostile, especially at the tactical level. The lack of an organised and determined opposition in East Timor should not lead future planners to assume that the model of an ad hoc, disparate multinational force will prove appropriate in all circumstances. An enemy that understands the weaknesses of coalitions could exploit their flaws very effectively.

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<sup>78</sup> William J. Doll and Steven Metz, *The Army and Multinational Peace Operations: Problems and Solutions*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 1993, p. 14.



### **3 INTERFET'S OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND CULTURE**

Preparing and deploying the elements of the force was only the beginning of a complex process. In the previous chapter, the obstacles to force preparation were considered, together with the problems that force planners had in creating a unified command. The true test of those arrangements was encountered as INTERFET set out to achieve its mandate in East Timor. As in any operation, INTERFET developed its own operational culture and personality. Anyone that observed the operation could not help but remark on the esprit de corps and sense of purpose displayed by its members. Early reports from East Timor at the time of writing suggest that UNTAET is a very different force from its predecessor—not necessarily less capable, but culturally different. Despite the high praise that INTERFET has attracted—quite justifiably—there were a number of areas where more preparation and training would have enhanced Australia's performance as lead nation.

The basic issue remains that the INTERFET coalition was a form of multinational force that the ADF had not prepared itself to lead. However, despite the short notice at which it was raised, it has been a success by any standard. Three aspects of the coalition need to be highlighted:

1. command and control;
2. functional interoperability and operational culture; and
3. logistical preparedness for multinational operations.

However, before analysing the elements of the operation, it is worth considering what actually happened as the coalition force set about enforcing its mandate.

## Overview of Operation *Stabilise*

Fashioning a coherent and completely accurate narrative of events during Operation *Stabilise* will take considerable time. Few sources are available, and many of the existing records are in conflict as to when events occurred. Even among those that were present, there is some disagreement as to when events occurred and why. The sketchy nature of many operational records and the often misleading and inaccurate language employed in media reports make the writing of a contemporary account very difficult. It leads this historian to have some sympathy for C. E. W. Bean, the official war historian of World War I, who took twenty-three years to compile his magisterial account. It will take the efforts of a full-time official history team to clear up the conflicting chronologies and create an accurate account of what ‘actually happened’. Nonetheless, it is useful to fashion a rough overview of events to help consider the context in which analysis of the coalition’s performance occurred. Wherever possible, the following narrative is drawn from publicly available records that have been verified with reference to official sources; however, no doubt some dates and interpretations will be revised as more detailed evidence becomes available. At the time that this monograph was in its final draft—some seven months after the end of the operation—the continuing lack of a publicly available, authoritative chronology of events indicates that the ADF needs to consider seriously how it conducts ‘real time’ historical analysis of military operations. This will be the subject of a forthcoming working paper to be published by the Land Warfare Studies Centre.

On 19 September, having been appointed Commander of INTERFET that day, Major General Peter Cosgrove, AM, MC, flew to Dili to confer with the senior Indonesian officer in East Timor, Major General Kiki Syahnakri. General Cosgrove was well qualified to conduct a coalition operation, having served with distinction as a platoon commander in Vietnam and having graduated from both the US Marine Corps Command and Staff

College and the Indian National Defence College. He had also instructed at the British Army Staff College at Camberley and served as Commandant of the Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre. As commander of the DJFHQ, he clearly had the best-prepared Australian command element for an operation overseas. His observations during the initial visit help set the tone for the operations that followed. General Cosgrove noted the huge level of destruction and the obvious militia presence. Despite the tense atmosphere, he did not allow the disorder in Dili to distract him from the immediate problem of building up military power and determining the potential level of opposition that the force might encounter. His deputy, Major General Songkitti Jaggabatara of Thailand, shared his concern with acquiring a full appreciation of the scope of the military problem that INTERFET would face. General Cosgrove described what followed:

In an initially cautious but positive meeting with my counterpart, Major General Kiki Syahnakrie of TNI, we negotiated the details of my initial requirements for airfield and port use and deployment areas. He and his advisers seemed taken aback at the size and rapidity of the initial deployments and my clear intention to embark immediately on security operations in Dili. I used here what I suppose is best described as a Rooseveltian approach ('Speak softly' etc) which I tried to apply throughout Operation Stabilise. That said, I was uplifted by my early discussions with General Syahnakrie—he seemed to want to avoid the same sorts of disasters that I did and I felt then and throughout that he was a man I could deal with.<sup>79</sup>

The following day, commencing at dawn, INTERFET forces began arriving by RAAF C-130 Hercules at Dili's Komoro airport. Initially these were Australian, New Zealand and British special forces troops. At midday the Second Battalion the Royal Australia Regiment (2RAR), supported by two M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carriers from B Squadron 3/4 Cavalry Regiment (B Sqn 3/4 Cav Regt), was flown in and began to

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<sup>79</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, *The Anzac Lecture*.

deploy around Dili. The British Gurkha company from Brunei also deployed on this day. Later in the day General Cosgrove and his command element, including some national contingent commanders, arrived to take command and establish INTERFET Headquarters.

On 21 September HMAS *Jervis Bay* delivered the Third Battalion the Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR) to Dili port and HMAS *Tobruk* landed twenty-two ASLAV 8 x 8 armoured vehicles of C Squadron 2nd Cavalry Regiment (C Sqn 2 Cav). On the same day twelve Black Hawk helicopters self-deployed into Dili heliport to provide tactical mobility, and A Company Second Battalion, Royal Gurkha Regiment, secured the UNAMET compound.<sup>80</sup> The atmosphere of that early deployment can only be described as tense. Coalition troops fanned out to secure positions in the smoky haze that covered the city and were shocked by the devastation that they encountered.<sup>81</sup>

Initially the INTERFET troops confined their activities to establishing a firm base in Dili. This was necessary to establish conditions of security and adequate logistic support to sustain operations in the not-so-readily accessible interior of the territory. The strategy adopted by INTERFET reflected the fact that contributions to the force were still being made from around the world as the small initial deployment, largely consisting of Australian and New Zealand troops, established its presence. Labelled the 'oil spot' strategy, it was based on the idea that INTERFET, having first secured Dili, could then spread to other strategic locations as more troops arrived in the country. From these individual 'oil spots' ever-larger areas would be brought under UN control.

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<sup>80</sup> Ian Bostock, 'By the Book: East Timor: An operational evaluation', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 3 May 2000, p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Don Greenlees, 'No joy left for late liberators', *The Australian*, 21 September 1999, p. 3.

Despite the firm approach adopted by INTERFET troops, for some days after the first deployment sporadic looting, shooting, arson and other destruction continued to occur in those areas of Dili not under their control. Indonesian troops did not appear willing to do anything to stop the violence and began pulling out of East Timor on 25 September—a withdrawal that was effectively completed on 31 October. Some tension between the forces became evident during this period but was capably handled by the INTERFET forces and their more responsible TNI counterparts. As an example of what might have occurred, General Cosgrove has since publicly commented on one particular confrontation where a 22-year-old Australian lieutenant and his troops handled a potentially inflammatory situation involving an entire battalion of approximately 500 East Timorese territorial soldiers.<sup>82</sup>

These troops, travelling in about sixty trucks loaded with loot, approached a vehicle checkpoint on the main road through Dili only two nights into the operation. Dressed in a mixture of military and civil clothing, twenty armed outriders on motorbikes led the troops. Their dress added to the tension as the TNI had agreed that their troops would wear uniform and not mix items of civilian clothing. As they had arrived unannounced, it was difficult to determine whether the convoy contained troops or militia. The leader of the Indonesian force refused to display identification and angrily demanded passage. At the same time a number of territorials took aim at the small party of Australians—not knowing that Australian infantrymen with night-vision goggles had in turn targeted them with the laser designators fitted to their weapons. At that moment Australian–Indonesian relations hung on the good sense of those present, and the belligerence displayed by the territorials did not augur well for the situation.

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Cosgrove, 'The night our boys stared down the barrel', *The Age*, 21 June 2000, p. 15. The article was an edited extract of General Cosgrove's Larry Adler Address to the Sydney Institute the previous night.

However, the Australian troops' discipline held and an exchange of fire was averted. General Cosgrove's conclusion about this event and the numerous other interactions with TNI forces in the early phase of the operation highlights an important development in the changing nature of command:

In my day, as a junior leader, my decisions had an immediate impact on my troops and the enemy. In today's military operations the decisions of junior leaders still have those immediate impacts, but modern telecommunications can also magnify every incident, put every incident under a media microscope, and send descriptions and images of every incident instantly around the world for scores of experts and commentators to interpret for millions of viewers and listeners.

Thus the decisions of junior leaders and the actions of their small teams can influence the course of international affairs.<sup>83</sup>

This issue, popularly described as the phenomenon of the 'strategic corporal', was never more obvious than in the period before the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor. Clearly, the reputation and obvious determination of the INTERFET forces played a major part in establishing their authority. In part the preservation of good relations between INTERFET and the Indonesian authorities can be ascribed to the pre-existing relationship between the ADF and the TNI, and General Cosgrove has identified two major benefits from that engagement:

First, TNI had a clear view of our competence and determination and secondly, I'm convinced that from time to time personal relationships and mutual respect had pay-offs in minimising and resolving misunderstandings at the level of our troops' interaction. They also predisposed protagonists from my level down to talk through issues rather than to shoot through them. Maybe our astonishingly low casualty count on both 'sides' so to speak is to some degree testimony to that factor.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, *The Anzac Lecture*.

On 22 September, A Company 2RAR conducted an airmobile operation to secure Baucau airfield in the east of the country.<sup>85</sup> As the airstrip was some distance outside the town, the operation did not involve a commitment to establishing conditions of security in Baucau proper. The establishment of a presence at Baucau airfield was the first deployment outside Dili and was essential to ensure an additional point of entry as the airfield is the largest in the country.<sup>86</sup> The first fortnight of the deployment concentrated on providing INTERFET with a firm base for further operations. General Cosgrove was criticised in the media and even from within the coalition for what was seen as an overly cautious approach, but the strategy was later fully justified. Few critics realised the tenuous nature of INTERFET's foothold. Dili port can only handle two ships at any time, and both Komoro airport outside Dili and Baucau had limited capacity by any standard. To commence activities from a standing start, it was vital to ensure that a firm base, including adequate command and logistic infrastructure, was established in Dili; that mission-essential stores were brought into the theatre; and that sufficient personnel were present to prosecute operations.<sup>87</sup>

If anything, the operation proceeded faster than originally envisioned. On 27 September an infantry company group from 2RAR conducted an airmobile operation supported by armoured personnel carriers into the town of Liquica, about thirty kilometres from Dili. Liquica had been the base of the Besih Merah Puti (Red and White Iron) militia, which had been responsible for a massacre in April in the town's Catholic

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<sup>85</sup> 'Operation Stabilise Day Three', *The Australian*, 23 September 1999, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Bostock, 'By the Book', p. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Ian McPhedran, 'Cosgrove upbraids armchair generals', *The Australian*, 8 October 1999, p. 6; Mark Dodo, 'Critics talking rubbish, says Cosgrove', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 October 1999, p. 10.

Church.<sup>88</sup> After securing the towns of Baucau and Los Palos in the eastern regencies on 3 and 4 October respectively, the force moved to establish troops on the border with West Timor. This was the critical point in the operation, as West Timor provided the militias with a secure base from which to conduct their forays into East Timor. The first phase of the process was titled Operation *Lavarack*, which commenced on 1 October with the airmobile insertion of 2RAR into Balibo, with armoured vehicles of B Sqn 3/4 Cav deployed by amphibious landing craft to a site near the town. Their mission was to secure Balibo and Batugade areas and halt militia activity.<sup>89</sup> With Balibo secured on 5 October, Maliana in the middle of the inter-Timor border was secured on 10 October.

To eliminate the militia presence in the south-west area, Operation *Strand* was mounted, beginning on 6 October. Despite substantial militia activity in the area, the south-coast town of Suai was fully secured on 11 October. The mission to relieve the Oecussi enclave, titled Operation *Respite*, commenced on 22 October. In Black Hawk helicopters INTERFET forces flew into the enclave from the sea and found perhaps the highest level of devastation yet encountered and the displacement of almost all of the pre-referendum population of 50 000.<sup>90</sup> The last part of East Timor brought under INTERFET control was Atauro island on 21 November. The company of Gurkhas occupied the island, which is visible from Dili. The occupation of the island was a relatively low priority as it had not experienced significant disturbances.

