

## **Regional Security and Middle Power Diplomacy**

Second Dr John Gee Memorial Lecture by The Hon. Dr Mike Kelly MP, Australian National University, Canberra, Friday 29 August 2008

Let me say from the outset that I regard the invitation to speak to you this evening as part of the John Gee Memorial lectures as very special. I regard it as a singular honour to be able to pay tribute to the man in this way. I say this because prominent amongst many shining highlights in John's wonderful life was his fearless commitment to the provision of honest advice to government in the context of the issue of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq.

This episode resonates with me particularly because, as you will probably recall, I travelled a similar road in relation to those fraught times. Certainly I won't easily forget the Abu Ghraib or AWB sagas. Reflecting on that time and John's work I recalled the incident during the election campaign last year when Brendon Nelson was pilloried for claiming that the objectives of the war were really about energy security. I remember we joked at the time that in justifying the war the Howard Government had gone from WMD to WD40.

Tonight I wish to talk to you about regional security and middle power diplomacy from both the perspective of my personal experience and in relation to my portfolio responsibilities and contribution to the Government's security policy, which has been informed by that experience.

In my service in Somalia, Bosnia, East Timor and Iraq I was afforded the opportunity to work and make observations from the very basic tactical level, all the way to the strategic management of those operations. I can appreciate what it is like to actually physically capture a threatening opponent and at the other end of the spectrum to try to pull together diverse civil and military actors to deliver operational level and strategic outcomes. These experiences also occurred in diverse geographic contexts encompassing the Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa and the Middle East. I served in operations that were coalitions of the willing and wearing the blue beret of the UN. I performed functions that were purely military and functions that were civil-military related. In addition to serving under military command I was seconded to the ICRC working principally in the NGO operating space. I am grateful for this diverse experience as it has enabled me to identify general principles that could be applied regardless

of context and to gain a fuller understanding of all the different effects that must be generated to succeed in what I will generically term stabilisation operations.

It has also given me some insights into the causes of conflict and conflict prevention. More than this, however, my experience has left me with a burning determination to avoid the sort of casualties I have seen resulting from mistakes and poor planning made at the strategic level. Along with John Gee I would, therefore, like to also pay tribute tonight to the memories of other “veterans” of Iraq such as Nadia Younes and Fiona Watson who lost their lives in the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, Ihsan Ghanim who was assassinated for his courageous work trying to bring good governance to Iraq and Chad Beuhring a fine soldier and family man killed in action in the assault on the Al Rasheed Hotel. I single out these colleagues as representatives of an all too large number of very special absent friends.

Outside of operations I have also been fortunate to have been involved in international efforts to distil and refine our approach to peace and stabilisation operations with our allies and through the Challenges of Peace Operations Project. With participants from all the key peace operations contributors this project has been very productive over the years and has presented useful products to the UN and broader peace operations stakeholders. For many years I have also enjoyed working extensively with our regional neighbours on forging closer peace operations cooperation through exercises, conferences and training.

This experience has taught me the overarching lesson that security policy must be forged on many levels and that it is essential to be able to harness all the capabilities that our national and international agencies can bring in a cohesive framework.

One of the reasons I decided to enter politics was because I was deeply dissatisfied with our national security policy as failing in these key respects. Our approach was one dimensional and at a strategic level we were not contributing to the discussions of how to actually succeed in the environments in which we were placing our men and women in uniform. This to me was not only letting our allies down in leaving all the intellectual heavy lifting to them but was an abrogation of our responsibility to our troops.

Within the ADF I was concerned that we weren't equipping our leaders with the full situational awareness they needed for the contemporary operating environment. We weren't enabling them to shape that environment, to understand that a modern Defence Force must be capable of appreciating the impact it can have on other actors and dynamics and the need to be able to generate a broader range of effects than pure combat power.

We also needed as a nation to be able to give effect to the Sun Tzu dictum that “the acme of success is to win without fighting”. In other words, through cohesive approaches to

cooperation and aid programs and skilled diplomacy, to neutralise sources of interstate friction, and to identify and address fault lines in fragile states in our immediate vicinity.

This is why I have been so delighted to be a part of the Rudd Labor security team. We now have a political leadership that “gets it”. As the Prime Minister put it, our new philosophy can be summarised as “either we shape the future, or the future shapes us”<sup>1</sup>. The embodiment of our approach at the highest level is the concept of the “Three Pillars”. These pillars - our alliance with the US, closer engagement with the UN and other multilateral institutions, and comprehensive engagement with the Asia-Pacific – underpin the way in which Australia will seek to build effective relationships that will contribute to security regionally and globally.

