

Land Warfare Studies Centre

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**Information-era Manoeuvre
The Australian-led Mission to East Timor**

by

John Blaxland

June 2002

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About the Author

John Blaxland is a serving Australian Army Officer, and was the Intelligence Officer and principal staff officer responsible for Information Operations in Headquarters 3rd Brigade, 1998–99. Born in Chile, he is a graduate of the Royal Thai Army Command and Staff College, has a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in History from the University of New South Wales and a Master of Arts degree in History from the Australian National University. His publications include ‘Consolidation and Reorganisation’, in David Horner (ed.), *Duty First: The Royal Australian Regiment in War and Peace* (1988); *Organising an Army: The Australian Experience 1957 to 1965* (1989); and *Swift and Sure: A History of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals 1947–1972* (1999). His recent article, ‘On Operations in East Timor—The Experiences of the Intelligence Officer, 3rd Brigade’, appeared in the *Australian Army Journal*, issue 2000; and a similar but shorter article on Information-era Manoeuvre appeared in the *Journal of Information Warfare*, vol. 1, issue 3, 2002.

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Comment on this working paper is welcome and should be forwarded in writing to:

The Office Manager
Land Warfare Studies Centre
Ian Campbell Road
DUNTROON ACT 2600
Australia

Telephone: (02) 6265 9624
Facsimile: (02) 6265 9888
Email: dir.lwsc@defence.gov.au

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

1RNZIR	1st Battalion of the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BOS	battlespace operating systems
C2	command and control
C2W	command and control warfare
C3I	command, control, communications and intelligence
C4ISR	command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
CSS	combat service support
DJFHQ	Deployable Joint Force Headquarters
EW	electronic warfare
FALINTIL	Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste
IFOR	Implementation Force (Bosnia)
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
JOSCC	Joint Offensive Support Coordination Centre
KFOR	Kosovo Force
LWD1	Land Warfare Doctrine 1
MOLE	military operations in a littoral environment
MOOTW	military operations other than war
OPSEC	operations security
POSTED	people, organisation, support and facilities, training, equipment and doctrine
PSYOPS	psychological operations
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RSI	reconnaissance, surveillance and intelligence
SFOR	Stabilisation Force (Bosnia)
UNAMET	United Nations Assistance Mission East Timor
UNITAF	Unified Task Force (Somalia)
UNOSOM I	United Nations Operation in Somalia I (Humanitarian)
UNOSOM II	United Nations Operation in Somalia II
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force (Bosnia)
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Authority for East Timor

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ABSTRACT

Strategists today are grappling with asymmetric warfare, collateral effects of past actions and the complexity of military operations in the Information Era, where outcomes may be influenced as much by what people think as by the application of conventional military force. Yet questions over how best to apply military force in this age of instant access to information have been generating debate since before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, with several recent international military operations being criticised. One success story stands in contrast, however: the Australian-led mission to East Timor.

The Australian approach merits attention, particularly as it contrasts with the traditional American way of conducting military operations. Australia has a history of seeking to ‘punch above its weight’ with battle cunning and stealth, backed up with, but not driven by, kinetic capabilities. This paper sets out emergent ideas on the Australian approach to military operations and the growing awareness of ‘Information Operations’ in Australian military doctrine that preceded the East Timor operation. Australia’s disciplined, restrained and self-deprecating approach helped bind together a 22-nation coalition of the willing, demonstrating the application of a manoeuvrist philosophy adapted for the mass-media information era. The result in East Timor was an ‘Information Operations’ method relying largely on a ‘tactics and television’ approach to accomplish the mission with minimal fighting and collateral damage to the region. This information-era manoeuvre approach is about intangibles, exploiting the opponent’s mental rather than geographic hard-spots. The success of this mission suggests that this innovative method is valid for the military challenges of today and beyond.

INFORMATION-ERA MANOEUVRE THE AUSTRALIAN-LED MISSION TO EAST TIMOR

When this is over it will be asked what was different about this operation from others. One of those things will be that we conducted Information Operations.

Major General Peter Cosgrove, Commander
International Force East Timor (INTERFET)

Speak softly and carry a big stick. You will go far.

Theodore Roosevelt

The skillful leader subdues his enemies without fighting.

Sun Tzu

PART I INTRODUCTION: WHY EXAMINE EAST TIMOR?

Coalition Operations ‘By The Book’

The post-Cold War era has witnessed a series of conflicts between religious, political or ethnic groups fighting as a result of the legacy of colonialism and the Cold War. Asia has several examples, perhaps the most remarkable of which occurred in 1999 in the Indonesian-controlled territory of East Timor. Believing that it could win, the Indonesian Government agreed to let the United Nations supervise a ballot on the future of East Timor, a former Portuguese colony that it had forcibly annexed during the Cold War. On 30 August 1999 the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly in favour of separation from Indonesia. Indonesian-sponsored militia forces raised to help ensure an outcome favourable to Indonesia began to operate in early September in an attempt to disrupt the outcome.¹ This situation

¹ See, for instance, James Dunn, *Crimes Against Humanity in East Timor, January to October 1999: Their Nature and Causes*, 14 February 2001, <http://www.etan.org/news/2001a/dunn1.htm> (Downloaded 8 July 2001); Don Greenlees and Robert Garran, *Deliverance: The Inside Story of East Timor's Fight for Freedom*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002; Ian

triggered an Australian-led evacuation operation from 6 to 14 September. Known as Operation *Spitfire*, it used mostly Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) C-130 Hercules aircraft to evacuate hundreds fleeing militia terror, including unarmed UN staff and associated East Timorese. By 12 September, facing intense international diplomatic and economic pressure, Indonesia agreed to accept a UN-mandated international force to restore order in the territory.

The Australian-led International Force East Timor (INTERFET), under Major General Peter Cosgrove, arrived on 20 September. The Force swiftly restored order in what has been described as a ‘by the book’ or model operation. Authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter the INTERFET mission has set the benchmark for peace enforcement operations.² Since then several publications have been released providing detailed descriptions of the conduct of Operation *Stabilise* in East Timor.³ The Australian Deployable Joint Force

Martin, *Self-Determination in East Timor: The United Nations, the Ballot, and International Intervention*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2001; Damien Kingsbury (ed.), *Guns and Ballot Boxes: East Timor’s vote for independence*, Monash Asia Institute, Clayton, Vic., 2000; H. MacDonald *et al.*, *Masters of Terror: Indonesia’s Military and Violence in East Timor in 1999*, Canberra Papers on Defence and Strategy No. 145, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 2002; John Martinkus, *A Dirty Little War*, Random House, Sydney, 2001.

² See Ian Bostock, ‘“By the Book”: East Timor—An Operational Evaluation’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 3 May 2000.

³ See, for instance, Bob Breen, *East Timor, Mission Accomplished*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001; Alan Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks—Australian Defence Force Participation in the International Force East Timor*, Study Paper No. 304, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Duntroon, Canberra, ACT, November 2000; David Horner, ‘Testing the Australian Defence Force’, in *Making the Australian Defence Force*, in the series ‘The Australian Centenary History of Defence’, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001; and Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, in the series ‘The Australian Centenary

Headquarters or DJFHQ (dual-roled as Headquarters 1st Division) was renamed and expanded to form Headquarters INTERFET, commanding a force of over 11 000 troops from twenty-two countries, including key regional Asian neighbours that added to the credibility of the force.

The initial deployment into Dili by sea and air consisted primarily of an Australian combined-arms, light-infantry brigade with naval and air supporting elements, special forces, and smaller attached British and New Zealand contingents. Initially troops had the responsibility of providing a secure environment in Dili in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1264. This task involved disarming the militia groups while avoiding unnecessary confrontation with Indonesian troops still in East Timor. Within three weeks, Dili was secure and a light-infantry brigade had deployed to establish itself on the border with Indonesian West Timor, effectively opening the way for the restoration of basic services, provision of humanitarian assistance and preparations for full independence.

The contribution of 5500 personnel to the East Timor operation at its peak was the largest single deployment by Australian forces since the end of World War II. While the Vietnam War involved a larger overall commitment of Australian forces, that deployment was much more gradual. Australia, like many other countries, has willingly contributed joint-force composite battalion groups since the late 1980s for a series of international missions, including those to Namibia, Cambodia, Somalia and Rwanda. Australian troops had

History of Defence', Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001. For a detailed description of the foreign policy background to the events, see *East Timor in Transition 1998–2000: An Australian Policy Challenge*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, 2000. The economic and national interest dimensions are also explored in Nicholas J. Wheeler and Tim Dunne, 'East Timor and the new humanitarian interventionism', *International Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 4 (2001), pp. 805–27.

acquitted themselves well and many lessons had been learnt, but the scale and scope of the East Timor mission was beyond anything previously entertained by Australian defence planners.

The East Timor effort also severely strained the limited resources of the Australian Defence Force. Despite these constraints and difficulties, observers of trends in military affairs may well have cause to mark the East Timor operation as a turning point in the conception of international security. Moreover, the success of the INTERFET coalition sheds some light on the processes that subsequent military coalitions will need to observe.⁴ Hence, the operation's broader significance merits reflection in terms of the nature of military operations in the post-Cold War Information Era—an era of asymmetric and low-intensity conflicts, many in urban and desolate locations, remote from the infrastructure of our modern world. Yet few can offer examples worthy of being touted as successful. East Timor stands out as an unusual exception and warrants closer scrutiny.

INTERFET's Broader Application

Although INTERFET has been acknowledged worldwide as an exceptional example of a successful military operation other than war (MOOTW), attention since then has focused elsewhere as time has passed. Still, there are several enduring characteristics of INTERFET that remain pertinent for those interested in understanding the nature of modern conflict.

The Nature of Modern Conflict

In the wake of the attacks of September 2001 and the US-led war on terrorism, strategists are re-examining old notions of warfare. The traditional focus on conventional high-intensity operations is in the process of shifting to address asymmetric threats and to influence the

⁴ Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 30.

course of non-state-based conflicts. This new thinking stresses the use of public diplomacy, public affairs, and psychological warfare to achieve objectives while containing the ‘collateral damage’.⁵

The East Timor operation joins a long list of low-intensity military operations that have increasingly become the focus of military forces worldwide, but its innovative handling of information sets it apart from many previous military coalitions. In *The Transformation of War*, Martin van Creveld pointed to the abundance of ‘low-intensity conflicts’ in the post–World War II era that military strategists have long avoided labelling as ‘war’, unduly fearing a dilution of the military art. His interpretation also suggests that an example such as the Australian-led mission in East Timor—Operation *Stabilise*—is worthy of the closest scrutiny and understanding.⁶ Other military theorists have further argued and experience has shown that in contemporary land operations there may be no fronts, since fighting may occur almost anywhere in the theatre as the modal size of operational units becomes quite small—even well below the size of the typical 700-man battalion. In this context, information, in all its dimensions, can greatly enhance the capabilities of small units.⁷ The character of emerging conflict, as described by such theorists as van Creveld, is reflected by events in the East Timor operation.