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Alford, 'Black Hawk Raid clears out militia', *The Australian*, 28 September 1999, p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Bostock, *By the Book*, p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> Catherine Munro, 'Atrocities in Timor enclave "right up until Friday"', UN reports', *The Canberra Times*, 26 October 1999, p. 3; Simon Pristel, 'Landing halts looting orgy', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 October 1999, p. 22.



Violence continued as INTERFET consolidated its position in Timor. On 22 September, men wearing Indonesian military uniforms murdered Sander Thoenes, a Dutch journalist, in Dili. The atmosphere in Dili was not improved as departing Indonesian troops set fire to their own barracks and fired into the air in front of Gurkha soldiers.<sup>91</sup> The discipline displayed by INTERFET forces was admirable throughout the entire operation. Although the cross-border incursions by militia and the sometimes-poor fire control displayed by Indonesian forces resulted in a number of incidents, INTERFET troops exercised remarkable restraint and thus avoided fighting, which might have escalated the situation. This is not an account of the conduct of field operations, but some appreciation of the nature of armed contacts can be gained from the list of incidents in Annex B.

The militia failed to demonstrate the resolve to continue the conflict that their leaders had promised before the Indonesian withdrawal. In large part this failure was due to the speed with which INTERFET established control over the border region. The political dimension was also significant. The militia lost the support of those elements of the Indonesian military that had sustained them. US support was also critical in convincing the TNI that East Timor was a lost cause.<sup>92</sup> The visit by US Ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, resulted in a meeting between General Cosgrove, Indonesian military leaders and Taur Matan Ruak (Commander of FALANTIL) at the border town of Motaain on 22 November. The result of that meeting was the joint acceptance of a 'Memorandum of Technical Understanding' on control of the Inter-Timor border. Each party agreed to respect the East–West Timorese boundary and to discourage retaliatory militia violence. Although the US presence was not obvious in terms of troops on the ground, it was critical to the success of the

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<sup>91</sup> Lindsay Murdoch, 'Indon troops trash Dili', *The Canberra Times*, 25 September 1999, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Garran and Stephen Romei, 'Severe dressing down for Jakarta', *The Australian*, 28 September 1999, pp. 1–2.

mission. There can be no doubt that the political leverage it provided (backed up by the presence of the USS *Belleau Wood* with its contingent of Marines from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit)—and the substantial logistical, communications and intelligence support that only the US military could provide—enabled INTERFET to ‘box above its weight’.

The success of the operation allowed INTERFET to start to draw down its operations from the middle of January in preparation for the final transition to UNTAET, which occurred on 23 February 2000. By that stage operations had become fairly routine. Despite the relative lack of opposition, it should not be forgotten that considerable uncertainty had accompanied the initial deployment, many commentators suggesting that the force would suffer significant casualties. That it did not do so was as much a result of the force establishing control over the situation as it was of luck. For those who served in INTERFET, their memories are as much of the uncompromising and uncomfortable environment as they are of armed conflict. The climate was hostile, the steamy and fetid conditions of the ‘wet’ overtaking the operation in its second month. Roads were liable to collapse and in fact caused a fatal accident, claiming the life of a New Zealand soldier. Disease was rife, with water-borne and mosquito-based diseases being as dangerous as anywhere in the world. That INTERFET achieved its mission so well under these conditions makes it a worthy object lesson for future peace operations.

### **The importance of ‘Jointness’**

Popular accounts of Operation *Stabilise* have concentrated, perhaps not surprisingly, on the role that land forces have played in establishing security in East Timor. The failure to represent INTERFET as a joint and multinational effort mirrored the tendency of some elements of the Australian media to report on Australian achievements without giving full credit to the total effort of all coalition forces? air, sea and land. Delivering the force to East Timor and sustaining it there occurred only as a

result of the combined effort of all the services and countries involved. All three services, drawn from a range of participating countries, contributed to force protection, including committed forces and the threat of the use of force. Unless the operation is seen as a successful joint-force operation, there is a danger that the importance of maintaining balanced capabilities within the ADF will be forgotten. In the foreseeable future, there is no guarantee that coalition contributions can be relied on to 'plug the gap' when short-notice missions require Australian and Allied forces to be deployed rapidly and maintained under operational conditions for indeterminate periods. This uncertainty applies as much to operations in the more remote parts of Australia as it does to offshore deployments. The strategic lift and tactical mobility that air and naval forces provide is essential if land forces are even to reach the area of operations. Maintaining them there requires ongoing movement of equipment and supplies. Without the strike capability of aerial firepower and naval gunfire, and the protection afforded by joint air-warfare sensors and weaponry, ground forces are vulnerable to attack.

An eleven-country International Coalition Airlift Wing provided air transport for INTERFET. Aircraft contributed by Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Canada, the US, New Zealand, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore and Australia flew 3400 sorties, carried over 9500 tonnes of freight and transported 38 000 passengers in and out of East Timor during the operation.<sup>93</sup> Royal Australian Air Force aircraft alone flew 400 of the sorties, but the remaining missions demonstrate how vital the coalition contribution was.<sup>94</sup>

While General Cosgrove commanded all coalition forces, the Air Component Commander doubled as the Australian contingent commander. Initially, the position was filled by Air Commodore Roxley McLennan; then Air Commodore Bruce Wood took over

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<sup>93</sup> Air Vice Marshal P. J. Criss, 'Air Operations in Australia's Defence', *United Service*, vol. 52, no. 3, p. 25.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

in the new year. Based at INTERFET Headquarters in Dili, the Air Component Commander had the responsibility for tasking all Army, Navy and Air Force assets, including the transport aircraft that were based in Darwin. In addition, the Air Component Commander had the responsibility for running the two airfields (at Komoro on the outskirts of Dili and at Baucau) and establishing airfield security and air traffic control from scratch.<sup>95</sup> The challenging task of commencing airfield operations from a standing start was only made possible because the Royal Australian Air Force had a readily deployable Combat Support Group. This group enables the Air Force to take over a bare airfield and operate it with its own air traffic controllers, engineers, firefighters and airfield defence guards.<sup>96</sup> Within hours of landing in Dili, INTERFET air traffic controllers had taken over operational control from TNI staff. The tenuous nature of the force's initial foothold in East Timor and the need to establish an airhead for continuous air operations reinforced the need for the Air Force to maintain the capabilities inherent in the Combat Support Group.

The coalition naval element was certainly as important in assuring the success of the mission as any other part of the force. In an as yet unpublished paper, titled *East Timor: Maritime Lessons*, Captain James Goldrick of the Royal Australian Navy's Sea Power Centre has pointed out that the:

dependence on the sea of both the military and the relief effort was demonstrated by the fact that there were often no less than 18 ships in Dili Harbour, with two to three shipping arrivals a day. Over 90% of military cargo and people went into and out of East Timor by sea and the lack of roads and infrastructure meant that sea transport was vital in-theatre as well.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Captain Goldrick kindly provided a copy of his paper, which had been reported in an article in *Jane's Defence Weekly*. References are

The great bulk of personnel, equipment, vehicles and supplies was transported into the theatre of operations by sea. Given the territory's very basic port facilities at Dili Harbour, which could only handle two ships at a time, amphibious over-the-beach capabilities were essential? both in Dili and at those other points on the coast where ships could not berth. Accordingly, while the newly commissioned high-speed catamaran HMAS *Jervis Bay* received just praise for its ability to transport whole units to Dili rapidly, the relatively unglamorous heavy-lift capability of HMAS *Tobruk* was just as significant. Similarly, the Navy's heavy landing craft and the Army's own smaller landing craft were often the only way to deliver personnel and cargo to the shore.<sup>98</sup>

Naval efforts were not limited to sustaining troops ashore. Captain Goldrick noted that 'maritime forces created a protective umbrella, within which the land component could operate, confident that it could concentrate on the job to be done in East Timor itself, without the possibility of external interference'.<sup>99</sup> This point was affirmed by General Cosgrove, who had earlier stated that 'the persuasive, intimidatory or deterrent nature of major warships was . . . an important indicator of national and international resolve and most reassuring to all of us who relied on sea lifelines'.<sup>100</sup> The protection that naval forces offered took a number of forms. Constant patrols by surface combatants provided the conditions of security that enabled chartered merchant shipping to deliver most of the cargo landed. The presence of the US Navy's AEGIS cruiser USS *Mobile Bay*, the Royal Navy's destroyer HMS *Glasgow* and the Royal Australian

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to the published article. See Richard Scott, 'Learning the maritime lessons of East Timor', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 30 August 2000, p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University.

Navy's FFG-7 frigates provided air-warfare sensors and weapons that gave the force the confidence that it was secure from air attack, even without continuous fighter cover.<sup>101</sup> Equally impressive was the degree of authority that INTERFET derived from the ongoing presence of two US amphibious assault ships. The first of these, the USS *Belleau Wood*, complete with a contingent of marines from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, arrived on 5 October and was relieved by the USS *Pelileu* with a contingent of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit on 26 October. Both ships carried heavy-lift helicopters that were in constant demand. The presence of these ships provided a significant show of force at a critical time for the operation, as INTERFET moved to establish its control on the border with West Timor. The ships and the marines aboard them were a key affirmation of US support, which provided depth to those land forces committed ashore. It is arguable that, without them, the speed with which INTERFET expanded its authority would have been significantly retarded.

Coalition naval resources were utilised for a wide range of other tasks. Clearance diving teams detonated large quantities of explosive ordnance that had been unsafely disposed of in Dili Harbour; they conducted dives in support of war crimes investigations and on one occasion freed the fouled propeller of a merchant ship that was threatening to block the harbour.<sup>102</sup> The multinational naval presence also provided land-based forces with supplementary support such as hot meals, showers, potable water, communications facilities and additional labour from ships' companies for work ashore. Richard Scott, defence editor of *Jane's Defence Weekly*, has since reached the following conclusion:

One of the hidden lessons of the East Timor operation was the way in which naval units could conduct so many apparently disparate activities concurrently and for

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<sup>101</sup> Scott, 'Learning the maritime lessons', p. 28.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

extended periods. On a typical day in theatre, a single frigate might, while acting in the presence and deterrence roles in a high state of combat readiness and contributing to the development and maintenance of the wide area surveillance picture, send parties ashore to assist with repair and rehabilitation work, act as a fuelling platform for maritime and land helicopters, provide onboard rest and relaxation for land component personnel, provide communications facilities and support logistics over the shore.<sup>103</sup>

Although it was not required in this case, Captain Goldrick has pointed out that naval platforms could also have provided a headquarters facility on board ship, while the necessary infrastructure and communications facilities were established ashore.<sup>104</sup>

Operation *Stabilise* yet again demonstrated that, while conducting operations in a littoral environment, land, air and sea forces need to achieve joint synergies. Combined interoperability is best achieved by utilising the relative strengths of each service to compensate for the relative weaknesses of the others. In the littoral all three services face disadvantages as the air, sea and land environments intersect. The ADF needs to retain the balance of capabilities that will enable it to conduct joint operations across environmental boundaries. Just as importantly, the high-level contributions made by the other members of INTERFET demonstrate that the ADF needs to continue to strive for the level of interoperability with potential coalition partners that will allow it to sustain operations on the scale required in East Timor.

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

## **Command and Control**

The command and control arrangements for INTERFET were distinctly Australian despite the multinational character of the force. The DJFHQ based at Enoggera in Brisbane was the obvious choice to provide the central command element of INTERFET as such deployments are its primary role. Although a Thai deputy commander, Major General Songkitti Jaggabatara, supported Major General Cosgrove, their respective headquarters remained separate, with Major General Songkitti working from an office in the Thai contingent's headquarters. Major General Songkitti, a former defence attaché in Jakarta, appeared content with this arrangement, although not having a permanent office in the headquarters limited his involvement in the day-to-day running of the operation. Nonetheless, the relationship suited the division of responsibilities within the coalition and reflected the integral though undeniably less combat-oriented Thai contribution to the force. The same distance was maintained between the force headquarters and the other national command elements present in Dili. In that sense INTERFET was not an integrated command. The Thais, South Koreans and Filipinos had their own AOs and conducted their own operations as tasked by HQINTERFET. Other, smaller, contingents were integrated into Australian and New Zealand units on the western border and into the New Zealand-led Dili Command.