Our alliance with the US is deep and abiding and goes beyond the transience of any one Australian or US administration. This is a relationship forged in blood and underpinned by basic values that are immutable. My grandfathers fought with US troops in WWII and I have imbibed the relationship personally through serving alongside my US brothers and sisters in uniform in Somalia and Iraq. US involvement in our region is critical and I have taken great pleasure in watching the US relationship with many of our neighbours deepen over the years. Most recently I was pleased to play a part in this process by working with my US and regional colleagues on the implementation of the Global Peace Operations Initiative.

We have failed in recent years, however, to add value to this aspect of our security policy through neglect of cultivating a sound multilateral security posture. It pained me to watch, for example, the negative attitude, particularly in their early years, of the previous government to the UN. I would be the first to admit that the UN is an organisation with flaws but it is also an organisation which provides irreplaceable potential in facilitating political transition and settlement, providing stabilisation and reconstruction capabilities, conducting and validating elections, providing inter-positional and lower level civil police/military peacekeeping and in conferring legitimacy. Much that went awry in Iraq in 2003 could have been prevented by taking advantage of these strengths.

In both our relationship with the US and the UN our Middle Power status carries potential as well as limitations. Our size, particularly in terms of military strength, gives us a perspective that can sometimes be lost by larger actors. It can enable us to operate in difficult diplomatic spaces where others may appear threatening and to be a bridge to understanding. The UN offers smaller States the potential to generate greater strategic weight and our history of constructive engagement in the UN as a Middle Power places us well in this respect.

Australia’s strong support of the UN is evident in our record in leading and participating in UN peacekeeping operations. Australia has contributed to over 50 peacekeeping operations

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<sup>1</sup> Asia Pacific community words provided by The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

under UN auspices since its inception. Today, our people are serving in UN-led or UN-approved peacekeeping operations around the world including in Sudan, the Middle East, Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste. We are also the 13<sup>th</sup> largest contributor to the UN budget, and the 12<sup>th</sup> largest financial contributor to peacekeeping operations. We are intent on enhancing the UN, to build on its strengths and potential and that is why we are seeking a seat on the UN Security Council for the 2013-2014 term.

This brings me to our region and our concept of comprehensive engagement. It is important to first identify some key features and dynamics of the region before discussing the security policy aspect of this. The most clearly identifiable and immediate physical threat we face is terrorism. In recent years we have seen a proliferation of organisations and issue-motivated individuals that have caused harm to the citizens of many countries in the region including our own. Particularly concerning have been Jemah Islamiyah, Laskar i Taibar, Laskar Jihad, Abu Sayaf, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Patani United Liberation Organisation, Kumpulan Mujahadeen, Tamil Tigers, Uighur Muslim separatists in China and Al Qaeda associated elements. These elements pose a challenge for our security agencies and have driven the forging of much closer cooperation in the exchange of information, control of funding and sharing of technical expertise. Beyond this are more subtle challenges including denying such organisations sympathy and support amongst populations whose grievances and needs are readily exploitable. In relation to Islamist terrorism it is essential that we work hard at building relationships with, support and promote the majority voices of moderate Islam. We should seek every opportunity to facilitate interfaith dialogue and contact.

In our immediate vicinity we face challenges of instability where political or communal divisions can or have spiralled into circumstances requiring some kind of intervention. Often we have not adequately identified or addressed the developing situations that would enable us to avoid costly interventions. At times when we have deployed into these situations we have restored a level of public security for a time but not resolved underlying causes or fault lines in particular areas such as good governance or the security sector.

While there are potential sources of friction in State relationships in the broader region we have evolved reasonably sound political fora to provide a means of building confidence. Australia plays a key role in many of these fora: for example, we helped to establish APEC and we were founding members of both the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum or ARF. Established in 1994, the ARF remains the only body in the region that brings all the major players together to focus specifically on security issues, positively contributing to counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and maritime security and a broad range of security challenges through preventative diplomacy, confidence building and increasingly practical measures. I am pleased to have played a part in building the peace operations network that has sprung from the ARF. ASEAN itself has made a remarkable contribution to establishing

stable relations between the countries of South-East Asia, and Australia is proud to have been the first ASEAN dialogue partner in 1974.

Our growing economic interdependence has acted as a further constraint to conflict. Of particular concern though is the potential for cancerous destabilisation to emerge if our efforts in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al Qaeda were to be unsuccessful. The harm we seek to contain and eliminate extends from the flow on drug trade all the way through to the consequences of a nuclear armed Pakistan becoming ungovernable or subverted by Islamist extremists.

Other regional dynamics and factors include:

- Shifts in the distribution of strategic, economic and military influence within the international system will need to be carefully managed to ensure ongoing stability;
- The potentially catastrophic impact on human lives, trade flows and the movement of people posed by health pandemics;
- In 2007 there were 241 natural disasters across Asia resulting in 15,000 deaths<sup>2</sup>. Cyclone Nargis in Burma, the recent earthquake in China and further back the tsunami and Pakistan earthquake remind us all of the devastating effects nature can inflict; and
- Climate change and its effects, including the demand for energy, fresh water and food will be an increasingly important factor in human security in the region.

