

Australia and NATO

Common Links

Australia shares many of the NATO ‘family’ values, like democracy and rule of law, but doesn’t want to marry into the NATO family. Australia and NATO have many common security concerns, like the lack of governance inside failed states. Although the alliance with the US is very strong, Australia maintains a self-reliance defence policy; investing heavily in air and naval forces. NATO aspires to implement a Comprehensive Approach (CA) in Afghanistan. What is, given the experiences of the Australian Defence Force in various operations, an Australian view of how NATO could deliver its own CA to future operations?

*Lieutenant Colonel M.J. Toohey, Australian Army**

From an outsiders perspective I would describe NATO as being a large ‘traditional’ family. NATO has a long pre-marriage ritual before a new nation can ‘marry’ into the family, but once you are in, regardless of how well or poorly you support the family, you cannot be divorced.¹ And like all large families, NATO too has many issues: sibling rivalries; intra-family feuds; rich and poor, dedicated and lazy members.

For all these humanistic weaknesses, the family remains committed to the common Western values of democracy, human rights, rule of law and to rallying together when the family is threatened. Although Australia shares many of the NATO family values we do not plan to marry into the family. Rather Australia will remain a trusted and reliable family friend.

Apart from shared values, Australia has several strategic issues that are very similar to those of NATO.

The aim of this article is to explore the common links between Australia’s and NATO’s strategic and security issues, namely the importance of our Alliance with the US; our common security concerns; our transformation into an expeditionary force; and our commitment to employing a Comprehensive Approach in failing states.

This article will end with an outsider’s view of how NATO could deliver its own Comprehensive Approach to future operations. Before examining our common links, I will provide an overview of Australia’s strategic policy in order to provide the NATO and European reader some historical context.

Australian Strategic Policy History

The Fall of Singapore in World War II (WWII) was a watershed moment in Australia’s strategic direction. Post Federation in 1901, Australia had closely aligned its Defence and Security Policy with that of the United Kingdom (UK). The closeness of this Alliance saw Australian

* Lieutenant Colonel Michael Toohey is an armoured corps officer with land force service in 1st Armoured Regiment (Tank) and B Squadron 3rd/4th Cavalry Regiment (Armoured Personnel Carrier), and operational experience in Somalia (1993), Iraq (2003) and Afghanistan (2007). He was the inaugural Australian student to attend NATO Defence College’s Senior Course 113 in Rome (Italy), prior to his current appointment as the Australian Defence Adviser to NATO and the EU in Brussels (Belgium).

¹ The views expressed in this article are the author’s and not necessarily those of the Australian Army or the Department of Defence. The Commonwealth of Australia will not be legally responsible in contract, tort or otherwise for any statement made in this article.

military forces committed to nearly every British operation from the Boer War until the end of WWII.

In 1914, at the start of World War I (WWI), Australia's male population was approximately 3 million. At the War's end over 215.000 of the 330.000 Australians that served in the defence of Western Europe were casualties.² The magnitude of the WWI sacrifice and the respect gained from our good performance in combat had a major impact on the development of Australia's national identity and culture.³ In 1939, when Europe was threatened again,

Australia was in need of a new ally and turned to the US, which had become the major power and provider of military security in the Asia-Pacific region. Soon after the end of WWII Australia, New Zealand and the US signed the ANZUS Treaty, which mirrors many of the Articles stated in the NATO Treaty.

US Alliance

Australia, like NATO, relies heavily on its alliance with the US as a key element of its national security policy. The ANZUS Treaty holds centre stage in Australian defence and security policy, which explains why Australia is the only US ally that has committed military forces to all major US led operations since WWII.⁶

Australia's support for US operations is, in part, because it is in our national interest but also reflects that both countries share common values and thoughts on global security issues. Like NATO, Australia is committed to fighting the global war on terrorism, evoking Article V of the ANZUS Treaty to deploy Australian forces to Afghanistan in 2001.