As already stated, many national contingents arrived in Australia with the impression that they would be participating in a combined headquarters along the lines of more traditional UN operations. In some cases this belief had apparently been supported by Australian advice at the time contributions to INTERFET were being sought. The Security Council resolution that provided the force with its mandate authorised 'the establishment of a multinational force under a unified command



structure'.<sup>105</sup> The nature of the 'unified command structure' was not specified. The UN mandate ensured that the 'lead nation' concept of command would prevail. As no other country offered to accept the responsibility of command, there was no proposal that a parallel or hybrid command structure be adopted. From an operational viewpoint, particularly given the limited time, this was the best outcome as it allowed the one country—Australia—to coordinate the deployment of all the contingents.

The Australian role as a 'strong' lead-nation flew in the face of the experience of other peace operations. UN peacekeeping missions generally follow a more bureaucratic and collegiate model of command, where national representation often has priority over operational effectiveness. This model has proved the Achilles heel of higher-intensity coalition peace operations time and again.<sup>106</sup> The INTERFET coalition was an interesting combination of countries that possessed a high level of interoperability at the command level, as well as countries that could not have made much of a contribution to the force headquarters. Reinforcing the decision to make DJFHQ the strong central core of INTERFET's command structure was the fact that, in November 1998, the headquarters had participated in Exercise *Rainbow Serpent*, which was designed to enhance the effectiveness of the conduct of coalition operations involving the ABCA partners in the region. Many of the officers from ABCA countries who were posted to INTERFET already had experience

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<sup>105</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1264 (1999), Art. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Alan Ryan, *From Desert Storm to East Timor: Australia, the Asia-Pacific and 'New Age' Coalition Operations*, Study Paper No. 302, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Duntroon, January 2000, pp. 10–19; 57–61; Alan Ryan, 'Command and control in multinational military operations: Historical Lessons for future regional peacekeeping', *Proceedings of the Technical Cooperation Program Workshop on Global Resource Management: Exploiting Command and Control Information Systems in Coalition Peacekeeping Operations*, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, Salisbury, SA, 9 November 1999.

of working with DJFHQ in a scenario not far removed from that experienced in East Timor.

In May 1999 the ABCA program released its *Coalition Operations Handbook*, which 'identified essential factors that the coalition commander and his staff need to know to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the coalition'.<sup>107</sup> This work, which was consulted by members of the planning staff for HQINTERFET, stressed that:

In the Lead Nation concept, appropriate command, control, communications, and intelligence procedures is determined by the lead nation working in close consultation with the other national contingents. The lead nation should provide unique C4I equipment and software to national component headquarters of other nations whenever feasible. Other nations participating in the operation provide appropriate liaison personnel to the lead nation headquarters. Robust liaison is essential to developing and maintaining unity of effort in coalition operations.<sup>108</sup>

Essentially this is what occurred, though there were two areas that could stand improvement. The first of these areas is Australian capability to provide C4I equipment to national command elements belonging to an Australian-led force. Although INTERFET did establish 'simple but robust communications means and modalities and SOPs for interoperation',<sup>109</sup> the ADF could have had even more sophisticated messaging links and operational databases for provision to the coalition partners. There was a certain degree of frustration that security measures meant that even the close ABCA partners did not have ready access to Australian-sourced

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<sup>107</sup> ABCA, *Coalition Operations Handbook*, Primary Standardization Office, American–British–Canadian–Australian Armies Program, Arlington, VA, May 1999, p. i.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 1-3.

<sup>109</sup> Interview by author with Major General Cosgrove, COMINTERFET at HQINTERFET, Dili, 10 January 2000.

data.<sup>110</sup> Although the operational tempo experienced in this theatre probably did not require a more extensive and readily available coalition communications and digitised information system, coalition forces may in future require a higher level of inter-communication to prosecute combat operations. For a defence force that prides itself on its commitment to achieving the ‘knowledge edge’, it makes sense to obtain the relatively cheap technologies that can act as force multipliers for even the most disparate forces.

Second, although the force made extensive use of LOs to expose and smooth out difficulties, the relationship tended to go mostly one way—from the Australian Headquarters to the contingents. Although the contingent commanders or their representatives attended the morning briefings at HQINTERFET, and there was a chiefs of staff meeting in the afternoons for administration, the national command elements did not have a standing role within the headquarters. The limited role played by the national command elements was probably as much a product of the historical development of the force as deliberate calculation. The core combat elements of the force—the highly interoperable Australian, New Zealand and British troops—were the first forces deployed. The other contingents that joined later found that HQINTERFET had already established a working system of command and control. However, in this author’s interviews with contingent commanders from a representative selection of countries, a constant theme was their feeling that HQINTERFET was not as inclusive as it could have been.

In fact, given the speed with which the operation was mounted and the disparate nature of many of the contributing forces, it was inevitable and appropriate that Australia should provide the headquarters. Furthermore the caveats—both formal and informal—that many countries placed on their forces effectively ruled out a combined headquarters on the traditional UN model.

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler (NZ).

The fact that the DJFHQ was available provided a prepared command structure capable of rapid and coherent response to the situation in theatre. Deploying an ad hoc, ill-prepared multinational headquarters was not an option in this case.

Despite the operational requirement for an integrated command and control structure, the perception remained that the other contingents could have played a more central role in the headquarters. In a coalition, perception is often as important as reality, and the cohesion of the force would have been assisted by a more prominent coordination centre. As the *ABCA Coalition Operations Handbook* points out:

A proven means of enhancing stability and interaction and improving control within the coalition is the use of a coordination center . . . Initially a coordination center can be the focal point for support issues such as force sustainment, medical support, infrastructure engineering, host-nation support (HNS) and movement control. However as a coalition matures, the role of the coordination center can be expanded to include command activities. When a coordination center is activated, member nations provide action officers who are familiar with its activities. Coalition nations should be encouraged to augment this staff with linguists and requisite communications capabilities to maintain contact with their parent headquarters. Early establishment and staffing of skilled personnel adds to the success of such centers.<sup>111</sup>

It is possible that such a centre would have headed off some of the criticisms from other contingents. The employment of a Coalition Coordination and Communication Integration Center during Operations *Desert Storm* and *Desert Shield* proved to be a very effective way of integrating dissimilar forces and ‘deconflicting’ their activities. That was, however, a much larger operation and one structured for high-intensity warfighting.

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<sup>111</sup> ABCA, *Coalition Operations Handbook*, para. 1-24; see also Ryan, *From Desert Storm to East Timor*, pp. 45–9.

In this case the command style adopted by General Cosgrove suited the requirements of a much smaller force and all but obviated the need for a formal coordination centre. The afternoon chiefs-of-staff sessions resolved most of the ‘bread and butter’ coordination issues that arose. It may be the case that on future operations a ‘clearing house’ will be required, and the establishment of a coordination centre is worth considering as an option. Even if the centre is not absolutely necessary to the operations of the headquarters, it might have a placebo effect on those coalition members that seem destined to remain disaffected.

On the other hand, the lead nation has the right to expect that countries that contribute forces will provide staff officers that will do more than simply adorn the headquarters. An experienced Canadian officer, who was one of the few non-Australian officers working within HQINTERFET, felt that some countries had not provided the force with qualified, experienced officers capable of operating in a multinational headquarters and therefore could not expect to fill staff positions.<sup>112</sup> Undoubtedly, the experience of operating a multinational force in East Timor was an eye-opener to many Australian officers. The command and control environment that a coalition force comprised of varied forces needs to generate fell outside the experience of most officers working in the headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel Derry Fitzgerald, the Irish Contingent Commander, noted that the Headquarters capacity to be inclusive of non-traditional coalition partners was not a problem but was very definitely an issue of which to be aware. He did, however, identify several problems:

A multinational force that has previous experience in dealing with some of the partners and not with other partners almost assumes that everyone joins . . . at that particular level, and that has been the difficulty we have had. Accepting the fact that it is going to be a multinational force presupposes that the headquarters is going to have to expand from the full headquarters that it was already, to allow the internationals

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<sup>112</sup> Interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel ‘Rocky’ Lacroix.

to come in. With that they are going to bring a little bit of baggage—which is going to be: language; culture and common SOP understanding, or the lack thereof.<sup>113</sup>

Again, if an already staffed headquarters needed to accommodate additional elements, it would do well to have a formal structure against which to post them. This requirement would be met by including those foreign officers in a coordination centre.

If Australia were to provide the base for a multinational headquarters in the future, it would be worth considering integrating national command representatives into the headquarters as they appear in theatre. However, before this can happen, the structure of the headquarters must be clear to all parties. Progressive integration of representative staff officers did not occur during Operation *Stabilise* because the Australian headquarters was already up and running in Dili, while many other contributions were not yet confirmed. It was not at all clear how to integrate officers into a working headquarters at that stage. To enable effective participation in the work of the headquarters, the countries contributing officers to the force needed to identify suitable personnel, with the appropriate skills for deployment with their contingents. In the short term, the structure of the headquarters needs to be made more visible, and ideally a ‘wish list’ of staff skill sets needs to be prepared and circulated. By early October such a list was circulating, but the speed with which the operation took place made it difficult to absorb many more officers. Those few that did join the headquarters as staff officers proved to be very capable and were rapidly absorbed into its structure.

In the future the ADF has to prepare for a combined DJFHQ by integrating officers from both traditional partners and regional

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<sup>113</sup> Interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel Derry Fitzgerald, Commander Irish Contingent, Irish National Command Element, Dili, 15 January 2000.

neighbours into training and posting streams that would equip them for such service. A regular program of combined-command post exercises with potential coalition partners might be the best way to initiate this process. To achieve this objective, a great deal of thought needs to go into how such a headquarters would work. Security of information and access to technological resources are problematic in a multinational headquarters where not all the partners necessarily share the same political outlook. To deal with these problems, the multinational Technical Cooperation Program is currently examining means of exploiting C4ISR technologies for coalition peace operations.<sup>114</sup> Finally, although the performance of INTERFET was not diminished in any way by the lack of a standing coalition coordination centre comprising representatives of all the contingents, a future operation might well require that function.

### **Interoperability, Operational Culture and Relationships within INTERFET**

The coalition was a true ‘New Age’ multinational operation consisting of traditional allies such as our ABCA partners, non-traditional regional forces, and forces drawn from broader afield whose concern with peacekeeping was not motivated by geography or political involvement (such as the Irish, the Italians, the Brazilians and the Scandinavians). Consequently, it was possible to be easily interoperable with some forces—such as the New Zealanders and the British—while being less close to other forces. As General Cosgrove put it:

I believe that we have shown outstanding success with a mixture of strong interoperability with the ABCA group and ‘cooperability’ . . . in the sense that we can operate alongside each other with some level of interdependence. So we have this hybrid which was interoperable on one side

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<sup>114</sup> *The Technical Cooperation Program Workshop on Global Resource Management: Exploiting Command and Control Information Systems in Coalition Peacekeeping Operations*, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, Salisbury, SA, 9 November 1999.

and collaborative—so we had a spectrum of operating techniques with an underpinning of interdependence in logistic terms—not with one being dependent on the other but with one half being largely dependent on the logistic support of the other half.

As it transpired, the lack of collaborative experience and common procedures was not a major problem. Measures that HQINTERFET took to minimise interoperability problems reflected experiences learnt on earlier operations, and included:

- extensive use of LOs;
- where appropriate, assigning a contingent its own tactical area of responsibility;
- simple but robust communications modalities and SOPs; and
- where fully interoperable operations were not possible, the simple matching of assets and personnel to given tasks.<sup>115</sup>

The work of the Australian LOs received positive comments from contingent commanders. However, it was noticeable that few of the LOs spoke the language of the national contingent to which they were assigned. As General Cosgrove concluded:

If strict military factors are a focus for coalition amity and cooperation, language and cultural aspects are hardly less important. I'm pretty sure that the Australian Defence Force will conclude we need more linguists, not just in the language of the country in which we are operating but in the constituent languages of the coalition. We deployed a large number of linguist LOs and needed more. LOs and language proficiency was absolutely key to avoiding and resolving misunderstandings, irritants and other 'friction of war' phenomena. We got through but it would have been a challenge if the tempo of operations had been uniformly high.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Interview by author with Major General Cosgrove, COMINTERFET at HQINTERFET, Dili, 10 January 2000.