Operations in Urban Environments

East Timor is predominantly rural, and in September 1999 it was a largely desolate and devastated land. Yet, despite the predominantly

⁵ Richard Holbrooke, ‘Get the Message Out’, *Washington Post*, 28 October 2001, p. B07.

⁶ Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, The Free Press, New York, 1991, pp. 18–32.

⁷ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, ‘A New Epoch—and Spectrum—of Conflict’, in John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (eds), *In Athena’s Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, Washington, D.C., 1997, chap. 1, p. 2.

rural setting, Operation *Stabilise* featured operations in urban areas. Once deployed, INTERFET troops exercised remarkable restraint, resulting in few casualties and a speedy elimination of the threat from armed militia members. Given the likelihood that future operations will include urban areas—where combat has historically been very costly in terms of casualties—the East Timor example of Information Operations in practice merits attention. The troops' self-discipline, restraint under provocation, and focus on the higher commander's intent, as described below, proved a noteworthy feature. The approach taken by the Commander of INTERFET demonstrates a less manpower-intensive and a more media-savvy alternative to high-casualty urban operations. This alternative is more suitable for a country such as Australia, which has a challenging strategic environment and limited resources.⁸

Critics may argue that there is no evidence that this level of violence was solely or even largely the result of the Information Operations strategy adopted in East Timor. Such an interpretation depends, however, on how broadly the concept is defined. If we take Information Operations to be the broadest level of 'shaping and influencing' by words, then the actions of international organisations, politicians, economic institutions and military commanders in September 1999 could be considered as contributing to the management of perceptions and bending an adversary's will without exclusive reliance on kinetic effects. Such an approach should be considered as evidence that Information Operations, broadly defined, significantly contributed to the favourable outcome. On the other hand, the effectiveness of Information Operations is not likely to be categorically proven without hard evidence of changed intentions from the other side. Unclassified documents or reliable interviews on Information Operations are not likely to be found anytime soon.

⁸ See Brigadier M. A. Swan, Director General Future Land Warfare—Army, *Land Warfare Conference 2000*, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 2–8.

The Uniqueness of INTERFET

The most obvious reason for examining the East Timor operation is that it contrasts markedly with widely criticised recent MOOTW elsewhere, including Somalia, Haiti and the Balkans.⁹ Firstly, the East Timor crisis presented a more compelling challenge to Australia, the main force contributor, than had previous international missions in Africa, Asia and Europe. It also provided an opportunity for atonement over a sense among Australians of past neglect.¹⁰ Australia's commitment of troops to East Timor helped ensure crucial popular support in Australia and elsewhere for the commitment of military forces. The move to commit Australian troops was critical to enlist the support of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other partners. Without Australia taking the lead, the others would not have participated. In turn, the wide support for Australia's lead role generated greater home-based enthusiasm for the operation. The spirit in which the troops approached their task to give the East Timorese 'a fair go' reinforced this popular support.¹¹ Of equal if not greater significance to the outcome of Operation *Stabilise* was the robust wording of the mandate. The latter authorised the use of lethal force, and set down a series of tasks, in which the 'end state'

⁹ In Somalia, arguably only UNOSOM II 'failed', UNOSOM I (Humanitarian) and UNITAF having been relatively successful, but the overall outcome of the combined missions was a failure. The initial deployment to Haiti proceeded well, but today Haiti's problems reflect fundamental flaws in the original mission objectives. In the Balkans, UNPROFOR was a failure and even IFOR/SFOR have met with what can at best be described as limited success. The Kosovo air campaign could also be considered as less than successful, and KFOR faces vast challenges. See Gary T. Dempsey with Roger W. Fontaine, *Fool's Errands—America's Recent Encounters with Nation Building*, CATO Institute, Washington D.C., 2001.

¹⁰ At great personal expense, many East Timorese had assisted Australian Commandos to fight Japanese troops in East Timor from 1942 to 1943. Many Australians have long felt obligated to them for that assistance.

¹¹ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. ix.

was clearly defined. Studies also point to the command-and-control arrangements as being pivotal in such operations.

As Alan Ryan observed in a Land Warfare Studies Centre study paper on the formation of INTERFET,

The Australian role as the dominant lead-nation flew in the face of the experience of most 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 mode of command has proven to be the “Achilles heel” of high-intensity coalition peace operations time and again.¹²

In contrast, strong central command in East Timor allowed effective and comprehensive responses to issues as they arose, and in a timely manner that was suitable for the media and appropriate for specific audiences. The INTERFET operation also has broader significance as an operation not led by the United States, demonstrating how a small to medium-sized power can play a leading role among forces from many contributing nations.¹³

¹² Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 83.

¹³ Twenty-two nations contributed forces to INTERFET, whose peak strength was 11 500 personnel, of whom 5500 were Australians. Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 5.

PART II

THE VIEW FROM AUSTRALIA

The ‘Australian Way’

For a medium-sized power, Australia features prominently on the world map, but the size of its landmass belies its limited economic and military power and influence.¹⁴ While Australia is similar in size to the continental United States, it has a population of only 19 million. Moreover, the country is situated close to a large and turbulent neighbour, Indonesia, whose population exceeds 210 million. The Australian Defence Force has long taken pride in being a relatively high-technology force in a low-technology neighbourhood. The small population base has long driven Australian defence planners’ thinking towards fighting smarter—‘punching above our weight’.

During World War II, Australia contributed to Allied efforts to outsmart enemies; it did so using such ‘soft’ capabilities as psychological and intelligence operations, deception, and electronic warfare.¹⁵ During the Vietnam War, to which Australia contributed more than 50 000 troops over a ten-year period, Australian commanders were always conscious of the need to conserve limited manpower, and fight as efficiently and effectively as possible. Australian forces could never afford the massive casualties that their US counterparts appeared to be prepared to absorb. This concern was exacerbated by problems with tactical-level interoperability and the high operational tempo. As a result, Australia sought its own area of operations to apply its more stealthy and less firepower-intensive

¹⁴ With a GDP of US\$ 416.4 billion, Australia is ranked as only the fourteenth largest economy in the world. See *The World in 2000*, Economist Intelligence Unit, London, 2000.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Judy Thomson, *Winning with Intelligence*, Australian Military History Publications, Sydney, 2000.

tactics—away from the more heavy-handed US forces.¹⁶ At least at the tactical level, Australian forces employed psychological operations, deception, electronic warfare, civil–military affairs, public affairs and an array of other military capabilities. The use of these tools effectively enhanced the tactical capabilities and effectiveness of the force, despite the broader strategic flaws of the Vietnam War.

Australia's experience in fighting in the South-West Pacific in World War II and thereafter in such places as Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam intensified concerns about the effects of military actions on relations with neighbours. Consequently, Australian diplomats, politicians and commanders have often weighed the long-term political ramifications of military action against short-term expediency. While prepared to apply kinetic force—or firepower—when necessary, and structuring its defence force accordingly to include tanks, warships and fighter-bombers, Australia has always looked for ways to achieve its objectives with minimal collateral damage. It has sought to keep its own casualties to a minimum and to contain the negative effects of forceful action on the nation's long-term strategic interests, including its relations with its neighbours. Conscious of the flawed conclusion to World War I that made World War II so much more likely, Australian planners reflected in their thinking the views expressed by Sir Basil Liddell Hart, who stated:

¹⁶ Australia committed an infantry battalion to fight alongside the 173rd US Airborne Brigade in Bien Hoa in South Vietnam in 1965. The experience disturbed Australian commanders, who were concerned to reduce casualties and more effectively implement the Australian tactics of stealthy jungle patrols and ambushing. By 1966 Australia had increased its deployed force to an independent combined-arms infantry brigade in addition to its air and naval contributions. See, for instance, Bob Breen, *First to Fight: Australian Diggers, N.Z. Kiwis and U.S. Paratroopers in Vietnam, 1965–1966*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988; and Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950–1966*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

the object of war is to obtain a better peace ... even if only from your own point of view ... it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire ... If you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war.¹⁷

Australia's Evolving Military Doctrine

While Australia's senior military commanders have long been conscious of the need to manage finite resources cleverly, the Australian Defence Force does not have a strong tradition of fostering military intellectuals and theorists. Australian soldiers have nevertheless been known for their tactical flair, and the Australian Army has a history of success at the tactical level that is, arguably, second to none. Until recently, the main influence on doctrine has been Australia's military heritage, rather than innovative and original thought.¹⁸ Since its inception the Australian Army also has been influenced by British military writings and, particularly since the Vietnam War, by US military theory as its source of operational thinking and doctrine.¹⁹ In the late 1980s, conscious of some evident limitations to Australian doctrine, the Army introduced the concept of 'directive control' throughout the organisation. This concept stressed a decentralised approach to command and control, aimed at exploiting battlefield opportunity, maximising speed of manoeuvre and avoiding the use of detailed plans.²⁰

¹⁷ Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, Faber & Faber, New York, 1954, p. 353, cited in Alan D. Campen and Douglas H. Dearth (eds), *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, AFCEA, Fairfax, VA, 2001, p. 12.

¹⁸ This point is argued well by Michael Evans in *Forward from the Past: The Development of Australian Army Doctrine—1972 to Present*, Study Paper No. 301, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Duntroon, ACT, August 1999, p. 72.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 33–4.

In 1991, following similar developments elsewhere, the Australian Army promulgated a doctrinal manoeuvrist approach to land warfare, emphasising an understanding of the centre of gravity, decisive points, lines of operation, the culminating point and tempo.²¹ Such an approach was well received, particularly among junior and middle-ranking officers, since it matched the Australian Army's ethos of operating with stealth, cunning and limited resources. Still influenced by experiences in the Korean, Vietnam and Gulf Wars, the Australian Army envisaged that a brigade—within a combined US, British and Canadian Corps formation—was likely to be as large a contribution as Australia could muster for a major multinational operation at short notice.²² Army planners had not seriously contemplated the prospect of actually leading a multinational operation at what effectively came to be divisional level in East Timor.²³ The fact that Australia managed to do so with its Brisbane-based DJFHQ reflects the Australian military's ability to improvise, adapt and overcome difficulties.