Although the alliance with the US is very strong, Australia acknowledges that physical US military support in a crisis is not guaranteed. As such, Australia



Australian Light Horse Regiment in Alexandrië during World War 1

Australia's predominantly European immigrant population was prepared to defend their ethnic 'homelands'. Because of this and perhaps to 'live up to' the nation's reputation from WW1, the government quickly committed military forces to WWII.

Initially, Australian forces fought in Southern Europe, North Africa, Syria and Lebanon.⁴ However unlike WWI, Japan's entry into the war directly threatened Australia's immediate region and resulted in the redeployment of the majority of Australia's land forces to the South West Pacific in early 1942.⁵ When the UK-led Commonwealth forces in Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in 1942 it signalled the end of UK military dominance in the region.

2 Australia's casualty rate was approximately 67%. Of the 215.000 casualties over 60.000 were killed or missing in action and the great majority are buried across Western Europe. *Australian War Memorial* website available at <<http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1.asp>>, accessed 12 November 2008.

3 Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) was first employed in battle as a combined Army force at Gallipoli, Turkey on 25 April 1915. For Australia, the Gallipoli Campaign was the first time that the various states of the Federation conducted a truly national activity. The collective loss of the life had a unifying effect on the national psyche and is viewed as Australia's 'Baptism of Fire'.

4 Australian Forces fought in the unsuccessful Greek and Crete Campaigns.

5 Australia maintained Royal Australian Navy and Royal Australian Air Force units in the European Theatre of World War II. *Australian War Memorial* website available at <<http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww2.asp>>, accessed 12 November 2008.

6 Australia committed military forces to major US led operations in Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

maintains a self-reliance defence policy; investing heavily in air and maritime forces to deter and defend against stated based aggression in the air and sea approaches to its continent.

Security Challenges: Failing States

The region from the north-west through to the north-east of Australia has been colloquially described as the 'Arc of Instability' due to the high percentage of new or emerging democracies contained within it. These emerging democracies face many of the problems that are currently being seen in regions surrounding NATO's direct areas of interest (Balkans, Caucasus, Central Eurasia, Sub Saharan Africa, and the Middle East).



Soldiers from the Australian 120th Squadron fetching their post, Merauke, New-Guinea, 1944-1945

These developing states are fighting corruption, poverty, unemployment, a lack of national institutions and poor governance. As such, these countries have the potential to become failed states which could be exploited as safe havens by terrorist and transnational criminal organisations. The activities of these illegal organisations would lead to further regional destabilisation and therefore directly impact on Australia's security interests.

As a result Australia has been and is currently engaged in security, stabilisation and development operations within its immediate neighbourhood, including in: East Timor, Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands; and further field in Cambodia, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. The government has made a long term commitment to operations in Afghanistan because Australia, like many other countries, has experienced the result of transnational terrorist attacks that can be traced back to failed states. Three Australians were killed in the US 9/11 attacks and a further 92 were killed in two separate attacks in Bali, Indonesia. The Bali Bombers were from a religious based extremist group called Jamal Islamiya, which has links with Al Qaeda and some of its members had been trained in Afghanistan.⁷

After the East Timorese people voted for independence from Indonesia, Australia led the UN endorsed International Security Force intervention operation into the country. This operation involved the largest deployment of Australian military forces since Vietnam and it came very close to breaking Australia's military logistics capability.

The lessons learned from East Timor combined with the phenomena of failed states in the post 9/11 security environment resulted in the Australian Government directing the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to commence its own expeditionary transformation process.

Expeditionary Force Transformation

Australia's post-Vietnam War strategic debate has been dominated by two theories: Forward Defence and Defence of Australia. Forward Defence was generically based around deploying Australian Forces off-shore to fight and stop state based threats in the countries on the likely approaches to Australia. Our commitment to the Vietnam War was a practical commitment to this approach.