<sup>116</sup> Major General P. Cosgrove, The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University.



The problem of language was probably the greatest challenge to the cohesion of the force. Not only did non-English-speaking countries identify language as a major problem, but other contingents found the Australian accent difficult to understand. For future coalition operations of this nature, the effectiveness of our LOs would be greatly enhanced if the ADF had access to a pool of officers who were language-qualified and culturally prepared to work with our most likely regional partners. This fact is hardly novel. The need for fostering cultural sensitivity and language skills has long been recognised in staff colleges and officer-training establishments around the world. However, given the limited time available in any officer's career to acquire professional experience and training, the time-intensive and expensive aspect of language training is often given lower priority. A small defence force such as the ADF faces particular problems in training and maintaining sufficient trained officers whose linguistic skills might not be called on very often in peace, but which become essential on multinational operations. To have sufficient numbers of officers who can effectively and confidently speak other languages, the ADF has to adopt lateral strategies. Just as in the private sector, where language skills make executives more employable and contribute to higher levels of remuneration, the ADF might profitably consider rewarding officers who attain levels of linguistic proficiency outside the military education system. Similarly, language-qualified officers might well have a particular role in the Reserve. Reservists with staff qualifications and language skills are often used by the US military on overseas deployments; they are not lost to the military but provide a vital supplementary capability to the full-time force.

The problem of establishing common understanding extended beyond liaison to the day-to-day operations of the headquarters. Perhaps surprisingly, even the Irish

contingent commander pointed out that he had struggled to understand the briefings at the start. He noted that:

It is a terrible thing to struggle at a brief, especially when you are new and you are learning the language and you're learning the procedures and you are just not quite sure what was actually said. I would wonder how the other Asian countries were feeling . . . The Australians certainly speak much faster than we would speak ourselves and there certainly is a process of addressing their own in a brief and it is got by the participants in the brief [making] eye contact, nodding their heads—I understand, I understand. I would think that the briefer maybe should look away from those people and look to the blank faces that may be there.<sup>117</sup>

Three Thai colonels interviewed in Dili supported this perception, arguing that 'the basic problem is language—we don't always understand what you are saying in English'.<sup>118</sup> They estimated that the Asian officers, in particular, understood only half of what was said at briefings and conferences, and they believed that Australian officers giving briefings appeared unaware of the issue. The colonels pointed out that the method of briefing needed to be adjusted to the audience, and that Australian officers tended to focus on the message and not on 'reading' their audience. Their suggestions included reducing jargon, paying more attention to the level of comprehension exhibited by non-English speakers, and slowing down the presentations. This last point was of particular importance at the end of the briefings when questions were solicited. The rapid pace at which Australian briefings were 'wrapped up' posed major problems for the Asian officers. They were still formulating questions, and

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<sup>117</sup> Interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel Derry Fitzgerald.

<sup>118</sup> Joint interview with Colonels Sakda Sangsnit, Prasopchai Kongburan, S. Yosporn by author at Thai National Command Element Headquarters, Dili, 12 January 2000.

when asked for questions tended to remain silent out of politeness rather than slow down the process.

The point needs to be forced home—Western operational culture emphasises a brusque ‘can-do’ approach that is entirely appropriate where all parties understand each other and can utilise verbal shorthand and non-verbal modes of communication. However, the demands of operating in a multinational environment require professional skills of a greater order. It is no use for Western troops to exhibit impatience with their partners; the cohesion of the force and the potential contribution to be made by other forces is too important for that.

The answer is not just a technical one either. There is a popular tendency to assume that the ‘tower of Babel’ phenomenon will be resolved by technologies that will translate languages for us. However, one of the real barriers to effective communication remains cultural. Again, General Cosgrove pointed out that we still have much to do in this area:

The robust and rough and ready lip service we pay to the interoperability issues between proudly different, but vastly similar, national and military cultures such as those of the USA and Australia does not ring true when the potential combined force has a different make-up. Platitudes such as ‘fish or cut bait’ or ‘if it’s too hot in the kitchen’, etc. don’t mean much if the coalition won’t form, or if having formed, won’t work. We have all been working on these relationship issues for decades, so I’m not saying we’re starting from scratch but if the requirement is for true burden-sharing then part of the burden is a sensitivity to accompany our clear and fierce mission focus.<sup>119</sup>

An area where the operational culture of the force proved inconsistent was where different forces applied caveats to their availability for different tasks. The requirement that force

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<sup>119</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University.

protection be provided for some contingents detracted substantially from the value of their overall contribution to the force's effort. Similarly, some contingents came unprepared to accept casualties—an attitude that is unrealistic and unhelpful on a Chapter 7 peace enforcement operation. Given that this attitude is increasingly prevalent, it may be that force protection capability needs to be regarded as an independent and not integrated requirement at the time of the formation of the coalition.

One reason that operations such as Operation *Stabilise* are half-jokingly referred to as 'New Age' coalitions is that they are perceived as being non-martial, humanitarian activities. It should not be forgotten, however, that the priority on this mission was to establish peace and security in East Timor. That mandate required a strong and determined military presence that was not matched by some of the force contributions received. Additionally, the friction caused by overt criticisms of the Australian operational style in some foreign media did little to enhance the cohesion of the force.<sup>120</sup> It may be that this criticism was caused by differences in personality as much as anything, but the fact remains that East Timor represented a very different environment than most other recent international operations have had to confront. Accordingly, INTERFET was subject to different tactical imperatives. General Cosgrove identified the particular responsibilities that faced his command as being not only to carry out the mission assigned them, but to:

- preserve the coalition, and one way of preserving the coalition was to avoid like the plague any pitched battles with TNI;
- ensure that Australia did not end up at war—even locally—with Indonesia; and

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<sup>120</sup> Barbie Dutter, 'Australia hails peace mission in East Timor', *Electronic Telegraph*, Issue 1735, Thursday, 24 February 2000, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/et?wtim24.htm> (Downloaded 27 February 2000).

- avoid unnecessary casualties to the Australian force, and an approach that got the job done and minimised the risk was a better approach than one that got the job done more quickly but may have entailed much greater risk to individuals.<sup>121</sup>

Ultimately, the policy of restraint was vindicated—even in the British press.<sup>122</sup> However, the over-criticism of the force commander by some members of INTERFET demonstrated the importance of having senior and middle-level officers that ‘think combined’ when assigned to multinational operations. The operational environment is tense enough without introducing elements of national chauvinism into command relationships.

By comparison with the ABCA contingents, the ASEAN forces brought an entirely different set of operational philosophies to INTERFET. These were by no means consistent across all forces, but the ASEAN countries did share an aversion to being seen as overly belligerent. In the stressful and dangerous circumstances accompanying the early stages of the INTERFET deployment, the forces confronting the militias and operating close to the TNI were required to adopt a high level of military preparedness, which involved active patrolling and being seen to impose their authority on the situation. The troops stationed in the border areas, particularly in Oecussi, had to maintain this posture throughout the life of INTERFET. This approach did not sit well with some of the forces that emphasised their humanitarian rather than their security function. However, it should be noted that these very forces, by virtue of the caveats placed on their use, had to be deployed in more secure AOs. While the difference in attitudes towards the force’s mission was sometimes frustrating, an understanding of these contingents’ thinking will lead to better—and, it is hoped, closer—relationships in the future.

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<sup>121</sup> Interview by author with Major General Cosgrove.

<sup>122</sup> Dutter, ‘Australia hails peace mission in East Timor’.

Perhaps the most obvious divergent approach was that adopted by the Thais. Their contingent was a significant part of the force. The Thai colonels interviewed in the preparation of this paper were admiring of the discipline, organisation and quality of the Australian military. However, they did remark that the Australian approach divorced them from the people. These comments reflected the Thai armed forces' focus on national development and civic action. As a result of the long-running counter-insurgency campaign in Thailand, the Thai armed forces replaced conventional counterinsurgency operations with a strategy to win over the populace. These reforms, commenced by General Prem Tinsulanonda during the 1980s, have permeated the operational philosophy of their forces. The Thai armed force's mission statement includes the following stipulation:

In normal times, the Armed Forces [provide] assistance to people living in remote and poverty-stricken areas by giving ideas, promoting occupational knowledge, providing health services, and supplying constructional material to help them build shelters. When public disasters occur, the Armed Forces [cooperate] with public and private agencies to bring the situation under control, solve problems and minimize the loss and damage suffered by the people. [The Armed Forces] then [provide] assistance to return the situation to normal as soon as possible.<sup>123</sup>

These methods carried over in their approach to peace enforcement. The Thais were not comfortable with the display of firepower, the use of armoured personnel carriers and the carriage of weapons in a state of readiness. They felt that, on a peace operation, contact with the people was more important; therefore they devoted much of their energies to preventative medicine, hospital care, agricultural demonstrations and rebuilding public infrastructure. The relatively quiet AO in which the Thais

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<sup>123</sup> Royal Thai Supreme Command Headquarters, *Role of the Armed Forces—National Development and Civic Action*, [http://www.armedforces.inet.co.th/develop\\_e.htm](http://www.armedforces.inet.co.th/develop_e.htm) (Downloaded 17 February 2000).

operated in Baucau and Viqueque (AO *Palisade*) allowed them to apply their philosophy. It was not an approach suitable for those in frequent danger of contact with the militias. However, bearing their reservations in mind is worthwhile, as it does little harm to make some adjustments to the force posture where such adjustment is appropriate and is not likely to endanger the security of the troops.

Like a number of other ASEAN forces, the Thais took particular exception to the wearing of the dark sunglasses sported by many members of the Australian contingent.<sup>124</sup> Their own cultural norms dictated that, when working with people, it was important to show eye contact. Again, these reservations should not dictate Australian operational methods, but it is important to understand how others perceive the ADF on operations. The images of Australians thus attired found their way into the media and went some way to representing Australians as being more 'warlike' than their regional colleagues. There was also some dispute within Australian ranks as to whether the glasses were strictly necessary. This seemingly minor issue underlines the fact that, on coalition operations, it is perception, as much as reality, that helps bind the force together.

The part played by the South Korean (ROK) contingent emphasised the fact that the capabilities contributed to multinational operations are heavily influenced by domestic factors. ROK forces have a popular reputation for operating aggressively, largely on the basis of their performance during the Vietnam War. However, it is more than a quarter of a century since that conflict, and changes in the South Korean Armed Forces have mirrored the radical changes that have occurred in that society. The ROK contingent was well disciplined and was very well equipped. As a consequence of caveats imposed by

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<sup>124</sup> Also brought out in an interview by the author with Brigadier General Khalid Saad, Malaysian Contingent Commander, Malaysian National Command Element, Dili, 14 January 2000.

domestic political instability in South Korea and the significant proportion of national servicemen in the contingent, the force did not come to Timor prepared to accept casualties. This limitation was partly addressed by assigning the force the control of AO *Barbican*, the eastern tip of the island of Timor, where the militia threat was at its lowest. However, even within their AO, the ROK forces adopted a fort mentality and would withdraw into their defended perimeter at night. This caution represented a dramatic contrast with the way that those troops that were more likely to engage the Militias operated, and limited the degree to which the Koreans could control the outbreaks of violence that occurred in their AO.<sup>125</sup>

The composition of the ROK force also limited the extent to which it could make a contribution. Although the ROK force consisted of a battalion group of 419 troops, only 150 members of the total contingent were infantry, the others being combat support and combat service support. Unusually, the combat support and combat service support troops were not utilised in what might be regarded as 'all-corps' functions, such as providing their own security and local patrolling tasks. Instead the infantrymen were stretched to perform security tasks and were operating on very little sleep. The consequence of this approach to manpower was that the core element of the contingent had problems undertaking tasks that HQINTERFET expected of a contingent of this size with its own AO.