Even while forces were being downsized in the 1990s, doctrine underwent rapid change and strategic thinking shifted, reflecting government direction on strategy that was focused primarily on the continental defence of Australia. By the late 1990s, as the countries to Australia's north increasingly came to form an 'arc of instability', Australian military doctrine emerged from two decades of reactive

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 40–3.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 47–8.

²³ Under Major General Cosgrove's direction, the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ) periodically exercised to command Australian forces and to play a lead role in small, short-notice international military operations, but not on the scale of INTERFET and not as the sole lead organisation. DJFHQ was always intended to be a joint force HQ (hence its title), able to command Australian forces. Many thought that the level of preparation was inadequate given the operational role that the DJFHQ might have to undertake. Correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Fielding, 31 July 2001.

thinking about defence of continental Australia to embrace the more realistic maritime strategy that has come to be termed military operations in a littoral environment (MOLE).²⁴ In 1999 a concept was developed that foresaw the flexible employment of force to achieve battlespace dominance. This concept involved improving manoeuvre capabilities through command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR); the application of Information Operations; and the professional mastery of the military art.

The term ‘network-centric warfare’²⁵ was incorporated in the Australian Army doctrinal publication released early in 1999—*The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*. The term sought to describe the integration of sensor, command support and weapons systems to synchronise military engagements in a theatre of operations. ‘Fighting Power’, articulated by Martin van Creveld²⁶ and already adopted by the British Army, was also incorporated in order to encapsulate the significance of the intellectual, moral and physical components of battle. Interlinked elements of land force capabilities were deemed to underpin fighting power—including people, organisation, support and facilities, training, equipment and doctrine (POSTED).²⁷ The POSTED elements were then linked into the battlespace operating

²⁴ This shift from continental defence to operations in the littoral environment been a strong feature of Michael Evans’ writings. See *The Role of the Australian Army in a Maritime Concept of Strategy*, Working Paper No. 101, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, September 1998; and Michael Evans, *Developing Australia’s Maritime Concept of Strategy—Lessons from the Ambon Disaster of 1942*, Study Paper No. 303, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, July 2000.

²⁵ Subsequently the term ‘network-enabled warfare’ has come into use to more accurately reflect the fact that technology supports but does not direct the conduct of military operations.

²⁶ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance 1939–1945*, Arms & Armour, London, 1983.

²⁷ LWD 1, pp. 5-10 – 5-15.

systems (BOS) based on reconnaissance, surveillance and intelligence (RSI); command and control (C2); manoeuvre; fire support; mobility and survivability; air defence information operations; and combat service support (CSS).²⁸

It was envisaged that the concept of fighting power would enable the Army to ‘fight smart’, using tactical manoeuvre and battle cunning to facilitate an indirect approach to warfare. Finally, fighting smart was explained in terms of exploiting the knowledge edge gained from using information technology.²⁹

The Australian Army’s Definition of Information Operations

Advances in information technology have been touted as triggering the most recent Revolution in Military Affairs,³⁰ and the term Information Operations sprung into use along with it in the late 1990s. Still, many of its component parts have long been practised on Australian military operations and field exercises, and elsewhere by others. The concept of command-and-control warfare or C2W was more familiar, having been introduced at the time of the Gulf War. Planners understood C2W as encompassing operations security (OPSEC), military deception, psychological operations (PSYOPS), electronic warfare (EW), and physical destruction; this understanding is, however, now regarded to be too narrow since other functions also applied to C2W.³¹ Following developments in US military doctrine, terms such as ‘information in war’, ‘information warfare’, ‘computer

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 5-13 – 5-14.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 5-1 – 6-9.

³⁰ See, for instance, Alvin and Heidi Toffler’s seminal work *War and Anti-War: Making Sense of Today’s Global Chaos*, Warner Books, New York, 1993.

³¹ LWD1 still defined Information Operations in terms of ‘protecting C4ISR systems and personnel from physical, psychological and electronic attack and deception, while actively seeking to attack and degrade the enemy’s C4ISR systems’ (LWD1, p. 6-13).

network attack', 'computer network defence' and 'computer network exploitation' have become more commonly used terms.³²

These terms do, however, have narrower meanings than that encapsulated by the term 'Information Operations'. This term recognises the wider use of information in peacekeeping and crisis management, but even as the East Timor crisis was emerging, the lexicon of Information Operations was not extensively used or understood by Australian military personnel. Some viewed the term as primarily concerning signal transmission between senders and receivers. Others saw it more in terms of the transmission of information as a component of a wider process. The structuring process converts raw data into information; that information is subsequently used to develop knowledge, which in turn is analysed, collated and integrated to become intelligence. Intelligence informs a commander, resulting in a wiser decision to act in a way that is more likely to accomplish a mission.³³ Information Operations has also been referred to in higher defence headquarters in Australia as 'shaping and influencing'.³⁴ Given the disparities and divergent views on how to define it, the Australian Defence Force has sought to define Information Operations more categorically, subdividing the term into three components: offence, defence and support.

Offensive Information Operations are operations defined as including Electronic Attack, Psychological Operations, Deception, Computer Network Attack, and Destruction. Defensive Information Operations include Information Assurance, Counterintelligence, Counterdeception, Physical Security, Operational Security, Electronic Protection, and Counter-PSYOPS.

³² Alan D. Campen, in Campen and Dearth, *Cyberwar 3.0*, p. 295.

³³ Discussions with Lieutenant Colonel Neil Quarmby, Australian Army Intelligence Corps, 1996. He defined this process as 'WIKID Power' (Wisdom–Intelligence–Knowledge–Information–Data); Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp*, pp. 442–9.

³⁴ Email correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Mark Smethurst, 26 July 2001.

Support Information Operations include Intelligence; Electronic Support; Public Information; Civil Affairs; Information Management; Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence (C3I) Systems Infrastructure; and Situational Awareness.

This overview of doctrine demonstrates that, by the late 1990s, a wider understanding of Information Operations was emerging among Australian military professionals. It was becoming clear that the Australian Defence Force needed to conduct Information Operations within a purpose-designed framework. The latter needed to permit an integral part of national military strategy to be centrally directed from the highest level and coordinated in execution.³⁵ This overview also shows that several new terms were being introduced in the Australian Defence Force in the months before the deployment of INTERFET.

The new doctrine generated significant debate, particularly within the Australian Army, but in essence reflected a philosophy that had been developing in Australia during the 1990s. Many had already learnt to think about military operations in ways appropriate for the Information Era. To most, however, that understanding is encapsulated in a ‘manoeuvre warfare’ framework—avoiding hard spots and going for the soft spots, or ‘gaps’, to achieve a mission—where speedy and informed decision-making is considered critical to maximise fighting power and minimise casualties.³⁶ This philosophy, adapted for the mass-media Information Era, could even be described as ‘cyber manoeuvre’.³⁷

³⁵ Colonel D. O'Neill, ‘Command and Control Warfare in Information Operations’, *Combat Arms* (Australia), 2/98, pp. 1–8.

³⁶ Popular books read and absorbed by junior Australian Army officers in the mid-1990s included William Lind’s *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1985; and Robert Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and AirLand Battle*, Presidio Press, Novato, CA, 1991.

³⁷ Australian Army, Future Land Warfare Branch, ‘Concept for Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment’ (Draft of

The analysis described above was not familiar to many officers deployed on Operation *Stabilise* since Australian Information Operations doctrine has only been gradually released, with much of it still under development. Regardless, in practice most of these aspects of Information Operations—support, defensive and some of the offensive aspects—did come to be applied during the operation in East Timor from September 1999 to February 2000.

PART III

WHY FOCUS ON INFORMATION OPERATIONS?

The force commander, Major General Cosgrove, made it clear that one of the unique features of the INTERFET mission was the conduct of Information Operations.³⁸ His statement suggests that an examination of the INTERFET mission through the prism of Information Operations can help explain why Operation *Stabilise* was so different from the peace enforcement missions of the 1990s that had such mixed results—even to the point of being dismissed by some as ‘fool’s errands’.³⁹

16 December 1999), cited in Michael Evans, *Developing Australia’s Maritime Concept of Strategy: Lessons from the Ambon Disaster of 1942*, Study Paper No. 303, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Duntroon, ACT, July 2000.

³⁸ Quoted in Major Kent Beasley, ‘Staff Paper on Information Operations During Operation *Stabilise*’, unpublished manuscript, 2000.

³⁹ See Dempsey with Fontaine, *Fool’s Errands*. Dempsey and Fontaine denigrate the Clinton Administration’s propensity to intervene in crises not directly threatening US national interests in order to assist in nation building. They argue that the United States should not intervene if its key military or economic interests are not involved, particularly where the mandate leaves in place residual local authorities to challenge the international force, and where the protagonists have not yet exhausted their violence.

In most peace enforcement missions the objective is not necessarily the destruction of the enemy, but rather the need to force a change in the behaviour of adversaries. The point of the exercise is to achieve one's political goals and military objectives by bending the opponent's will. Yet this approach is in marked contrast with what has been identified as 'the American Way' of conducting military operations, whereby military commanders seek to achieve success by using a strategy of erosion or annihilation that eliminates an opponent's ability to resist physically. This approach has almost invariably required the destruction of a major portion of the adversary's forces.⁴⁰ In many instances it has also resulted in drastic and enduring collateral effects that have complicated the management of international affairs following the cessation of hostilities. As Alan Campen has observed,

Kinetic warfare fails to satisfy that most basic objective of conflict. Conventional warfare has won impressive victories on the fields of battle, but has not secured basic foreign policy objectives. It bought stalemate in Korea, freed Kuwait of an invader, forced the withdrawal of an Army from Kosovo, but the dictatorships . . . remain in place.⁴¹

Perhaps the important element to grasp is the shift from the concept of purely kinetic attack that destroys an opponent physically to a

⁴⁰ See Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1978. US military strategy has usually sought options based on erosion or annihilation. Erosion represents a limited military objective, and convincing an enemy to make peace, rather than continuing a futile struggle. The military strategy of erosion aims to achieve a *limited* political objective. Annihilation represents an unlimited military objective, making the enemy helpless to resist through the destruction of his military capabilities. Annihilation achieves either an *unlimited* political objective, such as unconditional surrender, or a *limited* political objective, such as overcoming an enemy's will to resist.