To address the challenges of this contemporary and future international security environment, we must expand our domestic capability beyond individual agency planning and operations to integrate our military, police, political, humanitarian, economic and development goals. We must also look for every opportunity to improve engagement in our region and build platforms to enhance cooperation, to develop what the Prime Minister has described as a habitual operating principle of cooperation<sup>3</sup>.

One key piece of capability to facilitate this process will be the newly raised Asia Pacific Civil Military Centre of Excellence, which was a key election commitment of this Government. Effectively what we seek to achieve with this Centre is to hard wire integration in the way we approach not only the conduct, planning and management of operations but also in our

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<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister: The Singapore Lecture – “Building on ASEAN’s Success – Towards an Asia Pacific Century”, 12 August 2008

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister’s address to the *Asia Society AustralAsia Centre Sydney*, 4 June 2008.

cooperation programs for the prevention of conflict. We will staff the Centre with personnel seconded from the relevant agencies including DFAT, Defence, the Australian Federal Police, AusAID, and the Attorney General's Department. In bringing these personnel together we will pursue the forging of interagency understanding of all the dimensions and factors that are required in a holistic planning process. One of the first tasks that will be performed by the Centre will be to develop a whole of government campaign plan template, enabling the bringing together of all agency perspectives on how we can achieve success in a particular environment. This has been a missing link in the way we participate in and conduct operations; thinking through clearly what is the end state we're looking to achieve and how does each agency contribute to that end state? How do we harness all the aspects of national power to achieve success, and what will it look like?

Having gone through that conceptual exercise we will then have hooks in that campaign plan from which other agencies will be able to hang their individual plans. The Centre will facilitate the translation of the strategic campaign plan into this agency planning process. So for example, there will be "dotted lines" from the Centre to Headquarters Joint Operations Command, where they will assist in the development of the ADF operational plans and relevant annexes, to the AFP's International Deployment Group at Majura, to AusAID and possibly EMA. As part of this process the Centre will be a vehicle for bringing in NGOs into mission planning. The Centre will also participate in the scoping and reconnaissance for a mission and perform field surveys to determine adjustments that may need to be made to ongoing operations.

The Centre will develop a "think tank" capacity involving research and analysis, reaching out to subject matter experts and NGOs, providing a platform for sounding out and developing policy ideas that can be fed into Government. In this role the Centre will collaborate with other organisations such as the Lowy Institute. Through that process we should be able to provide better support to the decision makers and the strategisers. They in turn will be able to reach out and task the Centre to provide assessments and obtain a full understanding of the cultural context and human factors in an area of operations, and what may or may not work in that particular context.

We'll also look to see this Centre provide for the capture of lessons learned, the development of integrated doctrine, the design of training and the generation of exercise opportunities. It is one thing to hear and read these things but it is also essential to practice them.

As I was often fond of saying while in the Army, real life is not a fire and movement exercise at Puckapunyal, which is to say that once basic skills are transferred to our personnel we must then look to give our exercises and training fidelity by reflecting the real world and

providing an opportunity for agency personnel to work together and learn each others capabilities, practices and limitations.

In this way we will grow personnel who are capable of operating and succeeding in a multiagency, complex environment. Effectively this will mean we will one day have a generation to whom we won't have to explain the importance of this Centre!

In the Defence environment what we're saying is that we certainly need warriors. We must have warriors. But what we need is warriors who are also civil military operators. We want to give them an extra golf club in their golf bag, if you like. The United States Marine Corps took on board this necessity when they developed the "Three Block War" concept. Loosely this meant being prepared to operate in an environment where troops may be called on to perform conventional combat, peace keeping and humanitarian relief by turns and possibly even within the physical space of three city blocks.

I watched this in action in Iraq in the form of the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Marine Battalion commanded by my friend Chris Conlon. He fought his battalion all the way up from the Al Faw peninsular to Baghdad University during the manoeuvre phase of the Iraq campaign in 2003. He was then assigned the Tactical Area of Responsibility of Najaf where his troops were required to transition to civil-military operators. They did this with great professionalism and success as Chris also fell back on his USMC "Small Wars" Manual of 1922, which he had an original copy of. Proof in some ways that the more things change the more they stay the same. This also highlighted how much more effective our efforts could have been in the early days in Iraq if we had acted on suggestions for a proper stabilisation plan.

In it's conflict prevention mode the Centre will seek to coordinate and make more cohesive our respective agency cooperation, aid and development programs so that we can identify the fault lines that may be emerging in our regional context and then tailor complementary programs to address these.