The offer of the ROK contribution followed soon after the issue of a joint statement by Prime Minister Howard and President Kim Ad-Jung marking the growth of the bilateral relationship over the

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<sup>125</sup> These comments are based on conversations with a number of INTERFET officers, most notably Lieutenant Colonel Lance Ensor, Liaison Officer with the ROK Contingent at HQINTERFET, Dili, 12 January 2000. However, the opinions stated are entirely the author's own.



past half century.<sup>126</sup> While the Korean contribution was undoubtedly appreciated at the force formation level, integrating this contingent into INTERFET created problems that the ADF had not faced before. Despite the goodwill between the Australian and Korean components, there was little foundation for the forces to work together. It may be that in future operations more consideration will have to be given to the extent to which a force is able to integrate into a multinational force. Although the limitations of the Korean contribution to an Australian-led force did not prove critical on this operation, they might have proved a problem had the Koreans faced more opposition from militia or vigilante groups.

On the other hand, the Philippine humanitarian task-force had little trouble fitting into the coalition. The Philippine force stressed from the beginning that it was providing a niche civil-affairs function, which complemented INTERFET's main mission of providing security. However, the task force was a substantial contribution that justified assigning the Philippine force its own AO. In the words of the Philippine commander, this responsibility inevitably resulted in a situation where 'indirectly, if not directly, our troops are also helping in the restoration of security in our area of operations'.<sup>127</sup> Although the Filipinos clearly had some culturally based reservations about the way that the Australians operated, there was no communication gap between the forces. Given that—together with the Thais—the Filipinos constituted the core South-East Asian representation in

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<sup>126</sup> Joint statement by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon. John Howard, MP, and President Kim Dae-Jung of the Republic of Korea, *The Republic of Korea and Australia: An Expanding Partnership*, 17 September 1999.

<http://www.pm.gov.au/media/pressrel/1999/joint1709.htm>  
(Downloaded 28 February 2000).

<sup>127</sup> Interview by author with Colonel Cabrerros, Commander Philippines Humanitarian Mission to East Timor (PHILSMET) at Philippines National Command Element, Dili, 12 January 2000.

the force, a firm basis for future cooperation was established. It is to be hoped that both countries will have further opportunities to consolidate this potentially valuable security relationship.

Unfortunately, despite Malaysia being one of Australia's oldest security partners in the region, the Malaysian contingent faced problems as its members attempted to make a contribution to the force. Prime Minister Mahathir's comments at a press conference at UN Headquarters on 29 September, when he accused Australian troops in Timor of being too belligerent and overreacting to the militia threat, were, not surprisingly, not received well within the force. Mr Mahathir also called for the reduction of 'Australian-led INTERFET troops in East Timor'—statements that were reported widely by the Indonesian media.<sup>128</sup>

The sensitivity of the Malaysian contingent's position was underlined by its low numbers. Malaysia sent thirty staff officers and their support staff, though a Brigadier-General commanded the contingent. Brigadier-General Khalid Saad, a graduate of the Australian Officer Cadet School at Portsea, expressed some disappointment with what he and his officers considered was their under-utilisation. As it was, only one of the Malaysian officers had a full-time job—as a staff officer with Dili Command.<sup>129</sup> The point remained that, with such small numbers, the Malaysians were not in a position where their contribution was of much use to the coalition. Unfortunately for them, the public position of their government did not reflect positively on the mission of the force. In those circumstances, the Malaysian officers in INTERFET were placed in a difficult position.

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<sup>128</sup> Embassy of Indonesia, Ottawa, Canada, 'Australian troops conduct disgraceful—Mahathir', [http://www.prica.org/news/Timtim/ET-N.antara\\_100199-4.htm](http://www.prica.org/news/Timtim/ET-N.antara_100199-4.htm), Source *Antara*, 1 October 1999 (Downloaded 28 February 2000).

<sup>129</sup> Interview by author with Brigadier General Khalid Saad, Malaysian Contingent Commander at Malaysian National Command Element, Dili, 14 January 2000.

The example of the Malaysians demonstrates the problems inherent in multinational force operations. On a personal and professional level, Brigadier-General Khalid Saad was extremely complimentary about General Cosgrove's command style as well as the qualities of the Australian troops. Given Australia's long-term and demonstrated commitment to Malaysian security, it might have been hoped that the contingent would have been capable of making a greater contribution. This did not occur as a result of the Malaysian Government's decision to send a small contingent and the subsequent criticism of INTERFET troops' efforts to bring the militias under control.

Military coalitions are not 'feel good' combinations. In some circumstances, participating countries might have an inappropriate level of empathy with an opponent or, in this case, the former state authority. Where the motivations and performance of a coalition partner are not totally consistent with the objectives of the other contributing countries, there is no choice but to limit the level of its participation in the force. To maintain the political cohesion of the coalition, it is important to exhibit a friendly, cooperative approach to operations. However, the effectiveness of the force in achieving its mandate should not be compromised by the fact that the coalition was formed in a political environment.

One factor that did shape the operational culture of the force was a degree of self-consciousness by HQINTERFET that this was an Australian-dominated mission. As Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler, a New Zealander, put it:

Ninety per cent of the time I think that you've done marvellously well and then ten per cent of the time I've got really frustrated when the Australian-centric view . . . or the Australian flavour overrides anything else where it needn't have. You are such a dominating force here that everyone knows that this is Australian-led and you don't need to reinforce that.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Interview by author with Lieutenant Colonel Wheeler.

This observation was repeated by a number of officers who otherwise had nothing but praise for the professionalism of Australian staff work and the support that was provided. It does appear that the DJFHQ has some way to go before it can really claim to ‘think combined’. A number of foreign contingents pointed out, for instance, that the draft rules of engagement were not released until they had only forty-eight hours to assess and accept them.<sup>131</sup> This dilatoriness was despite a great deal of shared concern about the content of the rules and repeated requests for consultation. As it was, there were complaints that the contingents did not have time to gain the consent of their national command authorities, and accordingly some issues remained imperfectly resolved. The wording of the card containing orders to open fire provided a good example of a failure to engender a coalition mentality. Not all countries accepted the stipulation that the use of lethal force was appropriate to protect ‘mission-essential property’. These contingents did not make a fuss about the issue, but more prior consultation and perhaps the preparation of differently worded cards for the dissenting contingents, taking national law into account, would have resolved this problem.

Australian planning seems to have assumed primacy in the work of the headquarters. Again, this was demonstrated in small matters, such as the priority of planning. In the Plans Cell, Lieutenant Colonel ‘Rocky’ Lacroix of Canada noted that, when preparing for the redeployment of HQINTERFET at the end of the mission, rather than come up with a coalition redeployment plan, the headquarters prepared an Australian redeployment plan. The other, admittedly few, coalition members of the headquarters were then appended to the Australian plan.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*; also interview with Lieutenant Colonel Derry Fitzgerald (Irish contingent commander).

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Lacroix.

In the headquarters' defence, it should be noted that in no way was it a conventional UN-style combined headquarters, and that was its greatest strength. INTERFET did not deploy as an integrated, prestructured force. It was assembled in the field, after Australia, New Zealand and the British contribution established secure entry points into the theatre. Consensus between contingent commanders was established and maintained by the personal initiative of the force commander with the assistance of the deputy commander, through the thrice-weekly Chief of Staff meetings and by the weekly national component commanders meetings. Although some form of coalition coordination centre might have facilitated multinational cooperation, the headquarters was rightly suspicious of creating a 'tower of babel'. The Chief Staff Officer, Operations, Colonel David Morrison remarked:

If you had to run every ops decision through three different languages or three different cultural perceptions before a decision was made, or taken to the next level, then you would not be, in any way, shape or form as successful as INTERFET has been.<sup>133</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that greater awareness of cross-cultural sensitivities by members of any force at all levels would do much to improve any country's performance as a multinational force partner. While many members of the Australian contingent showed a high level of cultural literacy, and at times almost superhuman patience, a few relatively small issues still rankled with some of our partners. Operation *Stabilise* provided the ADF with invaluable experience of the attributes required of a lead nation in a coalition. These attributes range from the ability to deal with language problems—many coalition officers simply could not follow briefings—to exhibiting plain good manners. On one occasion an Australian soldier is known to have told a senior foreign officer to leave the Australian lines in blunt and uncompromising terms. It was noted, too, that on one occasion a

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<sup>133</sup> Interview by author with Colonel David Morrison, HQINTERFET, Dili, 14 January 2000.

group of non-Australian troops returning on the same flight to Australia was kept waiting while Australian soldiers (and the present author) were cleared through customs and quarantine. Although a small matter, the failure to accord troops who are guests in Australia some priority is symptomatic of a certain thoughtlessness to our partners.

### **Logistical Preparedness for Coalition Operations**

Australian logistic support for the operation was generally highly regarded by most contingents. However, a number of contingents arrived with little apparent idea of what they would be expected to pay for and what would be supplied by Australia. Alternatively, a few contingents took what appeared to be an inappropriately legalistic approach to the division of costs for operational requirements. Clearly differences of culture applied to accounting for operational expenditure, some contingents attempting to run a cash economy and pay for each small requirement at point of acquisition.

The ADF was unprepared to provide logistic support to a wide range of different countries with different requirements, accounting systems and operational cultures. As Major Bronwyn Worswick, legal officer for the Forward Logistic Support Group (FLSG), put it:

Prior to us arriving in-country we had no formal agreements with all these countries that are here, except for Great Britain and New Zealand. The concept of Australia providing neutral logistic support and trying to cost-capture and cost-attribute and balance the expenditure of that support, there were no procedures for it, and that was only a grey area—a big concept as far as our organisation was concerned. Then there was the high-level headquarters AST idea of what was happening and there was a considerable difference . . . between those two ways of thinking. So when we arrived on the ground we didn't have a lot of

actual procedures and SOPs and basic tints about how to go about what we were doing.<sup>134</sup>

Not surprisingly, the greatest problems encountered were with the most dissimilar forces deployed to Timor, though some problems occurred even with the New Zealanders, who had been told to track all costs. The advice given to the FLSG was that, being our close allies, the New Zealanders would not expect rigid accounting for stores consumed by them.<sup>135</sup> However, that was a matter of experience, and the Australians and New Zealanders had little difficulty communicating and thus resolving their differences. The situation was completely different with the ASEAN countries, and most notably with the ROK contingent.

The logistic-support relationship established with the ROK contingent provided a clear example of the Australian failure to appreciate the different approaches required to sustaining a coalition force. Although there was a clear requirement for all financial aspects of INTERFET operations to be recorded for subsequent cost-recovery, it would appear that the logistic-support system proceeded as if this were a unilateral venture.<sup>136</sup> As Major Worswick pointed out, ‘our logistics system is set up to supply us. It’s not set up to supply and sell basically to other countries’.<sup>137</sup> The issue was a serious one—squabbles over basic supplies have the potential to fracture a coalition. Australian operational culture, based on considerable warfighting experience, reflects the immediate needs of the force: provide the support as required and then worry about the details. The experience of working with the ASEAN countries demonstrated that this was not how they ‘did business’. Rather ‘they wanted to

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<sup>134</sup> Transcript of conversation, Subject FLSG Tour of Duty—East Timor—Dili, Major Worswick, Captain Anstey, Warrant Officer Class 2 Taylor, no date, Army History Unit, Australian Army, p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10; 19.

<sup>136</sup> COMAST Document, *Guidelines for Force Contributing Nations: International Force in East Timor*, 19 September 1999, p. 8.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

do deals like a normal commercial arrangement before you gave them the logistic support and in some sense they seem to even forget that we're doing that in an operational environment.'<sup>138</sup> The South Koreans even sought compensation when a ration delivery was late on the basis that Australia had not upheld its end of the contractual relationship. They also billed Australia for the water consumed by our liaison officer. The end result of this approach was that the FLSG had to micro-manage its relationship with the ASEAN contingents, and particularly with the South Koreans.

The lack of skilled interpreters in the ADF posed a particular problem when negotiating details of logistic support with the non-English-speaking troop contributors. Although most contingents brought their own interpreters with them, this situation proved one-sided and disadvantaged the Australians in what were essentially commercial negotiations. Very few of the LOs with non-English-speaking contingents were language-qualified. Major Worswick pointed out that:

We expect . . . to be able to negotiate about paying for things under the framework of our agreements—they've got us over a barrel because they insist upon evidence, documents, signed things—we don't have it and the language problem means that it's very difficult to try to communicate about it anyway.<sup>139</sup>

There is a distinct need for more linguists to facilitate understanding between coalitions—not only at the strategic and tactical levels, but in the all-important area of logistics.