⁴¹ Alan D. Campen, in Campen and Dearth, *Cyberwar 3.0*, p. 295.

form of psychological warfare designed to manipulate the opponent into a disadvantageous situation. A psychological rather than a physical outcome is the desired goal of Information Operations.⁴² The concept behind this term is manoeuvre warfare in its broadest context—‘gaining such a position of advantage over an adversary that his continued resistance to your will is irrational’.⁴³ In certain circumstances, this may have little to do with the ground being held. This concept is nothing new and was understood by military figures as far back as Sun Tzu, but its application in Operation *Stabilise* marks a novel interpretation.

Increasingly, contemporary commanders understand that fighting battles is not always about territory but is about influencing attitudes and perceptions. In addition, because of the communications revolution, information is proliferating and, as we have witnessed in recent events, is delivering enormous power into the hands of any individual, anywhere on the globe, with the skills to use it.⁴⁴ In response, commanders must be nimble-minded, applying a manoeuvrist approach, but looking for different kinds of ‘gaps’ and ‘expanding torrents’ to exploit. The Commander INTERFET described his concept of operations as being like one of oil spots, expanding outward and ultimately linking up across the country to provide a secure environment.

Major General Cosgrove and his Australian brigade commander (and land component commander during the initial phases), Brigadier Mark Evans, appreciated this manoeuvrist approach. They realised that effective Information Operations back up the psychological effects of non-lethal force and they directed their staffs to plan accordingly. They also recognised that they had to keep collateral

⁴² Douglas H. Dearth, in Campen and Dearth, *Cyberwar 3.0*, p. 105.

⁴³ Email correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Fielding, 22 July 2001.

⁴⁴ Carl H. Builder, *Rethinking National Security and the Role of the Military*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1995, p. 15.

damage to a minimum, in accordance with the Rules of Engagement. The minimisation of such damage was important for the sake of Australia's long-term political relationship with its neighbours. It was also necessary in order to maintain cohesion within INTERFET. While such concerns were critical for the success of the mission, they are not necessarily unique to peace support operations. It may be argued that such concerns must be taken into account for coalition warfare as well. While military officers debated evolving doctrinal concepts, events in Australia's region would soon lead the Australian Government and its military commanders to convert the core issues behind such esoteric debates into applied operational concepts and plans.

PART IV

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND PREPARATIONS FOR INTERFET

Government and Higher Control Arrangements

As the East Timor crisis brought together government ministers from the Department of Defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Attorney-General's Department, as well as the Prime Minister, John Howard, in the National Security Committee of Cabinet. They met regularly at the peak of the crisis and consulted with senior officials, including the Australian Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie.

The personal involvement of the Prime Minister in the crisis meant that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet had de facto leadership, but how to divide responsibilities remained undetermined.⁴⁵ A notable feature of Australia's approach to the East Timor crisis was the limited central, cross-departmental

⁴⁵ Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 39; and Horner, *Making The Australian Defence Force*, pp. 14–17.

coordination, at the national–strategic level, below the level of the Cabinet ministers’ meetings. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade established an East Timor Crisis Centre, and Defence raised its own East Timor Policy Unit working in conjunction with Defence’s Strategic Command. Both of these departmental organisations advised the Australian Government through normal channels. Eventually, on 17 September 1999, an interdepartmental East Timor Policy Group was established as an interim measure to help develop an integrated policy approach to the issues at hand, with senior officers from key government departments involved. This group was located in the premises of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and was overseen by the Secretaries Committee on National Security. It remained in place until November 1999.⁴⁶

Despite these shortcomings, officials at the highest levels in Australian government circles—including the Prime Minister, the Chief of the Australian Defence Force and the INTERFET Commander—all fully understood that the higher political intent of the operation would guide and constrain all their actions. In effect they were validating Clausewitz’s key dictum that military operations are ‘an extension of politics by other means’. To be fair, the lack of high-level coordinating machinery is not all that surprising given that Australia had not expected to lead, and had never before led, a complex multinational mission on this scale. Australian planners had always assumed that Australia would faithfully contribute to a multinational force, presumably led by the United States or some other UN-mandated authority. The fact that Australia was to lead the international mission to East Timor gave rise to some uncertainty as to which government department should provide policy leadership. Fortunately, the lack of substantive and permanent administrative

⁴⁶ *East Timor in Transition 1998–2000: An Australian Policy Challenge*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, 2000, provides a detailed account of the foreign policy perspective surrounding the events in East Timor during this period. See also Horner, *Making the Australian Defence Force*, p. 14.

arrangements did not unduly undermine the conduct of Operation *Stabilise*; however, had circumstances been more trying for INTERFET, the effects of limited coordination may have been more strongly felt.

Bringing the Soldier and Diplomat Together

Many in the Australian Defence Organisation and other government departments did not seem to understand the significance of Information Operations. Some even asserted that the Australian Defence Force should not be conducting such operations, mistakenly seeing it as some form of ‘black propaganda’ rather than as the force-enhancing and casualty-minimising capability it turned out to be for INTERFET. Nevertheless, some informal steps were taken across departmental boundaries to try to address the key issues required to shape and influence events. As some commentators have observed, ‘Information Operations brings the diplomat and the soldier into intimate and continuing contact’.⁴⁷ In the lead-up to the deployment to East Timor, Australian defence planners and diplomats had to work together to reconcile military plans with foreign policy.

Government Responding to Media Pressure

The international media had an important role to play in East Timor and helped to extend the political fallout during the crisis. Australian government policy had traditionally placed high priority on maintaining good relations with Indonesia; Canberra was therefore anxious to avoid a confrontation over the former Portuguese territory. However, in keeping with Western democratic norms, the Australian Government was mindful of public opinion, and was sensitive to the disturbing television images that were being transmitted from East Timor in the period leading up to the 30 August 1999 ballot.

⁴⁷ Campen, in Campen and Dearth, *Cyberwar 3.0*, p. 293.

Conscious of the widespread distress caused in Australia by the media reports emanating from East Timor, the Howard Government sought to muster international support that would help end the carnage and destruction in East Timor. Together with other members of the international community, it also sought to bring pressure to bear on Indonesia to accept the insertion of an international force in the territory. At the same time, the Australian Defence Force appreciated that the situation could become even more serious should the force sustain significant casualties. Limited military logistics raised concerns about the prospects of sustaining the mission, should the situation in East Timor descend into a protracted conflict.⁴⁸

Regional Engagement

At the highest levels, for instance, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Australia engaged potential mission partners at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum, fortuitously being held in New Zealand at the peak of the crisis. In the meantime, the Australian Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Air Marshall Doug Riding, visited several South-East Asian countries, seeking contributions from long-time regional partners. The personal nature of the Vice Chief's negotiations helped shape the operation. He succeeded in overcoming many of the apprehensions and misunderstandings in South-East Asia that had arisen during the formation of the INTERFET coalition. For example, he established good personal relations with senior Philippines Armed Forces officers and his visit to Manila helped facilitate their early contribution of troops.⁴⁹

Australia's regional engagement policy also was bearing fruit. Thailand, for instance, decided to contribute the 3rd Battalion, 31st Regiment, 1st Division (Kings Guards). This battalion was part of

⁴⁸ Email correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Mark Smethurst, 27 July 2001.

⁴⁹ Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, pp. 47–53.

Thailand's newly created Ready Deployment Force and had only a few months previously conducted a combined exercise with some of the Australian troops that deployed with INTERFET. Clearly the task of forming a coalition force at short notice presented Australian officials with enormous challenges that required cooperation and a degree of mutual understanding—itself something of a challenge given the different departmental cultures of Defence and Foreign Affairs.

PART V

INFORMATION OPERATIONS WITH INTERFET IN EAST TIMOR

The cultural difference in Australia between Foreign Affairs and Defence was negligible when compared with the cultural differences between INTERFET, the militia groups and the Indonesian military in East Timor. Moreover, even though the environment in East Timor was as rudimentary as any other theatre of military operations, Operation *Stabilise* demonstrated that, where Information Operations are concerned, many of the components still apply even when high-technology infrastructure is missing or has been destroyed.

Two-sided Campaign

It is clear that INTERFET was not the only organisation to utilise Information Operations. The plan in support of the militia actions was obviously well thought out and orchestrated at high levels. In addition, after INTERFET's arrival, militia groups continued to run an effective misinformation campaign in the refugee camps in West Timor in order to discourage the refugees from returning to their former homes.⁵⁰

At the time that the operation took place, some observers suggested that the forces opposed to INTERFET had a natural affinity with

⁵⁰ *East Timor in Transition 1998–2000*, p. 169.

perception management and were able to ‘run rings around’ INTERFET’s efforts.⁵¹ The substance and success of INTERFET does not support this argument. For instance, the militia-instigated violence in East Timor was widely discredited and internationally censured, to the point where control over the territory was lost despite twenty-four years of Indonesian rule. By contrast, INTERFET was successful on the ground in containing the violence with minimal casualties while managing a disparate coalition of twenty-two nations.⁵² This collective commitment by a diverse group of nations points to the greater success of INTERFET at shaping and influencing events. In short, the effective conduct of Information Operations amounted to manoeuvre operations adapted for the information era.

An Afterthought or Overarching Concept?

The fact that there was only limited strategic-level guidance and that INTERFET lacked adequate, coordinated Information Operations planning prior to deploying does not detract from the success of such operations in East Timor. Information Operations were more than an afterthought. Although the force did take some time to coordinate its Information Operations capabilities at Headquarters INTERFET level, the components were in place from the first day, having been incorporated as part of the plan prior to deployment, and these components effectively worked to the same higher goal. Admittedly, planners and commanders could have made more considerable efforts from the outset to foster a greater understanding of the component tools of Information Operations. At the tactical and strategic levels, the components of Information Operations were coordinated under the Commander’s direction to suit the mission’s purpose and limitations.

⁵¹ Correspondence with Major John J. Frewen, 27 July 2001 and Lieutenant Colonel Mick Lean, 27 July 2001.

⁵² Correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Mick Lean, 27 July 2001.