The critics of this strategy successfully branded this concept as being unnecessarily expeditionary in nature. They advocated the Defence of Australia strategy, which focussed on defence in depth on the Australian continent and con-

⁷ Garamone, J, 'DoD Officials Discuss Asia-Pacific Region Challenges', *American Forces Press Service*, 17 June 2003, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=28817>, accessed 9 January 2009.

PHOTO COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, R. INGRAM



Australian soldiers conduct regular patrols throughout the local areas of Honiara to help maintain security to the community (2006). Operation Anode is the name of the Australian Defence Forces' contribution to the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

centrated on defeating any state based threat in the sea and air approaches to Australia. The Defence of Australia policy was formally adopted in the Australian Government's 1994 Defence White Paper, but the concept had driven the ADF budget and nature of capability acquisition from the late 1980s and well into the 1990's.⁸

The Army was the major loser in the inter-service budget and new capability allocations. A regionally strong Air Force and Navy were considered key to Australia's deterrence policy, seemingly negating the need for an Army capable of deploying off-shore. As such, the size of the Army was reduced and much of the broader ADF's logistics support was outsourced and civilianised. In many ways it left the Australian Army with the same characteristics of many NATO Armies, in that it was focussed on territorial defence.

Weaknesses

Unlike most NATO countries, Australia's large territorial mass and limited infrastructure requires its Defence Force to have expeditionary

capabilities to enable it to deploy, fight and sustain joint operations in defence of its territory. However, like NATO, Australia's post Cold War experiences exposed major weaknesses in the ADF's expeditionary capabilities and its ability to support self-reliance.⁹ This was particularly evident in the 1999 East Timor operation in which US logistics support was required to ensure the success of the operation.¹⁰

The 2000 Defence White Paper took the lessons learned from these operational experiences and identified and funded the deployable capabilities needed to address them.¹¹ Post 9/11 the

8 *Defending Australia*, Defence White Paper 1994, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1994.
 9 For an overview of Australia's current international military commitments see the *Department of Defence Global Operations* website, available at < <http://www.defence.gov.au/opEx/global/index.htm>>, accessed 15 November 2008.
 10 Breen, B., *Struggling for Self Reliance: Four case studies of Australia's Regional Force Projection in the late 1980s and the 1990s*, 2008, Australian National University E Press Canberra, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 171 available at http://epress.anu.edu.au/sdsc/sfsr/pdf/whole_book.pdf, accessed 9 January 2009.
 11 Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 2000, available at <<http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/wpaper2000.PDF>>, accessed 10 September 2008.



PHOTO COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Australian and East Timorese soldiers practice obstacle crossing drills and navigation skills in Viqueque, East Timor

government released the 2003 Defence Update¹² paper which revised the security environment and stated that:

*Southeast Asia and the South Pacific face major challenges due to political weakness, decline in governance, difficulty in grappling with terrorism and the economic effects of terrorism. If these trends continue, there may be increased calls on the ADF for operations in Australia's immediate neighbourhood.*¹³

Additional Funding

This potential requirement to assist states in our immediate region justified the government's provision of additional funding for the ADF to replace most of the ADF's obsolete equipment and acquire new expeditionary capabilities, including two Helicopter Landing Amphibious ships, three air warfare destroyers,

four C-17 Globemasters, a minimum of 75 Joint Strike Fighters, Air to Air Refuelers, and raised two additional infantry battalions.¹⁴

Comprehensive Approach: it's all about national will

NATO aspires to implement a Comprehensive Approach (CA) in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Australia is currently participating in and leading regional CA missions to support developing countries in its immediate area of interest, namely: East Timor and the Solomon Islands. The following will summarise the Pacific nations regional response to the instability in the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is an archipelagic nation approximately the size of Belgium, situated in the Pacific Ocean 500 km east of Papua New

PHOTO COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, A. GREEN



Guinea. It is a former British protectorate that gained independence in 1976 and like many emerging democracies it has suffered from poor governance, which led to ethnic based violence and widespread crime that undermined the new nation's stability and civil society.