In some respects the ADF could have been better prepared to capture some of the costs of operations so as to recover those costs in a more effective manner, either from the countries that contributed forces or from the trust funds set up for the purpose.

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<sup>138</sup> Interview by author with Major Bronwyn Worswick, Legal Officer FLSG, HQINTERFET, Dili, 14 January 2000.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*



For example, Australian fuel pumps did not have meters on them; it was therefore not easy to measure accurately how much fuel was provided to other contingents. Similarly, the force deployed before a process had been put in place to capture such items as the cost in labour and consumables of servicing vehicles. A process was developed in-theatre, but without having been tried and tested, there was no guarantee that it would be effective in recovering costs from the time of implementation. These details were traditionally dealt with under standard-form Mutual Logistic Support Arrangements and Implementation Arrangements, both of which constituted the respective agreements between Australia and the various contributing countries for logistic and financial dealings. Although not legally binding, these documents have effective political force but are arguably too restrictive for use with forces that do not share the same appreciation of operational realities as the ABCA countries do. Without provision for variation of the terms of an agreement to suit changed circumstances or a dispute resolution mechanism, the ADF is putting itself in a position where it will invariably have to accept all cost overruns.

To a certain extent the lead nation in a coalition is going to have to accept liability for many of the hidden costs of a multinational operation. However, seasoned hands at multinational peace operations have pointed out that a mendicant culture prevails among some of the countries that regularly contribute troops. In fact, despite requiring the contingents to arrive in Australia self-sufficient for a minimum of forty-two days:<sup>140</sup>

a large number of contingents, bordering on the majority, have arrived with very little by way of their own logistic support with them, and no ability to do any kind of independent sustainment of themselves, particularly the nations that are looking forward to the trust fund. They pretty much have brought nothing.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> COMAST Document, *Guidelines for Force Contributing Nations: International Force in East Timor*, 19 September 1999, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> Worswick, Subject FLSG Tour of Duty—East Timor—Dili, p. 7.

These contingents tended to plead ignorance of the negotiations that had preceded their deployment, and many appeared to assume that, as lead nation, Australia would underwrite all of the costs of the operation. This argument was somewhat disingenuous—the *Guidelines for Troop Contributing Nations* clearly stipulated that:

The cost of deployment, rotation and recovery of TCN forces will remain the responsibility of the individual TCN. Reimbursement of that cost remains subject to negotiation between the TCN and UNNY.<sup>142</sup>

It does appear that some contingents may have taken advantage of the urgency with which Australia constructed the coalition in terms of their demands for support. As Australia is not a Great Power, nor an especially affluent one, the ADF has the responsibility to impress on its partners the fact that the cost of a coalition operation must be a collective responsibility. In addition, where a country in Australia's position takes on the risk of mounting an operation at the behest of the UN, that country should properly be able to expect that the international community underwrite the operation. At the very least, coalition planners for future contingencies need to make it very clear to countries offering troops that Australia cannot be expected to bear the financial burden of humanitarian and regional-security operations.

### **The Relationship between INTERFET and Non-government Organisations**

If not full partners, non-government organisations (NGOs) have become an integral, and perhaps unavoidable, part of multinational peace operations. At least sixty-five identifiable organisations were active in East Timor during INTERFET's command, of which twenty-three were UN agencies. This was an

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<sup>142</sup> *Guidelines for Force Contributing Nations: International Force in East Timor*, 19 September 1999, p. 8, para. 50.

almost manageable number; at one stage in Rwanda 134 were counted.<sup>143</sup> As on many other humanitarian-relief operations, the NGOs were justly criticised for being slow to react, uncoordinated, lacking forward planning and misapplying assets. One FALANTIL Commander stated that many members of NGOs made a bad impression on the local population by their waste, inefficiency and inappropriate displays of wealth.<sup>144</sup> The local population often perceived them to be pursuing their own agendas, with little consideration of the actual needs of the community. There was also a strong feeling that, when the NGOs eventually left, there would be little actual change in the circumstances of the East Timorese. This sentiment appears to have been disproved by the slow, often uneven but discernible improvement in the East Timorese standard of living during 2000.

The requirement to facilitate humanitarian-relief operations, where possible, was only the third of INTERFET's priorities. Nonetheless, despite and because of the chaos that met the force when it arrived, the need to deliver aid was a vital and urgent function. The force itself was not structured to meet the many needs of the East Timorese, nor should it have been. The immediate problem of establishing and guaranteeing security had to take priority without the distractions associated with the provision of aid. The nature of the crisis and the consequent mandate that was given to INTERFET left the NGOs to deal with the distribution of aid and the provision of medical care. Despite their lack of coordination, local knowledge and preparation, the NGOs were effectively all that was available. Military operations will have to continue to accommodate voluntary organisations while the international community continues to rely on NGOs for humanitarian relief.

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<sup>143</sup> Interview by author with Major Mark Mackay, OC CMOC, Dili, 14 January 2000.

<sup>144</sup> Conversation between author and Vicente Ximenes, Dili Harbour, 10 January 2000 (author's notes).

The ADF's lack of a specialist civil–military operations capability proved to be a problem during this operation. Originally, only four Australians were posted to the Civil Military Operations Centre (CMOC): a logistician, an engineer, an infantryman and an administrative clerk. Although Major Mark Mackay, the officer commanding the centre, had some previous experience of civil affairs, none of the centre's staff had undertaken any specialist training for the task before deployment. Fortunately sixteen members of a US Civil Military Affairs unit initially supported the Australians, though the force protection caveats placed on their use meant that those members could not be used outside Dili. The Americans then had to provide the Australians with in-theatre training to assist them when they deployed to the field to conduct surveys of humanitarian-aid requirements.

The role played by NGOs in an operational area is invariably circumscribed by the degree of coordination achieved (or lack thereof). Military forces deployed on UN-sponsored missions cannot be held responsible for this problem; a more effective system of civil administration is required. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) undertook the function of coordinating the NGOs in Timor. Unfortunately, OCHA had little logistic expertise, unlike its counterpart in the early phases of the Somali operation, the Humanitarian Operations Centre.<sup>145</sup> After the initial phase of the operation, when the NGOs were flat out to meet the most basic needs, OCHA was unable to maintain control over its constituency. The NGOs became more self-sufficient and fell back on their own mandates, ceasing to resort to the central point of contact.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> See Major Harold Bullock, *Peace by Committee: Command and Control Issues in Multinational Peace Enforcement Operations*, pp. 16–7.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Major Mark Mackay.

Although the various humanitarian-relief organisations sought to pursue their own agendas and were often critical of the military for its inability to redirect assets to humanitarian-relief tasks, they did remain reliant on INTERFET for much of the basic support that they could not themselves provide. Reflecting on the problems encountered as INTERFET attempted to assist NGOs, General Cosgrove pointed out the difficulty of formalising the relationship, as there were too many variables from mission to mission. These variables included the nature of the mission; the particular circumstances in-theatre; the personalities involved; and the fact that many humanitarian organisations deeply distrust the military—any military.<sup>147</sup> The military can do little more than offer its good offices to NGOs through the medium of its CMOC. However, it does appear that better relations with major stakeholders in the NGO community can be built before the commencement of operations. Greater communication between deployable headquarters staff and their NGO counterparts, and perhaps even shared training programs, might provide a better basis for cooperation than the present highly inefficient relationship.

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<sup>147</sup> Interview with Major General Cosgrove.

## 4 TRANSITION TO UNTAET

INTERFET had a relatively short life and is perhaps unique among multinational peace operations for the speed of its deployment and the amount it achieved in such a brief period. One of the indicators of its success was how smoothly the transition to its UN successor took place. The INTERFET mission and UNTAET's operation overlapped, with the latter beginning its activities on 26 October 1999. It did take some time before the UN was able to build up its presence to commence effective operations. After the takeover on 28 February 2000, UNTAET was criticised for having no strategic plan, lacking planning and coordination, losing civilian staff and wasting resources.<sup>148</sup> These comments need to be put in context. General Cosgrove has since remarked on the frustrations he experienced in dealing with the UN bureaucracy but pointed out that this problem was not unexpected. He cautioned future mission commanders:

not to waste one joule of energy trying to change this bureaucracy in any material way but to understand and facilitate it both in the mission area and as appropriate in New York. My remarks are not meant to criticise because it is hard to see how the UN could reasonably be any different. There are so many firewalls and vertical structures in the UN that you would get a hemorrhage if you didn't adapt to cope with the UN way of doing business. That said there are some enormously talented and dedicated people working therein and while I have steadfastly stayed away from personalities in my remarks let me just say that people like Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in East Timor are truly outstanding and it was a privilege to work with them.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Geoffrey Barker, 'Scathing attack on UN force', *The Financial Review*, 28 March 2000, p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University.

Although INTERFET was mounted with the consent of Indonesia—the de facto authority in East Timor—the Security Council determined the situation to be a ‘threat to peace and security’; the force was therefore constituted under Article 42 of the UN Charter. So too are the military functions of UNTAET. The function of INTERFET has been best described by the mission title—Operation *Stabilise*—as the force created conditions of security in which the militias could not operate and the continued presence of TNI forces became superfluous. However, in the general absence of any effective opposition, the difference between the military functions of INTERFET and of UNTAET is more a matter of degree than a fundamental change.<sup>150</sup> Although there was some change in force composition as some states (notably Australia) sought to adjust the level of their commitment, UNTAET has inherited many of the forces already deployed in East Timor, and their military tasking is expressed in similar terms to the INTERFET mandate.<sup>151</sup> Perhaps significantly, UNTAET is charged with *providing* security and maintaining law and order, where INTERFET was more simply tasked to *restore* peace and security. Clearly, the Australian-led coalition was successful in establishing the preconditions for UNTAET to take over and function effectively.

What has changed is that, in addition to its mission to provide security, UNTAET is charged with establishing a civil administration, restoring civil and social services and building a capacity for self-government.<sup>152</sup> In the transition of authority, the military function has been supplanted by the civil role. If all

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<sup>150</sup> However, the ambush of a New Zealand patrol of UNTAET on 23 July 2000, resulting in the death of Private Leonard Manning, demonstrated that the threat has not gone away and that UNTAET continues to contend with the problem of maintaining security.

<sup>151</sup> Art. 2, Security Council Resolution 1272 (1999), 25 October 1999, <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1272.htm> (Downloaded 30 November 1999).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

proceeds according to plan, UNTAET will find itself largely preoccupied with the business of nation building, rather than establishing basic conditions of security. This is appropriate given that the structural priorities of UNTAET are governance, public administration, humanitarian assistance, emergency rehabilitation and, last of all, the military component.<sup>153</sup> It is, nonetheless, a UN operation and its processes are dominated by the problems of achieving and maintaining consensus in a more bureaucratic environment.

By comparison, INTERFET was better suited to mount an emergency operation, being a 'coalition of the willing' constituted in keeping with the spirit if not the letter of Chapter 8 of the UN Charter. Article 53 of the Charter empowers the Security Council to utilise 'regional arrangements for enforcement action under its authority'. Although the mandate made no reference to Chapter 8, Australia was effectively 'subcontracted' by the Security Council to undertake its mission. While the final composition of the force included many extra-regional countries, the core element was composed of regional countries. Quite apart from any arguments as to the numbers involved, the fact that regional countries were represented resolved the question of the legitimacy of the involvement of non-Asian countries in INTERFET and placated all but the most radically nationalist Indonesian sensibilities. As long as the UN cannot guarantee rapid-deployment forces to deal with threats to international security, Chapter 8 'bushfire'-style operations will be required before the insertion of UN forces. Australia's role in this operation creates a precedent for involvement in future UN-mandated operations and raises the issue of whether it is necessary to make express reference to the authority represented by Chapter 8.

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, Art. 3.



UNTAET was founded on the security initially established by INTERFET. Some indication of the challenges facing the UN administration may be derived from the different operational cultures that prevailed within INTERFET. As noted, some contingents provided better security than did others in their AOs. The militias are not the only obstacle to East Timor's transition to stable self-government. As the unifying influence of a common enemy recedes, tensions have already begun to emerge between pro-independence groups in East Timor. During Operation *Stabilise* there were occasions when political conflict manifested itself as violence, particularly in the Korean AO in Los Palos and in the Thai AO in Baucau. The Timorese people have no experience of responsible and representative democratic government. They face a sharp learning curve, as have people in other countries that have made a rapid transition from colonialist domination to democracy. In these circumstances, the personal security of those involved in the political process and that of the broader community is very important. If the conditions of relative security established with little bloodshed by INTERFET are to continue, UNTAET will have to remain on its guard against disturbances from every quarter.