Four Phases

The Commander directed a four-phase campaign in East Timor with specific but limited objectives. The first phase was the negotiation with the Indonesian force commander, Major General Kiki Syahnakri, to establish safe conditions for lodgment. The second phase involved the rapid lodgment of the necessary combat forces. The third phase concerned the establishment of a secure environment, initially in Dili and then throughout East Timor. The final phase involved the transfer of authority from INTERFET to a UN peacekeeping force. The security of INTERFET troops was the highest priority for each phase. Major General Cosgrove also committed the force to the facilitation of humanitarian aid to relieve the suffering of thousands of displaced East Timorese as quickly as possible.⁵³

On Arrival

When INTERFET troops deployed to East Timor on 20 September 1999, they encountered minimal armed resistance, but they had to be prepared to fight in order to uphold their mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1264. The maintenance of a high level of preparedness proved a potent deterrent to aggression, particularly in the first few hours when the still heavily outnumbered INTERFET troops were most vulnerable. Furthermore, the collapse of the militia forces had as much to do with the knowledge that they faced a sharp and determined response as it did with the purported withdrawal of Indonesian military support and patronage.⁵⁴ As Major General Cosgrove noted, a less robust ‘force optimised for peacekeeping would have in my view invited more adventurous behaviour by our adversaries’.⁵⁵

⁵³ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 23–4.

⁵⁴ Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Major General P. J. Cosgrove, ‘The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University’, Washington D.C., 4 April 2000.

Navy Support

The naval and air components were also prepared for whatever contingencies that might have arisen should the situation have deteriorated. The maritime forces deployed with INTERFET were assigned the ‘mission to act as an air-defence screen and to provide back-up if the lodgment did not go according to plan or was opposed’.⁵⁶ The presence of the US Navy’s Aegis cruiser USS *Mobile Bay*, the Royal Navy’s destroyer HMS *Glasgow* and the Royal Australian Navy’s FFG-7 frigates provided air-warfare sensors and weapons that gave reassurance to the land forces.⁵⁷ Naval-force protection also helped sustain the troops ashore since it enabled merchant shipping to deliver 90 per cent of the cargo landed. As the then Director of the Australian Navy’s Seapower Studies Centre, Captain James Goldrick, observed,

the maritime component of INTERFET created a protective umbrella, which enabled the land component to concentrate on the job to be done in East Timor, without concern about the prospect of external interference.⁵⁸

The presence and contribution of the Royal Australian Navy helped shape the operational climate, bolster INTERFET’s confidence and ability, and positively influence outcomes, especially in the first critical days of the operation.

Air Support

Also crucial for the lodgment and sustainment of the force was air support, particularly with regard to surveillance, readiness, and the provision of airfield services in Dili and at East Timor’s second

⁵⁶ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 29.

⁵⁷ Hamish McDonald, ‘East Timor—Revealed: When Australia was forced onto a war footing’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 2001.

⁵⁸ Cited in Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Tasks*, p. 79.

airport, Baucau.⁵⁹ As David Horner has noted, the Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Barrie, took every precaution for the safety of INTERFET personnel and assets. Admiral Barrie was keen to ensure that his troops had recourse to the ‘big stick’ of air or naval gunfire support.⁶⁰ Fortunately, neither was required at any stage of the operation.

Securing Dili and Environs

The land component operations in the first few days revolved around three elements. The first was the establishment of an INTERFET Response Force presence in the countryside, conducting reconnaissance, maintaining an Immediate Reaction Force and acting as pathfinders for follow-on forces. This force was a unique international group based around an Australian special forces squadron and including British and New Zealand components. The second element involved the 3rd Brigade’s security operations using two Australian infantry battalions, a British Gurkha company, aviation and armour, as well as other components of the 3rd Brigade in support.⁶¹ Bob Breen has described the third element as ‘human and technical intelligence collection, and psychological operations’.⁶²

Third-element ‘Vectoring’ Role

This third element played a pivotal role in discretely and efficiently vectoring INTERFET’s limited resources onto fleeting and difficult-to-locate militia concentrations.⁶³ Based on threat assessments and

⁵⁹ McDonald, ‘East Timor—Revealed: When Australia was forced onto a war footing’, *Sydney Morning Herald*.

⁶⁰ Horner, *Making the Australian Defence Force*, p. 38.

⁶¹ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 38.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 53–4.

⁶³ For a discussion of how these elements were employed in 3 Brigade during Operation *Stabilise* see John Blaxland, ‘On Operations in East Timor: The Experiences of the Intelligence Officer, 3rd Brigade’, *Australian Army Journal*, 2000.

the intent to prevent an escalation of tensions, INTERFET did not deploy tanks, field artillery or anti-aircraft artillery. The armoured vehicles that did deploy had no adequate protection against a variety of threats, including heavy machine-guns, anti-armour weapons and mines. INTERFET considered it unlikely that the militia groups used such weapons. Armed with this intelligence, focused troops could then weed out the militia forces with precision and throw off balance those contemplating a strike against INTERFET.

As Colonel Bob Breen has observed, having established situational awareness in the first few days of the operation, INTERFET effectively exploited the decision cycle of the militia groups and their controllers to achieve superiority, conducting 24-hour and air-mobile operations, and dominating Dili. INTERFET then continued to intervene and to apprehend suspected militiamen; it also responded to threats to peace and security in the Dili area and beyond. This vigorous prosecution of operations prompted the remaining militiamen to leave East Timor while their controllers closed down their communications networks and ceased operations entirely.⁶⁴

Unsettling an Adversary

Before those militia networks closed down, several other incidents occurred that demonstrate the importance of Information Operations to the chain of command. In the first few days of the operation, Indonesian troops continued to gather in East Timor's capital, Dili, from outlying areas while the militia groups continued sporadic activity around Dili. Sensing that a deterioration in the security situation was possible, the brigade commander sought to pre-empt any increase in hostile actions by applying disciplined and restrained combat power for a psychological effect. He directed that all available rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft should deploy above the city. The brigade commander's plan was to demonstrate air superiority, mobility, observation and—even though only installed

⁶⁴ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 53–4.

for self-protection—some aerial firepower. Aircraft were directed to fly low and hard across the city, and to make a great deal of noise to intimidate anyone likely to oppose INTERFET.⁶⁵

In the meantime, infantry troops and armoured vehicles conducted a ‘hammer and anvil’-style sweep through the city. Admittedly, as Bob Breen pointed out, this was an exhilarating but highly disciplined experience for those involved.⁶⁶ Some people had worried that the presence of armour might escalate conflict, but the adversary saw armour and would not engage. One commentator observed: ‘We saw people scared of armour. We often talk about the psychological effects of armour. We saw it in East Timor’.⁶⁷

These efforts paid off handsomely. The energy generated from the initial shock of the rapid deployment enabled the Brigade Commander to grasp the initiative at a critical juncture. After the initial deployment, the intent of the adversary became unclear. The Brigade Commander retained the initiative before the initial shock effect could wear off by adopting a suite of measures such as a series of night-time cordon-and-search actions and sustained overflights of the Dili area using helicopters equipped with forward-looking infra-

⁶⁵ Some have argued that this tactic was courting a similar disaster to that which occurred to US forces in Mogadishu in 1993. What marks this incident as different is that, although it entailed risks, it had not been done before in Dili; it did not involve the firing of weapons from aircraft; it took place in an environment with no heavy weapons in use by militia groups; it was for a short duration only; and, arguably, its positive effect justified the limited risk. The sweep was deliberately timed to test the waters—to see what the reaction might be—but not to allow sufficient time to organise any form of coordinated reaction. Correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Fielding and Major Chris Field, 30 July 2001.

⁶⁶ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 55.

⁶⁷ Major Chris Websdane, Officer Commanding, C Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, 2000.

red (FLIR) equipment. In addition to sending the message out around Dili that INTERFET owned the night as well, this operation served to deter anyone trying to undermine the INTERFET mission. It also demonstrated the brigade commander's keen sense of timing and measured use of force to unbalance the adversary.

Youthful Discipline

Similar restraint and keen understanding of the mission's intent was being demonstrated at the grassroots level as well. One 22-year-old Australian Platoon Commander and his troops handled a potentially inflammatory situation involving an entire battalion of approximately 500 East Timorese territorial soldiers. These troops, travelling in about sixty trucks loaded with loot, barrelled into Dili, where Australian infantrymen had established a vehicle checkpoint. The territorial commander refused to show his identification and demanded passage as his troops began taking aim at the Australians. Good judgment and quick thinking were required to defuse a potentially disastrous escalation of tensions. The platoon commander checked with higher headquarters, which authorised him to allow the territorial troops to proceed westwards out of Dili to the border. The Australian troops' discipline had held, despite provocation, and an exchange of fire was averted.

The Australian Platoon Commander demonstrated that he had a sharp appreciation of his higher commander's intent, and although his rules of engagement authorised the use of lethal force against such provocation, he realised that the best approach was to seek to diffuse the situation. Major General Cosgrove observed that 'the decisions of junior leaders and the actions of their small teams can influence the course of international affairs'.⁶⁸ This was never more

⁶⁸ Peter Cosgrove, 'The night our boys stared down the barrel', *Age*, 21 June 2000, cited in Ryan, *Primary Risks and Primary Responsibilities*, p. 72.

obvious than during the tense days after INTERFET's arrival and before the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor.

There were several other similar displays of stealth, discipline, cunning and a clear appreciation of the strategic consequences of tactical actions in the early days of the operation that demonstrated an application of Information Operations concepts with a manoeuvrist approach. These consequences included several clashes between militia groups and INTERFET's Response Force, and between militia and INTERFET light-infantry troops near the border with West Timor and to the east of Dili.⁶⁹

Critics may argue that repeated references to a manoeuvrist approach is stretching the point, and that a vehicle checkpoint is hardly an example of operational or even tactical manoeuvre.⁷⁰ The point is that 'information era manoeuvre' is about the opponent's mind. It is about manoeuvring around his mental hard-spots rather than geographic hard-spots. This is the essence of 'manoeuvre warfare'.

Control Operations

These incidents demonstrate that INTERFET was a tolerant, disciplined force; once engaged, however, it could respond with immediate aggression and apply lethal force effectively. Moreover, the fact that these incidents did not degenerate into ugly firefights where protagonists were hardly distinguishable from unfortunate bystanders—as occurred in Somalia in October 1993—suggests that INTERFET was taking a different approach. This approach has recently been described as 'Control Operations'—the establishment of operational control of an area to achieve strategic outcomes. The key to this approach is to convince the civilian population that the force's strategic objectives are analogous to their own. Soldiers can

⁶⁹ See Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 56–7 (Com incident), 63 (on the border), 77–8 (Motaain) and 87 (October incidents).

⁷⁰ Author's correspondence with Dr Alan Ryan, May 2002.

achieve operational control by a variety of means, such as mixing with the local people, gathering information, protecting noncombatants from harm, and exerting control for periods of time until non-military solutions to a problem can be found and take effect.⁷¹ The dividends from this approach that was applied in East Timor are obvious, particularly when contrasted with the limited success of some other recent peace-enforcement operations.