12 Department of Defence, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 2003, available at <<http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Australia-2003.pdf>>, accessed 15 September 2008.

13 Ibid, page 23.

14 For more detail on Australian defence acquisition projects see the Defence Capability Plan 2006 – 2016, available at <http://www.defence.gov.au/dmo/id/dcp/DCP_2006_16.pdf>.

15 Bisogniero, C, NATO Deputy Secretary General, *Assisting Afghanistan: The importance of a comprehensive approach*, Keynote address at the GLOBSEC Conference 17 Jan 2008, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080117a.html>>; and *Bucharest Summit Declaration*, NATO Press Release, Bucharest 3 April 2008, available at <<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html>>, accessed 13 November 2008.

Violent conflict began in 1998, when a group of militants from the island of Guadalcanal attacked settlements of islanders predominantly from Malaita in northwest Guadalcanal, an area bordering the capital city Honiara. Their actions were prompted by the failure of successive national governments to address issues raised by the indigenous Guadalcanal people.¹⁶ The increasingly belligerent behaviour of these Guadalcanal militants resulted in some 25.000 Malaitans fleeing Guadalcanal, and an estimated 11.000 people from Guadalcanal exiting the capital city of Honiara for the safety of the island's interior.

The violence escalated at the start of 2000, when a resistance group named the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), claiming to represent the interests of displaced Malaitans, armed themselves by raiding police armouries and subsequently taking control of Honiara.



While the Dutch forces and Australian Reconstruction Task Force provide security and are involved in trade work and supervision, it's the local Afghans who are contracted to do the actual building of an Afghan Army base in Chora

RAMSI's Goal: peaceful Solomon Islands

Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a partnership between the Government and the people of Solomon Islands and the contributing countries of the Pacific region.¹⁷

The overarching goal of RAMSI's work is for a peaceful, well-governed and prosperous Solomon Islands.¹⁸

The mission was executed without a formal UN mandate. RAMSI started out with a heavy military presence to separate and disarm the warring militia groups and protect the Regional Police Force, which was required to have a direct and hands-on policing role in the country. Over time the military security force has been reduced and the policing effort has transitioned into training and mentoring the local police force. In parallel with these security sector reforms, the RAMSI contributing nations have provided governance, judicial and economic training and mentoring to the Solomon Islands parliamentarians and public servants.

The Solomon Islands mission is a good example of a CA for several reasons. First, the Solomon's had requested Australian Government intervention to provide security while re-establishing the rule of law. As Australia was not prepared to act unilaterally, they requested the Pacific Island Forum to give verbal support for the mission, and by providing military and/or police forces. Australia and New Zealand, as close partners to the Pacific Island Forum, had a solid understanding of the issues in the Solomon's and were able to prepare a mission with the means to succeed.

Nation building

Second, RAMSI was planned to be a CA and nation building operation from the outset. The military provided the planning, coordination, expeditionary expertise, and then resources to the Foreign Affairs and police staff, but they did not have the lead in the overall mission. And although Australia was the lead nation,

16 First tabled as 'bona fide demands' in 1988 and again in January 1999, the issues that were listed were rent from the use of Honiara as the capital city; non-payment of compensation for the indigenous people killed by settlers over the years; demands for the review of the Land and Title Act; the squatter settlements; and restrictions on citizens from other provinces from owning land on Guadalcanal. [https://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2005/papers/HDR2005_McGovern_and_Choulai_33.pdf], accessed 6 January 2009

17 RAMSI Home Page available at <<http://www.ramsi.org/>>, accessed 10 November 2008.

18 Op. Cit.



PHOTO COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Medics conduct a Medical Community Assistance Program (MEDCAP) in Oruzgan, Afghanistan. Such activities support the Reconstruction Task Force's reconstruction efforts, support the development of Afghan National Security Forces and reinforce the legitimacy of the Afghan Government

all Pacific Island Forum nations contributed military, police, and volunteer public servants to train and mentor the Solomon Islanders.