The transition to UNTAET marked what many saw as the beginning of a decline in the effectiveness of the military component in East Timor. Before the handover Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheeler predicted that:

The UN will now suffer, and will not have the same amount of success, solely because it does not have the unity of a single command and a force with the majority [of combat troops].<sup>154</sup>

These opinions reflected the widely held beliefs of many of his colleagues in INTERFET, but it must not be forgotten that UNTAET's mandate shifted the emphasis from providing security to the process of building a nation. There are inherent

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Wheeler.

risks in this process, not least of which is the granting of political and administrative responsibility to the East Timorese people for the first time. As is currently being demonstrated in East Timor, and will no doubt continue to be the case, outside forces cannot impose nationhood on a people. Ultimately, the people themselves have to take responsibility for their own country. UNTAET's mission is a complex one. The military is only one of three components (or 'pillars') of UNTAET's effort, the other two being the humanitarian pillar and the governance and public-administration pillar.<sup>155</sup> UNTAET benefited from the foundation of security provided by INTERFET, but the efficiency of the military operation should not be confused with the far more complex issue of creating a prosperous, democratic independent state.

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<sup>155</sup> Jean Christian Cady (Head of the Governance and Public Administration pillar, UNTAET), 'Building the new state of East Timor', an address given at the School of Law, Australian National University, 18 May 2000.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The primary lesson to be learnt from Australia's role in INTERFET arises from the very unpredictability of the mission. Twelve or even six months before the mission, few could have imagined that an Australian-led multinational force would take charge in East Timor at the behest of the UN Security Council. Within Australia, many senior strategic analysts and political figures had spent a quarter century defending Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. As late as February 1999, the Australian Army was unjustly ridiculed by some of the more prominent commentators for asserting its preparedness to mount 'expeditionary forces to support Australia's national interests offshore'.<sup>156</sup> That the deployment was carried out with such success and with so few casualties within the whole force speaks volumes about the human capital of the ADF and its partners. However, the ADF was called on to lead a multinational coalition at short notice.

Like virtually every other operation mounted by the Australian military in defence of Australia's strategic interests, this operation occurred overseas. It is evident that much greater priority must be given in Australian strategic thinking to the issues confronting a country whose national interests begin well offshore and whose strategic environment is determined by the circumstances of a politically and economically unstable region. Continuing to base force structure and capabilities on the remote possibility of a threat to Australian territory is not particularly sensible in Australia's current strategic circumstances, and it is certainly extremely wasteful. In the new global environment, national security will be intrinsically linked to collective security measures. The ultimate confidence and security-building measure

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<sup>156</sup> *Land Warfare Doctrine 1: The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, p. 3-14.

is an assurance that the international community, and especially the regional community, will guarantee regional security. The links that are based on a capability to mount and sustain coalition operations are the foundation of this guarantee.

In the long run, operations such as INTERFET promise to facilitate better relationships within the region. The potential of multilateral security operations was highlighted by those members of ASEAN that contributed forces on the basis that they were not only assisting to relieve a humanitarian crisis, but were extricating Indonesia from a situation it could no longer control. Australia's role as lead nation was critical and provides a positive precedent for future coalitions of this type.

On a more prosaic level, one issue to consider is the distinction between the operational realities of UN Chapter 6 (Peacekeeping Operations) and UN-mandated Chapter 7 (Peace Enforcement Operations) has become blurred almost to the point of irrelevance. Rather than a clear distinction between observer-type missions and armed interventions, peace operations occur on a broad spectrum of escalating violence. As the former Commandant of the US Marine Corps General Krulak argued, in future conflicts, troops will have to conduct humanitarian-assistance operations, peace operations and full-scale, high-intensity combat—all in the same neighbourhood.<sup>157</sup> Even missions that commence as part of a negotiated peaceful dispute-resolution process can decline into open warfare, leaving UN forces stranded in a combat zone. Alternatively, the show of force under a Security Council-mandated intervention can be enough to restore security and stability to a disrupted state. Uncertainty continues to be the province of military operations—whether for high-intensity warfighting or peace operations. Accordingly, armed forces need to remain capable of offering their

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<sup>157</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting Concepts for the 21st Century*, Concepts Division, Marine Corps Development Command, Quantico, VA, 1996, VII-5-6.

governments a full suite of military-response options and have the responsibility to advise government against entering an operational environment unless they have the capacity to meet every realistic contingency. In East Timor uncertainty about the potential level of conflict facing INTERFET meant that the ADF could not fulfil its mandate without demonstrating to its potential opponents its ability to use force effectively.

The construction of INTERFET yielded many lessons for future coalition force planners. The first lesson was that the need for broad-based legitimacy should not necessarily determine force structure. Australian planners were keen to get 'flags on the ground' as they had the responsibility to build a credible multinational force quickly. A more ideal approach would have been to develop a clear 'game plan' before attempting to build the coalition. This approach would have involved identifying what capabilities were needed and being more selective about what offers were accepted. It is easy to be wise in retrospect, and these observations do not add up to any criticism of the planners who pulled the force together. The possibility of Australia having to construct a multinational force had not been considered in advance of this operation; therefore no real doctrinal guidance existed. Nonetheless, having established a precedent, it would be foolish not to take these considerations into account should Australia be given the task of raising a coalition force again.

Much of the uncertainty that dogs ad hoc operations could be obviated by regional countries making advance commitments of standby forces for a wider range of operations than is currently the case. While countries are willing to make low-risk provisional commitments to provide forces for UN peacekeeping missions, the real need is for forces capable of enforcing peace. Taken together with the existence of a more secure source of funding, such arrangements would do much to provide for regional security, particularly in an environment where the greatest source of instability is the existence of disrupted states. Although it is

unlikely that any regional countries will commit themselves to participating in operations in advance, Australia can prepare the ground for multinational force-participation by supporting Kofi Annan's advocacy of standby forces. Australian preparedness to cooperate, coupled with strong bilateral relationships with key countries, can provide a firm foundation for future operations. As always, preparing for military deployments seems a low priority when there is no prospect of disorder in the region, but in the year 2000, with political upheaval throughout the South Pacific and elsewhere, the need for cooperation in the interest of common security seems more urgent than ever.

For 'coalitions of the willing', mounted to deal with issues of regional security, force cohesion is better attained by having a firm base of common interests than by subscribing to esoteric internationalist notions. Countries that send their troops into potential combat zones soon develop compassion fatigue if their own interests are not directly involved. The proliferation of caveats and requirements for force protection measures ultimately diminish the value of these humanitarian contributions. Better security is afforded where states make more formal commitments to provide standby forces in advance of regional contingencies. The need for last-minute 'recruitment drives' can be obviated if regional countries develop a higher level of preparation through combined training and exchanges of military and civil personnel. In Australia's current situation many of these relationships will be built at the bilateral level, though it may well be that the abject failure of other regional organisations to respond to the Timor crisis will prompt a move to develop a firmer multilateral security architecture in the Asia-Pacific.

Associated with the problem of guaranteeing an assured response from regional countries is the problem of how to pay for the operations that result. The problems encountered by the Australian force planners in consolidating the force after the original round of 'in principle' offers demonstrate the need for

access to a more secure source of funding than trust funds set up to meet the needs of a particular contingency. The trust funds take time to establish and, more importantly, the negotiations over access to these funds only delay deployment. If, as seems likely, the US is going to continue to limit the range of its overseas entanglements, regional middle-powers are going to have to assume more responsibility for mounting regional security and humanitarian operations. Australia might profitably call on its experience with INTERFET, to lobby for the establishment of a standing international peace and security fund to meet the needs of similar operations in the future.

It might also be considered that the need to attract a broad base of support to bestow legitimacy on a coalition cuts both ways. A number of countries that made force contributions to INTERFET appeared to be more concerned with how they would profit from the operation than with how they could assist the East Timorese. Peace operations are more than simply an opportunity to gain subsidy for standing forces and acquire new equipment. Countries acquire moral capital by participation in peace operations, but the benefits that accrue need to be balanced against the real value of their effort. A coalition member that seeks to benefit at the expense of its partner states detracts from its own contribution. After this operation, Australia and the other participant countries will have a far clearer idea of what countries it will be worth operating with in the future. We are a long way from instituting a comprehensive system of collective security in the Asia-Pacific, and our engagement with regional countries needs to be driven by common sense and shared interests rather than optimistic hopes for the future. Although democratisation is proceeding at a reasonable rate in the region, many social structures and political systems remain fragile. While coalition operations are inevitable, there is no guarantee that today's allies will always share our perspective. This dilemma is unavoidable while countries continue to assert their indefeasible authority. Despite the conundrum represented by cultural difference and

political autonomy, we can take heart from the most surprising lesson of Operation *Stabilise*—that not only do quite diverse regional forces prove that they are capable of operating together effectively, but their countries benefit from the experience in terms of inter-state relations.

From an ADF perspective many old lessons were relearnt in Timor, not least that assuming the responsibilities of coalition leadership brings commensurate risks. Having called for the operation and having enlisted international support, Australia was honour-bound to send its own troops in harm's way. Although the ADF was fortunate not to suffer more casualties, the operations on the border provided a timely reminder about the vulnerability of troops in the field. The nature of the operation reinforced the need for the ability to commit ground troops. The operation also demonstrated the importance of maintaining a broad range of capabilities within the ADF so as to deal with a wide range of potential tasks. The trend to focus on 'sharp end' combat capabilities should not distract the ADF from maintaining less glamorous assets such as civil–military liaison units, terminal handlers, fully trained logistic staff and a sufficient number of LOs who are language-trained and familiar with the forces of our most likely coalition partners. No 'silver bullet' technical solution could have assured peace and security *and* protected and supported UNAMET in carrying out its tasks *as well as* facilitated humanitarian-relief operations. Being a good regional citizen requires a demonstrated commitment to multinational cooperation. In the eyes of their partners, those regional countries that shrank from committing ground troops demonstrated a lack of commitment to regional stability. Inevitably, vacillating governments experienced a loss of face amongst their peers.

The very success of INTERFET demonstrated, once again, that the weakness of multinational forces—particularly those sponsored by the UN—is founded on their multifarious command and control structures. Colonel David Morrison in HQINTERFET



offered some pithy advice for future coalition force planners: ‘Pick a strong lead nation, supplement it by all means with other organisations . . . and get on with the job. Don’t try to be something to everybody.’<sup>158</sup> While in order to retain the support of its partners the lead nation has to be all things to all coalition members, from a command and control perspective the importance of establishing a strong central authority remains essential. The same principle applies to parallel and hybrid command structures on more complex multinational operations. After East Timor makes more progress towards statehood, it will be interesting to compare the record of the inherently more bureaucratic UNTAET with its predecessor.

The lessons that have emerged from recent ‘emergency’ peace-enforcement operations indicate that command needs to be centralised and coherent. Not having raised the force, the UN did not control it in other than the broadest sense—this was an Australian-led operation to which twenty-one other countries provided substantial support. The primary mission of INTERFET was to create immediate security so that a UN operation could take place. However, it remains the responsibility of the lead nation in a coalition of the willing to make it clear to participating countries that centralised control does not imply that they have abnegated all authority over their own forces. Initially, the Command and Control diagram provided to the countries contributing forces did not emphasise the fact that the contingents had recourse to their national command authorities and that those authorities had access to the CDF. After this omission had been pointed out, the diagram was modified, but it is a point to be kept in mind for future operations. Short-notice deployments in particular require the lead nation to make command-and-control parameters very clear. Failure to do so from the outset can discourage governments from making a contribution.

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<sup>158</sup> Interview with Colonel David Morrison.