Managing FALINTIL

One of the key groups that INTERFET sought to influence, or control, was the armed faction of the Timorese pro-independence national liberation front, FRETILIN. The faction was known as the 'Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste', or FALINTIL. INTERFET developed a 'Three Ps' policy encouraging the 'Progressive Laying Down of Arms', facilitating 'Progressive Introduction' back into the civil structures, and encouraging 'Progressive Reconciliation'.

Recognising that they had to avoid giving the Indonesians and the militia groups a pretext to justify opposing an international force, FALINTIL exercised considerable discipline in the days before INTERFET's arrival, when the militia groups had run amok. Response Force personnel carefully administered arrangements in order to convince FALINTIL to defer its aspirations of playing a stronger role in security issues, effectively preventing it from adding to INTERFET's challenges. This approach also made it easier eventually to give FALINTIL a positive liaison role alongside peacekeeping troops assisting in border management, particularly once INTERFET had accomplished the initial tasks of providing a secure environment.

⁷¹ See Lieutenant Colonel Andris Balmaks, 'Control Operations—A New War Fighting Paradigm For Military Operations In Urban Terrain', in *Land Warfare Conference 2000*, pp. 46–53.

Manoeuvre to the Border

In the days and weeks that followed the initial deployment, INTERFET numbers increased and a secure environment was established in Dili as militia groups and Indonesian troops withdrew across the border. This withdrawal and force increase allowed Commander INTERFET to deploy the Brigade by sea, road and air to the border area adjacent to Indonesian West Timor. Evans' force included the two infantry battalions and integral 3rd Brigade units as well as a company of British Gurkhas and the 1st Battalion of the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1RNZIR). The lead element of 1RNZIR arrived shortly after the main force had landed in Dili. The remainder of 1RNZIR, as well as a company of Canadian infantry⁷² and a platoon of Irish Rangers, joined the lead New Zealander element in October 1999.

Other national contingents deployed to the more benign sectors in central and eastern East Timor. By mid-October the manoeuvre phase of the operation had wound down, with forces allocated distinct areas of operation in which to establish security and facilitate humanitarian aid. Although the critical phase of the operation had passed, there was still much work to be done, including the coordination of some aspects of a fairly complex Information Operations campaign.

It has been suggested that this border deployment was hardly an example of 'manoeuvre' since the operational centre of gravity was the ability of the militias to continue their violent activities and that consequently the Commander's concept of operations focused on securing centres of population rather than geographical areas.⁷³ Certainly, population centres were important, but there were a couple of other aspects that were equally if not more important. Firstly with the town of Suai, near the border on the south coast of East Timor,

⁷² From the French-Canadian Royal 22nd Regiment known as the Vandoos.

⁷³ Author's correspondence with Dr Alan Ryan, May 2002.

the initial concern was to dominate the road junctions and the township to dislocate the militia who were using the area as a thoroughfare. With Balibo, the border town on the north coast, geography was an important consideration, particularly the way the town dominates the north-coast access to East Timor. Occupying that position made militia access difficult. Clearly, therefore, the early tactical deployment of troops to the border in October 1999 was manoeuvrist in its approach.

These actions demonstrated that the INTERFET and Brigade Commanders still appreciated the place of geography in the manoeuvrist setting of the information era. Nonetheless, the tasks that the Information Operations Cell undertook proved that the two Commanders also appreciated the need to coordinate this ground manoeuvre (the ‘tactics’) with the information aspects of the operation (the ‘television’).

Establishing an Information Operations Cell

Headquarters INTERFET—as the Australian Deployable Joint Force Headquarters became known once it deployed to Dili—established an ad-hoc Information Operations Cell to coordinate aspects of Information Operations for INTERFET. The cell was formed from the Joint Offensive Support Coordination Centre (JOSCC) since the Australian Defence Force’s paucity of assets and personnel had precluded such a cell from being included in INTERFET from the outset. In effect, this arrangement meant that the JOSCC staff officer, or J93, Major Kent Beasley, assumed responsibility for the cell. The arrangement was made possible because, as an artillery officer, Major Beasley was able to adapt the lethal-fire targeting methodology used by gunners to Information Operations.⁷⁴ Given its ad-hoc nature and initial concern with the risk of escalation in tensions, the cell took some time to establish. Once it was set up, the cell was able to plan beyond

⁷⁴ Beasley, ‘Staff Paper on Information Operations During Operation *Stabilise*’.

the initial arrangements made in early September with the staff on Headquarters 3rd Brigade for the deployment phase of the operation.

As an interim step, at least, assigning these responsibilities to the JOSCC staff made sense because, when selecting a target, Commander INTERFET appreciated that his staff needed to consider the target's real value and the desired effect against the overall objective of an operation. Still, had the JOSCC function been needed, the JOSCC staff member would not have been able to perform these additional duties, and Headquarters INTERFET would have been caught short. Subsequently, intelligence and targeting staffs were required to look beyond the obvious for alternative non-lethal, non-destructive options in order to achieve the desired effect.

Despite the lack of extensive prior training, Major Beasley set about seeking to coordinate the work of the Public Relations Officer, the Psychological Operations Platoon and other force elements at Headquarters INTERFET level. He developed themes and messages, and ensured a coordinated and timely approach to the task. Nevertheless, the ad-hoc nature of the new cell and the lack of established procedures inhibited the full integration of intelligence support and civil-military affairs into the Information Operations Cell planning process.⁷⁵

Brigade-level Information Operations

By contrast, at INTERFET's subordinate Headquarters 3rd Brigade, Information Operations were coordinated by the S2 or Intelligence Officer. For the S2, Information Operations was the second BOS assigned in addition to RSI, and it had featured prominently in the 3rd Brigade Headquarters' pre-deployment planning process. Information Operations formed part of the S2's portfolio because of the paucity of staff in the S3 (Operations) Cell.

⁷⁵ Correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Chris Shine, 27 July 2001, and with Major Chris Field, 30 July 2001.

Given resource constraints, it made sense for the S2 to oversee Information Operations staff work in addition to the work of the S2 Cell because of the close links between the intelligence preparation and estimates process, reconnaissance and surveillance tasking, and the key aspects of Information Operations, including psychological operations, electronic warfare and deception.

The integration of different forms of intelligence—ranging from signals intelligence to aerial surveillance and topographical information—gave an unprecedented degree of tactical situational awareness to the S2 Cell, enabling it to provide the necessary support to the Brigade Commander's planning and conduct of operations. Liaison officers from the Psychological Operations Platoon and the Brigade's assigned tactical signals intercept unit worked alongside. The Civil–Military Affairs Officer in the headquarters regularly attended coordination meetings and sought to ensure that the Brigade's work in the community was complemented by the themes and messages that INTERFET assets were communicating through a variety of media outlets. The Brigade Commander's Public Relations Officer also sought to ensure that his messages were consistent with the overall Information Operations themes.⁷⁶ These components, working as a team, helped generate the synergy required to convert standard tactical intelligence and operations staff-work at brigade level into something more than the sum of its parts.

Public Relations

A major factor in promoting peace operations has been the force of public opinion. Because the maintenance of the collective will of INTERFET's member states was the operation's centre of gravity in East Timor, public relations was the most significant aspect of Information Operations to be managed as INTERFET evolved. The legitimacy of INTERFET as a peace enforcement mission was dependent on achieving a high degree of international consensus, and

⁷⁶ See Blaxland, 'On Operations in East Timor'.

Commander INTERFET fully recognised this fact. Legitimacy was demonstrated by the strong regional core membership in a truly cooperative international force.⁷⁷ As Alan Ryan has observed, ‘those members of the ASEAN that were involved in INTERFET were particularly concerned that their participation not damage their relationship with Indonesia, ASEAN’s largest member’.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Commander appreciated that the ability to influence the perceptions of key individuals and groups—including adversaries and coalition partners—and subsequently their decision-making process, had been dramatically enhanced by the Information Revolution, particularly international satellite broadcast television and the Internet.⁷⁹ It was therefore incumbent on the Commander and his staff to ensure that a carefully managed and scrupulously honest media-awareness program was maintained in order to foster ongoing cooperation. As Bob Breen observed,

The media conference in Darwin marked the beginning of Phase One of Cosgrove’s campaign. He was going ‘live’ to Australia and the world at what was later assessed to be one of the largest press conferences ever conducted on Australian soil. More importantly for his specific purposes, he was going ‘live’ to Jakarta and Dili. First impressions would be lasting. His face and his words had to communicate his intent effectively to set the scene for his negotiations in Dili. Every word and facial expression would be analysed. Relations between Australia and Indonesia were in a crisis. His words and manner could either intensify or ease tensions.⁸⁰

Consistent with this appreciation of the media’s role, and to the chagrin of the infantry troops deploying to Dili on the first day of Operation *Stabilise*, 20 September, two C-130 aircraft loads of journalists were

⁷⁷ Ryan, *Primary Risks and Primary Responsibilities*, pp. 55 and 66.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷⁹ Andrew Garfield, ‘Information Operations as an Integrating Strategy’, in Campen and Dearth, *Cyberwar 3.0*, p. 269; and correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Chris Shine, 27 July 2001.

⁸⁰ Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 25.

flown into Dili. The Australian Defence Force's Media Support Unit assigned to assist journalists accompanied them. The arrival of the journalists was scheduled at late notice, reflecting the ad-hoc initial efforts at the strategic level to conduct the campaign with an Information Operations approach. This change at late notice interrupted the 3rd Brigade's tightly programmed deployment for the first day in Dili, and resulted in the rescheduling and repacking of several flight-loads of troops and equipment.

Despite the burden of protecting accredited journalists, many in INTERFET soon came to appreciate that the 'double-edged sword' of media attention was working in their favour. Media attention reinforced the mandate's legitimacy and further discredited the militia groups and isolated their sponsors in Indonesia. In the first few days before Headquarters INTERFET was fully established, and while 3rd Brigade was busy establishing a secure environment in Dili, the Brigade Commander's immediate response to acts of destruction or looting was to 'cue', or prepare, the media.⁸¹

Rules of Engagement and Troop Discipline

Critical to the plan for 'cueing' the media was full confidence in the troops' discipline, a high level of training, and an understanding of the laws of armed conflict. Commenting on the degree of competency displayed by Australia's Army, Navy and Air Force during Operation *Stabilise*, the Australian Chief of the Defence Force observed:

we don't regard this [operational success] 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

⁸¹ Email correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Fielding (the S3 of Headquarters 3rd Brigade during Operation *Stabilise*), 22 July 2001.