Government organizations, such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), implemented 'developmental aid' programs to reduce the Solomon's poverty and

achieve a sustainable development. Some aid activities include food security, water and sanitation, education, and rural development.¹⁹ As this agency has good relations with several NGOs, they were able to concurrently deliver their developmental aid to the Solomon's.²⁰

Australia is a major contributor to RAMSI because it is in its national interest for the Solomons to be a stable, democratic and economically viable nation rather than a failed state. The Australian led intervention received formal regional support before a 'coalition of the willing' was deployed to the country. Unlike NATO, Australia had no formal alliance with the Pacific nations when it facilitated the establishment of RAMSI. Yet it has been able to incorporate a Comprehensive Approach to the operation: military, police, and personnel from other government agencies have deployed into both 'hands on' and mentoring roles within the Solomon Islands Government and its national institutions.

As such, I have found the argument that NATO is purely a military alliance and therefore cannot to deliver its own Comprehensive Approach to operations most puzzling.²¹ If several European NATO countries are prepared to see the EU grow a Military Committee and staff, which leverages existing NATO organisations and capabilities, to improve the EU's delivery of a Comprehensive Approach to security operations, why shouldn't the reverse be possible? That is to allow NATO to grow a small civilian capability that can leverage existing non-military government and civilian organisations and their capabilities to improve NATO's delivery of its own Comprehensive Approach.

Future NATO Comprehensive Approach

NATO nations make up the majority of the veto capable UN Security Council members and global economic organisations like the G8 and G20. Therefore, if NATO nations collectively applied their diplomatic, political, military, and economic development capacity to the operations in Afghanistan arguably they

19 Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), [<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/makediff/default.cfm>], accessed 13 November 2008.

20 Activities by Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) members working in the Solomon Islands: Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific (AFAP); Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA); Australian Red Cross (ARC); Australian Volunteers International (AVI); Burnet Institute; Caritas Australia (CA); Fred Hollows Foundation (FHF); International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE); Live and Learn Environmental Education; National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA); Oxfam Community Aid Abroad (OCAA); Save the Children Australia (SCA); Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia (FPA); World Vision Australia (WVA); Appropriate Technology for Community and Environment/ Village First Electrification Group (APACE VFEG); University of Queensland (UQ)/ Rural Development Trust Board (RTDB). <[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2003.nsf/FilesByRWDocUNIDFileName/ACOS-64BPT9-acfoa-slb-22jul.pdf/\\$File/acfoa-slb-22jul.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2003.nsf/FilesByRWDocUNIDFileName/ACOS-64BPT9-acfoa-slb-22jul.pdf/$File/acfoa-slb-22jul.pdf)>, accessed 20 December 2008.

21 The NATO Research Paper "HASTEN SLOWLY: NATO's Effects Based and Comprehensive Approach to Operations Making sense of the past and future prospects" by B. Smith-Windsor sparked much debate from both students and guest lecturers during NATO Senior Course 113. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/publications/rp_38en.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2008.

could change the course of the war and bring security, stability and democratic and institutional development to this country.

Although the threat scenario in the Solomon Islands is benign and scale of the operation significantly smaller when compared with Afghanistan, the overarching principle of applying a Comprehensive Approach still comes down to the will of the participating member states. It is disappointing that collectively member states endorse the NATO Summit statements, including the point that

about the NATO family problems in that once you are in the family you can be as active or as lazy as you like because you will not be divorced from the organisation. NATO membership appears to be all about the Article V collective defence ‘carrot’ but no ‘stick’ for under performance.

For NATO to adopt its own Comprehensive Approach, I believe its decision-making process should allow for the Military Commanders to brief the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on the non-military civil resources needed to ensure

PHOTO COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, R. FULLER



Australian and Afghan soldiers set a cordon around a quala of interest as they prepare to search the compound for insurgent weapon and explosive caches on the outskirts of a village in Oruzgan Province, Afghanistan

the War in Afghanistan is the Alliance’s number one priority, yet not all nations are prepared to provide the military and civil resources needed to succeed in Afghanistan.