Future preparedness for coalition operations will depend on the development of appropriate and considered doctrine, as well as well trained personnel in all the armies that are likely to work together. At present, Australia has no detailed joint doctrine for coalition (as opposed to allied) operations, though a draft publication is in the early stages of preparation. We will find that we are following a well-trodden path. Defence forces, foreign-affairs practitioners and security analysts everywhere have awoken to the fact that, in a globalised security environment, multinational cooperation—including combined resort to armed force—is the last guarantor of national security.<sup>159</sup> In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the then US Army Chief of Staff, General Gordon Sullivan recognised this when he asserted:

Army doctrine should reflect that future operations will . . . most likely be conducted with allies or coalition partners . . . We cannot know with any certainty who our enemies or our coalition partners may be, or when or where we will be operating. Doctrine must be specific enough to be useful in a particular case, yet adaptable to the wide range of possible operations we face.<sup>160</sup>

In the final analysis, the INTERFET coalition was formed to bring peace, stability and hope to the people of East Timor. In examining the many issues that confronted the international coalition and Australia in particular, it is easy to lose sight of that fact. This paper has not addressed the steps taken to redress the plight of the East Timorese, and from that perspective it is a distorted representation of the INTERFET mission. The success of Operation *Stabilise* was internationally celebrated and was a credit to all that participated. Regardless of this success, there are many lessons to be learnt and applied by all those involved in establishing national and regional security. Now famous for his

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<sup>159</sup> For further discussion of this trend see Ryan, *From Desert Storm to East Timor*, *passim*.

<sup>160</sup> General Gordon Sullivan, US Army Chief of Staff, 'Doctrine: A Guide to the Future', *Military Review*, February, 1992, p. 8.

forthright commonsense and adroit handling of his disparate command, Major General Cosgrove expressed his opinion on the outcome of the coalition, and it is appropriate to conclude with his words:

I think the coalition has been an undoubted success for a spectrum that goes from high interoperability—example, ourselves and the Kiwis—through to collaboration, for example, ourselves and any of the coalition partners with whom we don't have a lot of training interaction and it has resulted in greatly enhanced bilateral regard for each other, probably government to government—I'm not the best judge of that. Military to military, all the vibes seem very good. In a wry way it has set us up for a new relationship with Indonesia . . . it has given us a new basis for a much more constrained, conservative relationship with them, but one which acknowledges that we are neighbours, that we have had problems, but that we are really professional—that what we say we do and we're good at what we do.

I think we have had virtually unqualified success. What were the measures of success? The coalition is maintained. The international community is satisfied. The relationships between the coalition partners are strengthened. There is, especially in our ASEAN partners, much mutual congratulation and goodwill which has been strengthened from before the operation until now. Much of that springs from a sense of relief that this risky operation has not resulted in a foreign relations disaster. But take it as you find it, because if the measure of the success is improved bilateral relationships between partners, and I think it is . . . then we're in good shape.<sup>161</sup>

The crisis that resulted in Australia taking command of the coalition force in East Timor represented one of the most direct threats to Australian security since World War II. Australia was fortunate that the circumstances of its engagement in East Timor did not deteriorate. If the ADF is to lead a similar regional coalition in the future, then it would do well to remember the lessons of INTERFET.

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Major General Cosgrove.



## ANNEX A

### FORCES CONTRIBUTED TO INTERFET

The following bald figures are indicative only and use the information available at the time of writing. They reflect the contributions identified by the countries involved and refer only to the forces actually deployed to East Timor. Accordingly it is not possible to identify all the other national assets, including logistic support, transport, health services, terminal handling and engineering support, without which the operation could not have occurred. The ADF, in particular, committed a great deal of its resources and personnel to sustaining the operation from Australia.

#### **Australia**

*Maritime:* 3 x Frigates, 1 x Landing Ship, 3 x Landing Craft, 1 x Tanker, 1 x Jet Cat, 1 x Clearance Diving Team.

*Land:* HQINTERFET, 1 x Joint Support Unit, Brigade Headquarters, 10 Signals Squadron, 2 x Infantry battalion groups, 1 x Mechanised battalion group, Special Forces, 1 x Armoured Reconnaissance Squadron, 1 x Armoured Personnel Carrier Squadron, 2 x Construction Squadron, 1 x Aviation Regiment, 1 x Reconnaissance Squadron, 1 x Brigade Administrative Support Battalion, 1 x Forward Logistic Support Group, 1 x Forward Support Base, Combat Engineer Regiment.

*Air:* 12 x C130, 2 x 707, 4 x Caribou aircraft.

#### **Brazil**

*Land:* Reinforced MP Platoon (fifty members).

#### **Canada**

*Maritime:* 1 x Tanker, 2 x helicopters.

*Land:* Infantry company group, 1 x Construction Troop.

*Air:* 2 x C130, Air Support Team.

#### **Denmark**

*Land:* Staff Officers.

## **Egypt**

*Land:* Contribution to medical facility, 70 hospital staff.

## **Fiji**

*Land:* Infantry company group.

## **France**

*Maritime:* 1 x Frigate, 1 x Landing Ship.

*Land:* Surgical Team Protection Element.

*Air:* 3 x C130, 3 x Puma helicopters.

## **Germany**

*Land:* Casualty Evacuation Support.

*Air:* 2 x C160.

## **Ireland**

*Land:* HQ Element, Ranger Platoon.

## **Italy**

*Maritime:* 1 x Landing Ship.

*Land:* 1 x Company Group.

*Air:* 2 x G222, 4 x helicopters.

## **Jordan**

*Land:* Infantry battalion group.

## **Kenya**

*Land:* Infantry Company, Engineer Troop.

## **Malaysia**

*Land:* Staff Officers.

## **New Zealand**

*Maritime:* 1 Frigate, 1 Tanker.

*Land:* Infantry battalion group.

*Air:* 2 x C130, 6 x Helicopters.

**Norway**

*Land:* Staff Officers.

**Philippines**

*Land:* Humanitarian Task Force.

*Air:* 2 x C130.

**Portugal**

*Maritime:* 1 x Frigate

**Republic of Korea**

*Land:* Infantry battalion group.

**Singapore**

*Maritime:* 2 x Landing Ships.

*Land:* 1 x Medical Team.

**Thailand**

*Maritime:* 3 x Vessels.

*Land:* 1 x Task Group (Battalion size).

*Air:* 2 x C130.

**United Kingdom**

*Land:* Infantry company  
group.

*Air:* 2 x C130.

**United States of America**

*Maritime:* 1 x Cruiser, 1 x Helo Support Ship, 2 x Support Ships.

*Land:* Logistic Group, J2 & J6 Staff, CMOC Signals Company.

*Air:* 4 x C130, 1 x C12, 1 x EP3.





## ANNEX B

### OPERATION STABILISE

#### Outline of Key Events

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 27 January 1999   | President Habibie offered referendum on independence.   |
| 5 May 1999        | Referendum was set for August.  |
| 11 June 1999      | UN Security Council Resolution 1246 established The United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET).  |
| 30 August 1999    | Referendum was held.  |
| 31 August 1999    | There was an outbreak of violence.  |
| 4 September 1999  | Announcement of ballot outcome was made. 78.5 per cent of voters selected independence. Violence escalated.   |
| 8 September 1999  | The majority of UNAMET staff was evacuated.   |
| 12 September 1999 | President Habibie agreed to the deployment of an international peacekeeping force in East Timor.  |
| 14 September 1999 | United Nations received Australia's offer to lead and manage a multinational peace operation.   |
| 15 September 1999 | The Security Council of the UN adopted Resolution 1264, which authorised the establishment of a multinational force for East Timor.   |
| 16 September 1999 | INTERFET Operation Instruction was issued.  |
| 18 September 1999 | Major General Peter Cosgrove was appointed Commander INTERFET.  |
| 19 September 1999 | Major General Cosgrove and Major General Songkitti Jaggabatara (Deputy Commander) visited Dili to liaise with the responsible TNI Commander, Major General Kiki Syahnakrie. |

- 20 September 1999 Deployment of INTERFET to East Timor commenced.
- 22 September 1999 Dutch Journalist Sander Thoenes was murdered.
- 23 September 1999 Headquarters INTERFET was established in Dili at the heliport. Australian and British (Gurkha) troops come under fire in Dili.
- 25 September 1999 TNI commenced withdrawal of their forces from East Timor.
- 26 September 1999 Headquarters INTERFET was fully established in the burnt-out Library building in Dili.
- 27 September 1999 Twenty-four armed militiamen were detained in Com and were returned to Dili for questioning.
- 29 September 1999 HQINTERFET air reconnaissance over Suai was fired on.
- 1 October 1999 4288 coalition personnel were deployed in East Timor.
- 6 October 1999 115 militiamen were captured at Suai in an incident in which six militiamen were wounded, two receiving serious gunshot wounds. After escorting the detainees back to the border, the Australian convoy was ambushed probably by the Laksaur group, whose members were armed with automatic assault rifles. Two Australian soldiers were wounded. Australian troops returned fire, killing two militia members.
- 9 October 1999 Twelve to fifteen militiamen ambushed a British Special Forces patrol at Alto Lebos. The patrol returned fire. One militia member was killed.
- 10 October 1999 Armed Indonesian police fired on a platoon from C Coy 2RAR while on patrol at Motaain on the Western Border. The Australians

returned fire, killing one Indonesian police officer and wounding two others. The incident occurred because the old Dutch maps used by the Indonesian forces and the Indonesian ones used by INTERFET were not consistent as to the exact position of the border.

- 16 October 1999 Approximately twenty militiamen contacted a six-man Australian SAS patrol near Aidabasalala. Four militia members were killed and another four wounded before the patrol was extracted by helicopter.
- 19 October 1999 The Government of Indonesia recognised East Timor's independence.
- 20 October 1999 Indonesian Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections held. Indonesia's National assembly revoked the 1978 decree that incorporated East Timor into Indonesia.
- 21 October 1999 Xanana Gusmao returned to Dili.
- 22 October 1999 INTERFET forces deployed to Oecussi enclave.
- 25 October 1999 UNAMET mission ended; UNTAET mission commenced.
- 31 October 1999 TNI withdrawal completed.
- 16 November 1999 Sergio De Mello (Special Representative to UN Secretary-General) arrived in Dili.
- 22 November 1999 US Ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, Major General Cosgrove, Special Representative to UN Secretary-General Sergio De Mello and staff met with Indonesian representatives at Motaain and signed a 'Memorandum of Technical Understanding' on the control of the Inter-Timor border.

- 25 October 1999 10 238 coalition personnel were deployed in East Timor.
- 4 December 1999 Eleven militiamen were contacted and pursued by elements of 2 RAR south of Balibo. The militia group withdrew across the border.
- 15 December 1999 A mass grave-site was discovered in the Oecussi enclave.
- 29 December 1999 Two individuals were seen firing close to returning refugees at a border crossing near Memo. INTERFET troops returned fire to protect the refugees. There were no reported casualties.
- 1 January 2000 New Zealand troops challenged and opened fire on an armed group crossing into East Timor. The group withdrew without casualties.
- 17 January 2000 Three incidents occurred in the Oecussi enclave: one at Mahata and two near Passabe.
- At Mahata around fifty militiamen crossed the border, fired shots and burned two huts. A 3RAR patrol responded but the militia group withdrew into West Timor.
- In Passabe two groups, one of between twenty and thirty militiamen and the other of eight, opened fire on two separate 3RAR patrols. On both occasions the Australians returned fire. One militia member was reported killed.
- 18 January 2000 Approximately 100 militiamen crossed the border in two separate groups at Mahata in the Oecussi enclave. One Australian patrol made contact and the militia group withdrew back across the border. There were no reported casualties.
- 19 January 2000 At Saben on the far west of the Oecussi enclave, a 3 RAR patrol responded to a group of

- militiamen who had entered and wounded two civilians. The militiamen fled without contact.
- 1 February 2000 Philippine, Thai and South Korean areas of operations were transferred to command of UNTAET as Eastern Region.
- 14 February 2000 Dili and environs were handed over to UNTAET as Central Region.
- 15 February 2000 Oecussi enclave was handed over to UNTAET.
- 17 February 2000 A New Zealand patrol exchanged shots with militiamen near Nanu. No casualties were reported.
- 19 February 2000 At a reunion visit on the border, the discovery of suspected militiamen in the crowd led to stone throwing. Indonesian troops in West Timor fired 500–600 rounds into the air to disperse the crowd. No casualties were reported, and INTERFET troops did not fire.
- 21 February 2000 Western Region was handed over to UNTAET.
- 23 February 2000 Final handover to UNTAET took place.

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