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.⁸²

It was the calibre of the troops deploying to East Timor that gave the Commander the confidence to bring in the media on that first day. Australian troops have rules of engagement and orders for opening fire drilled into them, producing disciplined and alert soldiers. This kind of training proved instrumental in ensuring that the ‘strategic corporal’⁸³ worked towards the common goal of INTERFET. It also enabled INTERFET to capitalise on its resources and achieve its objectives. Such discipline, combined with a clear and moral mandate, gave the commanders confidence not to fear the media presence, but to work with it, wielding the double-edged sword advantageously.

Psychological Operations

In addition to media and legal concerns, a concerted psychological-operations effort was undertaken by INTERFET. Conscious of the damaging effect of the backlash that misinformation could generate if uncovered, the Psychological Operations Platoon was tasked with producing information that was scrupulously honest. The Platoon also prepared the majority of products used by INTERFET to communicate with the target audiences during Operation *Stabilise*. The Platoon Commander worked closely with the INTERFET Information Operations Cell as well as with the subordinate elements through attached liaison and support teams in the West Force sector, as the 3rd Brigade’s sector became known once it deployed from Dili to the western border.

⁸² Interview with Admiral Chris Barrie, AO, RAN, Australian Defence Headquarters, Canberra, 31 July 2000, cited in Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 2.

⁸³ General C. C. Krulak, ‘The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War’, *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

Leaflets

The first products in use were leaflets. The Psychological Operations Platoon had prepared leaflets prior to deployment according to the key themes and messages of force protection, humanitarian assistance, peace promotion, and law and order. Leaflets were developed, tested, approved and printed. Lead elements that deployed on 20 September carried bundles of these leaflets with them to hand out should the need have arisen. Other leaflets were also developed, timed for release at key junctures to get certain messages across to respective target audiences. Eventually INTERFET troops delivered them by hand, helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft. Helicopters were used extensively in the border regions. The key to a successful leaflet was pre-testing drafts on the local people in order to ensure that the message got across by using appropriate images and to avoid the inevitable cultural faux-pas of ill-conceived leaflets generated from a Western cultural perspective. Leaflets were used widely to target the militia forces. In broad terms, this product was aimed at neutralising the effect of the militia groups, isolating their leaders and encouraging those willing to renounce violence to be prepared to face justice and to reconcile their differences in a peaceful manner. In such a low-technology environment, leaflets were essential and effective tools for disseminating messages to a range of audiences.

The New East Timor

Once INTERFET settled in, the Information Operations cell set about coordinating the production of *The New East Timor*, a weekly newspaper for the local people. In an ad-hoc arrangement, the Topographical Survey Unit in Dili used its map printer equipment to supplement the Psychological Operations Platoon's limited printing capacity. Copies were printed in several languages—Bahasa Indonesia; the local dialect, Tetum; and English—in order to ensure maximum reach. INTERFET then distributed the newspaper widely throughout East Timor. *The New East Timor* was the main source of news for many people in the first few months since no other news

media outlet had been left undamaged throughout East Timor as the Indonesians and the militia departed. While the newspaper was used to highlight particular messages and themes, it always remained a credible and accurate source of news and information. Bernard Estrade, Bureau Chief of Agence France-Presse in Jakarta was effusive in its praise:

The New East Timor is history: it tells the history of independence for the people of East Timor as it occurred. The newspaper, a single sheet printed in black and white on both sides, has during the past four months been the only newspaper in East Timor giving local news and information, dominated by the activities of various non-governmental organisations.⁸⁴

Loudspeakers

The Psychological Operations Platoon had limited loudspeaker capabilities, but what it did have was put to good use. The platoon deployed initially with the 3rd Brigade, and its loudspeaker capabilities were used extensively to broadcast messages in order to target audiences in Dili and in the region contingent to the western border. The platoon broadcast pre-recorded messages encouraging people to return to their homes and advising them of where to find humanitarian assistance.

Another function of the team was to help in incidents of potential crowd violence. When such incidents were identified, INTERFET would assign a team at the planning stage, enabling it to develop and record messages and to pre-position teams in support. These teams had to be used with discretion. INTERFET was aware of the sensitivity of the East Timorese people to this form of public announcement following the use of such a technique during the Indonesian occupation. Resentment on the part of the East Timorese of such

⁸⁴ Cited in Beasley, 'Staff Paper on Information Operations During Operation *Stabilise*'.

methods was a concern that led the Information Operations Cell to use the resource sparingly, particularly in the more populous city of Dili.

Radio

By the time INTERFET had arrived in East Timor, the three radio stations in Dili had been destroyed or closed down. One of these stations, Radio Kmanek—a station owned by the Roman Catholic Church—was the least damaged and was soon able to recommence broadcasting. The Information Operations Cell arranged a contract with the station manager, providing INTERFET with the opportunity to have air time thrice a week on the radio station. The station presenter read the contents of *The New East Timor* newspaper in Tetum and Bahasa over an hour, interspersed with segments of music. This program came to be known as the ‘INTERFET Hour’. An appeal in Australia resulted in the donation of over 300 radios for the people of East Timor. These radios, many of them large enough for use in a community hall, along with thousands of batteries, were shipped to East Timor and distributed. Some short-wave radios were also distributed along with explanations in Tetum and Bahasa detailing how to tune into Radio Australia and the BBC World Service.⁸⁵

Civil Affairs

The US Army provided INTERFET with Civil Affairs Teams, which operated in conjunction with the humanitarian assistance organisations that quickly returned to Dili once a secure environment was restored. While US doctrine recognises the role that Civil Affairs plays in Information Operations, in the case of INTERFET there was little integration of the Civil Affairs program with the Information Operations program. This lack of integration was due to a variety of reasons, including the ad-hoc nature of the Information Operations Cell at Headquarters INTERFET, and the constrained arrangements in place for the US Civil Affairs Teams. At infantry battalion level,

⁸⁵ Beasley, ‘Staff Paper on Information Operations During Operation *Stabilise*’.

Civil Affairs was coordinated by the Artillery Battery Commander and his Forward Observer Parties—again not an ideal arrangement, should they have been required for indirect fire support.⁸⁶ Still, the benign nature of operations, particularly after the initial phase had passed, meant that any potential ill-effects from this disconnection were negated.

Deception

Acknowledged doctrinally as a component of Information Operations in wartime, deception is difficult to achieve in a coalition peace-enforcement operation and, given the sensitivity of such operations, is often deemed to be inappropriate. Essentially deception was considered in the planning phases of certain tactical operations but discarded at least partly because of the imperative to ensure that INTERFET was seen at all times as credible. Throughout history, the successful achievement of deception has almost invariably involved the reinforcement of a preconceived notion to distract attention away from where that attention was not wanted. It was fortuitous, therefore, particularly for the elements of the 3rd Brigade as they prepared to deploy from Townsville in Queensland, that the international media was focused on the events in Darwin, where its sister brigade, the 1st Brigade, was in the limelight. This erroneous perception that the force deploying to East Timor would be the 1st Brigade gave the 3rd Brigade in Townsville a respite from unwanted and distracting media attention at a critical juncture as it prepared to deploy. Admittedly, elements of the 1st Brigade—including a squadron of armoured reconnaissance vehicles and, two weeks later, a mechanised infantry battalion—did deploy to East Timor as part of INTERFET.

⁸⁶ Correspondence with Major Chris Field, 30 July 2001. Major Field was the Operations Officer, 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) during INTERFET.

Counterintelligence

In a low-technology environment such as the one in East Timor in late 1999, counterintelligence operations primarily involved human intelligence work by field operatives, who collected information and asked questions. In the first few days of Operation *Stabilise* there were concerns about the adversary's ability to collect information from INTERFET; counterintelligence efforts were therefore focused on force protection priorities. Then, as the security concerns in Dili diminished and the main area of concern shifted from Dili to the border region designated as Sector West, the focus moved from force protection concerns to collecting information in order to support broader mission-planning.

Small Field Intelligence Teams were deployed at battalion level and assisted with the tactical questioning of detainees and border crossers, but the limited availability of trained linguists made communications difficult. These teams nevertheless played an important role in complementing the other available information collection capabilities to enhance situational awareness. The teams also helped provide feedback on the extent of the success of the Information Operations efforts in influencing specific audience groups. Infantry battalion commanders who had at first expressed reluctance to include such elements as part of their teams had changed their tune within the first few days of the operation, even requesting supplementation.

Operations Security

Information Operations involves, *inter alia*, disseminating information while guarding it closely. To prevent security breaches, each item produced for or through the Information Operations Cell was vetted in order to ensure that it was not divulging information that could be used to undermine INTERFET operations. For instance, the deployment of the 3rd Brigade to Sector West was an event worthy of significant media attention, but the release of the

timings and details had to be carefully managed. The security of the deploying force had to be protected from compromise while the staff had to retain the confidence of the media, assuring the television reporters that INTERFET would provide them with the necessary newsworthy footage. Helicopters were discretely arranged in advance to give journalists the opportunity to witness events for themselves and to report on the successful deployment. The careful management of events such as this one helped shape the environment and helped reinforce the message that INTERFET was an extremely capable force of which any adversary should be wary.⁸⁷

Electronic Warfare

Today electronic warfare is widely considered to be a conventional component of any military force. The last time a substantial Australian force had deployed with such capabilities was during the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1972. There, Australia deployed a brigade-sized Task Force including 547 Signal Troop—a secretive unit tasked with eavesdropping on enemy communications and coordinating radio direction-finding efforts.⁸⁸ The effectiveness of 547 Signal Troop ensured that such units were maintained as a regular component of operational planning in the years that followed. Yet, by the time the East Timor crisis had emerged, several unit commanders had not had the opportunity to practise procedures on exercises with such units for the effective incorporation of their capabilities at battalion level.

Once it became clear to Australian military planners that an operation was to be launched using Australian forces, information became available from national strategic intelligence assets for use by the units preparing to deploy and valuable reports started to come

⁸⁷ Beasley, 'Staff Paper on Information Operations During Operation *Stabilise*'.