As such NATO’s credibility is undermined because it appears that acknowledging a problem is in the national interest of all NATO member states but acting to resolve a problem is not. This point reinforces my opening observation

mission success. It would then be the responsibility of the council members to seek their Government’s support and provision these capabilities.

Just as the members states of the UN enable the appointment of a civilian Special Representative to head civilian and military political aspects of a UN mission. NATO nations should be able to do the same, especially if the organisation

PHOTO COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, H. PATERSON



A soldier from RTF-III recovers weapons and ammunition whilst searching a hidden weapon cache on patrol in the green zone of the Dorafshan area. The weapons were used in an attack on Australian positions the previous night

non-NATO nations, in addition to International Organisations and NGOs. As a minimum member states could opt to contribute their own comprehensive approach to a Tactical Area of Responsibility within the AO. For example, a nation could provide a security battle-group plus governance, police, judicial, and economic training and mentoring teams, which would operate within a specific district or province, but working to a coherent mission plan.

Several NATO nations have adopted such an approach to their operations in Afghanistan, but a lack of high level agreement and consistency in national approaches is leading to stove pipes and inefficiencies and complicates the interaction with immature Afghan national institutions.

is required to conduct a Kosovo-like operation in the future.²² That is, a mission which is endorsed by NATO nations and, potentially, the most of the international community, but where a UN mandate may not be forthcoming because of security council politics and veto rights.

Importantly the NATO Special Representative would be responsible for seeking support from

Finally, as the NAC is a political organisation they should be able to support the concept of a lead nation for future operations that would assist the NATO Special Envoy in gathering the non-military support required to ensure that any future intervention mission into a failed state has all the resources required to succeed. If Australia is able to lead a regionally endorsed mission like RAMSI with an ad-hoc 'coalition of 15 willing nations', then arguably there is no reason that an Alliance with 28 of the worlds most advanced nations cannot provide the full array of military and civil resources to support an international request for assistance such as from the President of Afghanistan.

22 The concept of a NATO Special Representative was a recommendation of the Atlantic Council of the United States September 2006 Policy Paper led by C. Richard Nelson, 'How Should NATO Handle Stabilization Operations and Reconstruction Efforts?' <<http://www.acus.org>>, accessed 15 December 2008.



Like several other NATO states Australia attempts to maintain a self-reliant National Defence strategy

Final remarks

This article has explored the common links shared by Australia and NATO. Like NATO we see our US Alliance as a core element of our national security policy. Like several of the larger NATO states Australia attempts to maintain a self-reliant National Defence strategy, which acknowledges that the physical military US support in a time of crisis is not guaranteed.

Like NATO, Australia has learned from its post-Cold War operations that it needs its Defence Force to be capable of conducting expeditionary operations in off-shore territories primarily within South East Asia and South West Pacific region. As such, successive Australian governments have committed the resources and funding to deliver these transformational capabilities over the next ten years.

Like NATO, Australia believes that the potential for international terrorists to exploit the insta-

bility and lack of governance inside failed states is a threat to its own national security. As such, Australia is leading several long term nation building missions in emerging states in its direct area of regional interest and has made a substantial and long term commitment to Afghanistan.

Finally, Australia agrees that a Comprehensive Approach to operations is central to bringing stability, good governance and democracy to failed states. Australia has been able to bring together a 'coalition of willing' regional partners to deliver a Comprehensive Approach type of operation to the Solomon Islands. Indeed, RAMSI may provide NATO with an example of how it could apply a Comprehensive Approach to future nation building operations in failed states.

Australia and NATO have much in common and much to learn from each other, which is why we will continue to maintain our robust family friendship now and into the future. ■