⁸⁸ See John Blaxland, *Signals Swift and Sure: A History of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals, 1947 to 1972*, Southwood Press, Sydney, 1999, chap. 11.

through from national intelligence organisations. After deployment, the coordination elements were retained in Dili but the Signals Squadron teams were deployed out with elements of the 3rd Brigade. The Squadron Commander and his Operations Officer coordinated technical advice while analysts provided timely and valuable reports that added to the force's understanding of the situation and supported the Information Operations objectives. This unit worked intimately with the Brigade and unit staffs, coordinating tasking and requirements in support of the mission.⁸⁹ It soon became clear that more integrated training was required at battalion level since the Light Electronic Warfare Teams and the command elements were not conversant with battalion procedures due to the lack of regularly working together on exercises.⁹⁰

Computer Network Defence

Signals units were responsible for providing reliable communications and computer support, and by the time the force reached peak strength, there were more computers in use within the Australian components of INTERFET than there were on any previous Australian military operation. At the outset of the mission, communications were limited, and the radio waves were congested because commanders and staffs were transmitting a high volume of messages. Within a few days, however, INTERFET had established an extensive classified network of computers in Dili and beyond. Although most were not greatly concerned that a coordinated attack on the computer network was likely, physical access control became a security issue. Australians initially deployed with their own national classified, computerised command support system but soon found that they had to share space and computer terminals with supporting staffs from a multitude of nations. The staff tasked with providing an additional coalition command support network were faced with the challenge of finding extra computer terminals. It took

⁸⁹ Blaxland, 'On Operations in East Timor', p. 9.

⁹⁰ Field, correspondence with author, 30 July 2001.

the 1st Joint Support Unit several weeks to make adequate, albeit ad-hoc, networking and communications security arrangements, to the credit of the communications staff.

INTERFET Coalition Partners

Despite the assiduous application of the various aspects of Information Operations, INTERFET would not have achieved its mission without the support of the contributing coalition countries. Consequently, a concerted effort was made by INTERFET and the higher Australian defence machinery to ‘shape and influence’ in order to quickly muster the necessary international support, particularly from key allies and regional partners.

Ground-force capabilities were enhanced by contributions from Canada, New Zealand, Italy, Ireland, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and the United Kingdom. These troops came with their own professional skills and heritage, complementing the force with their unique strengths that contributed to the successful outcome of the mission. For instance, Thai troops—familiar with winning hearts and minds in their long and successful fight against communists in the remote parts of their country—applied their skills in psychological operations. They operated in the more benign eastern sectors of East Timor, away from the border with Indonesian West Timor—where the militia had regrouped. Many countries provided military airlift assets, which were critical for the lodgment phase of the operation. It was no mean feat to enlist and then maintain the support from so many diverse countries with different cultures, languages and religions. Shaping perceptions and influencing opinions was an important part of the mission. This achievement alone is a mark of the success of the INTERFET operation in countering external pressures aimed at undermining the INTERFET coalition.

United States' Low-key Support Critical

Arguably one of the most important aspects of US support for INTERFET was the critical moral, political and financial pressure applied at the APEC Forum in New Zealand in early September that helped persuade Indonesia to accede to the international intervention.⁹¹ The United States went on to provide civil affairs, intelligence and communications support to INTERFET, as well as unique heavy-lift and combat-support capabilities—capabilities in short supply in the Australian Defence Force.

The offshore presence of major components from a US Navy-Marine Amphibious Ready Group, with about 2500 Marines, was an additional important demonstration of US interest and resolve as well as of alliance solidarity. Their presence also shaped perceptions and helped influence the opinions of key stakeholders; it helped to convince wavering minds in the militia and among Indonesian local commanders not to avoid any direct confrontations with INTERFET, particularly in the vulnerable first few days of the deployment.

Transition to United Nations Administration

INTERFET had been created partly to help the United Nations Assistance Mission East Timor (UNAMET), which had supervised the fateful ballot on 30 August 1999. Once INTERFET had completed its essential tasks, particularly the establishment of a secure environment, the Australian Government—keen to restore relations with Indonesia—was eager to shift responsibility for East Timor back to the United Nations. The United Nations Security Council established a Transitional Authority for East Timor (UNTAET) to supervise the transition to full independence.

While the fate of UNTAET is not the topic of this paper, it is encouraging to note that, despite the usual challenges associated with

⁹¹ *East Timor in Transition*, p. 137.

UN mandates, UNTAET has successfully managed to assist the East Timorese progress towards independence by providing a relatively peaceful environment. As Commander of INTERFET, Major General Cosgrove understood that his mission was finite in scope and time. Once his mission was successfully completed, he set about ensuring that the United Nations was best placed to take over as soon as possible, and INTERFET handed over to UNTAET on 23 February 2000.

PART VI

CONCLUSION: SO WHAT?

It Could Have Been Worse

Although the threat environment in East Timor did not feature adversaries as heavily armed and equipped as those in other recent international military operations, the evidence suggests that the INTERFET mission could have been less successful and far more turbulent in character. Instrumental in its success and the avoidance of significant clashes was the clear understanding demonstrated by the troops of the higher commander's intent for the mission. Showing restraint throughout the operation, the INTERFET troops and their commanders appreciated the need to limit the collateral political effects that an escalation of violence would have generated, particularly with the rapid dissemination of news made possible by the ever-present mass media.

Information Operations—Key Force Multiplier

In September 1999, Australian operational and strategic concepts of Information Operations were unrefined and in draft form. At the tactical level, however, the adaptation of established practices and procedures to meet emergent circumstances resulted in a classic example of manoeuvre tailored for the information era, and featuring applied and controlled Information Operations. Although

Information Operations were not originally planned and coordinated at the strategic and operational levels as a new ‘force contributor’, in effect INTERFET’s actions demonstrated a broad and informal understanding of the principles involved.

The manoeuvrist approach that was prevalent in East Timor would assist in the development of Australian Defence Force doctrine for Information Operations. Focused Information Operations efforts, incorporating fused and timely intelligence, allowed for careful and efficient vectoring of combat forces to hot spots in the early days of Operation *Stabilise* that effectively unhinged the adversary in Dili, along the border with Indonesian West Timor, and throughout the remainder of East Timor. The coordinated application of stealthy and highly mobile Response Force assets—along with the light infantry, armour and air elements—quickly put the adversary off balance and gave INTERFET the clear psychological advantage. This was the case even while INTERFET was still outnumbered by the militia and Indonesian troops, which—at the lower levels and among territorial units at least—were prepared only grudgingly to accept INTERFET’s mandate.

Non-kinetic Shaping and Influencing

Operation *Stabilise* also demonstrates the significance of a shift from reliance on kinetic (or blast) effects to an emphasis on perception management as a key tool to accomplish a mission. With this approach, carefully crafted and timed actions, demonstrations and announcements were targeted at specific audiences as part of the efforts aimed at ‘shaping and influencing’, that is, pressuring them to bend to the will of INTERFET. Such actions were only credible because they were backed up by highly trained, mobile and well-equipped forces on the ground, which were in turn supported by the maritime forces and air elements. The mission succeeded because tactics and television coverage carried the day.⁹²

⁹² Fielding, correspondence with author, 22 July 2001.

Perception management did not replace the potent threat represented by the promise of force. Nonetheless, in this case, the use of Information Operations proved to be an invaluable addition to the commander's operational options. In future missions, the use of Information Operations is likely to assume greater prominence as a 'key club in the golf bag'.⁹³ It is not the intention of this paper to denigrate the place of blast effects. Kinetic effects are important and they remained important for INTERFET as well. The point is the degree to which we emphasise one over the other, not whether we emphasise one at the total expense of the other. They are not mutually exclusive. Yet, historically, commanders have paid little more than lip service to 'shaping and influencing' the 'battle-space' in non-kinetic ways. INTERFET demonstrated that this need not be the case.

Containing Collateral Damage

The Australian commanders involved in launching Operation *Stabilise* demonstrated their understanding that an obsession with kinetic effects can have long-term, detrimental effects on national and international interests. Adherents of a Clausewitzian approach would echo his call to 'let us hear no more about generals who conquer without bloodshed'. Yet, in conventional wars of the future, such concerns should perhaps be relegated to second place. As recent events have demonstrated, convention in armed conflict is becoming increasingly difficult to define. In multinational operations, however, where a fragile coalition plays a pivotal role, relegating such concerns can have long-term, drastic and damaging ramifications.

Furthermore, in the case of Operation *Stabilise*, the effective display of military prowess in a measured, constrained and focused way laid the solid foundations for the nation building that is still occurring in East Timor today. The disciplined and careful application of force limited the collateral political damage to Australia's relations with regional neighbours, and particularly helped contain any political

⁹³ Author's discussions with Dr Alan Ryan, May 2002.

damage in relations with Indonesia. For instance, had less disciplined troops not understood the intent of the mission in the tense first few days, unintended confrontations could have resulted in a far more difficult situation, further damaging Australia's relations with Indonesia and threatening to unravel the coalition that was so critical to INTERFET's legitimacy.

Information Operations are not a black-and-white alternative to high casualty operations. Rather, such operations are an underutilised and little-understood set of tools that are increasingly important for successful military operations in the 'information era'. This paper does not claim that Information Operations can win the day single-handedly—hence the reference to the first and second 'elements' prior to the discussion on the 'third element' of INTERFET. Instead, the paper has set out to demonstrate that the descent into high-casualty operations is less likely if the Information Operation tools are used effectively as an integrated part of an overall strategy from the outset. No-one would argue, for instance, that Information Operation tools were effectively applied at the strategic level with the UN forces in Somalia. This point is difficult to prove without another operation on which to test the theory in detail—and that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Pointer to the Future

Perhaps this operation also serves to demonstrate what some have already argued: that Sun Tzu's notion of victory with minimal violence may displace Clausewitz's emphasis on the deadly clash of armies amid fog and friction.⁹⁴ Regardless, Operation *Stabilise* was no fool's errand. It was an operation launched with a sense of regret over the events of early September 1999, but also with measured determination. This combination ensured that INTERFET was an unqualified military success, and those nations that contributed to it can be justifiably proud of their enduring legacy. Moreover, students

⁹⁴ Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp*, p. 18.

of military operations can refer to it as a ‘by the book’ example of applied military force for limited strategic aims in a coalition environment—an appropriate way to use military forces as an extension of national and international policy.

Operation *Stabilise* also demonstrates how Information Operations can be applied with a manoeuvrist approach in what is arguably the most likely form of military conflict in the current era— asymmetric, low-intensity and urban operations. INTERFET demonstrates that, while the concept of manoeuvre is not new for military practitioners, there is a new ‘information era’ approach to manoeuvre and military operations.

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