We also see this centre as an important way to network with other regional and international organisations to ensure interoperability and monitor best practice developments. These organisations include the Post-conflict Reconstruction Unit in the UK, which has now been rebadged as the Stabilisation Unit, the Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force in Canada, the Office of the Coordinator of Reconstruction and Stabilisation in the United States, and the European Union's Civilian Headline Goal, 2008 program.

It will also be able to engage with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and draw on lessons from the developing UN doctrine and Integrated Mission Planning Process. It will establish links with NATO's CIMIC groups. Eventually the Centre will subsume the role of the ADF

Peacekeeping Centre and therefore engage in networking with regional peacekeeping organisations of which there are a growing number. This is a very important aspect of what the Centre will deliver, as security dialogue and engagement in the region is easier to facilitate in a disaster relief, peace operations and UN context.

We will eventually develop a training capacity in the Centre where courses catering for around 60 people may be run. We will also run conferences and seminars as part of the think tank and lessons learned functions which will hopefully generate useful publications. It is our ambition that these activities will involve a high level of participation from the region and that the Centre itself will acquire secondments from our neighbours.

What has been discovered in many of our operations is that you need people with civil expertise who are deployable. This can be tackled by drawing on civilian volunteers from within government, building a database of civil volunteers from the public, drawing on private organisations and/or using military reservists who may be prepared to deploy for their civil qualifications and skills. Certainly we are examining this requirement at the moment and on my part I have directed that we start mapping the civil skills that exist in the ADF reserves as this exercise has never been undertaken before. The Centre would provide an important role in the doctrinal, training and planning assistance for utilising such personnel.

An example of the sort of circumstance where the Centre would come to the fore in enhancing regional security, taking advantage of our capacity as a middle power, is in the Solomon Islands. In April 2003, faced with escalating ethnic conflict, the Solomon Islands Government requested Australia's assistance to address its acute crisis. In July 2003, no more than three months after the initial request for assistance, over 2000 police, military and civilian advisers from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Fiji arrived in the Solomon Islands to restore and maintain law and order.

What became known as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands or RAMSI required a concerted civil-military effort. While the Solomon Islands Government was 'cooperative' the issues it faced were deep-seated and culturally-based. The regional response to the crisis is indicative that one nation's crisis can be a regional concern. In the case of the Solomon Islands, a multinational combined approach by a group of relatively small nations is making progress.

The international response was facilitated through the cooperative conclusion of a suite of international legal instruments as well as by the Solomon Islands amending its domestic legislation.

Today, over 700 personnel from fifteen regional countries contribute to RAMSI to promote stability and growth in the Solomon Islands – including about 140 Australian Defence Force Reservists along with their military counterparts from New Zealand, Tonga and Papua New Guinea. Notwithstanding its progress there were significant issues revealed in the early phases of the operation in the ability of the ADF and AFP to operate together and political weaknesses were not properly identified and addressed at later stages of the mission.

The ADF operation in the Solomon Islands has faced a less volatile (but no less protracted) security environment compared to other theatres, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the challenge for the ADF and Australian Government lies in planning our civil-military approach to maximise our chance for success in each different situation, to encompass the myriad of political and social factors that will drive the nature of the military and civilian response.

With the contribution of the Centre, I hope that Defence and all of our agencies will become known for two particular qualities: flexibility and imagination, as this is what the contemporary security environment really requires of us. The challenge for us is the ability to be flexible in the capability that we bring to the table, in our strategic analysis and our ability to think outside the square.

This extends to the way we determine what sort of assets and capabilities we acquire for the ADF. An example of the sort of flexibility in application of our assets was the recent disaster relief operation in Burma. The international response to the devastation caused to Burma by Cyclone Nargis was logistically and politically complicated; making a concerted civil-military response crucial to the successful delivery of aid.

Cyclone Nargis hit Burma on May 2, with an estimated 134,000 people dead or missing, and leaving over 2 million people in need of basic supplies according to the International Federation of the Red Cross. The Australian Defence Force and AusAID initially supplied 31 tonnes of humanitarian relief – including water, shelters and blankets – to Burma on May 13, transported to Rangoon by the RAAF as part of a UN-led effort.

This operation, Op Nargis Assist, could not have been achieved without extensive coordination with our regional neighbours, especially in obtaining diplomatic clearance for the RAAF C-17 Globemaster aircraft from the five countries whose airspace it had to travel through to complete its humanitarian mission. This effort meant that Australia was one of the first countries to deliver relief supplies to Rangoon.

Adding its voice to the broader international community, Australia was active in pushing the Burmese regime to allow greater access to the regions devastated by the cyclone. We were also active in supporting calls by ASEAN and the United Nations for Burma to open up its

borders to foreign aid workers. Through ASEAN, a coordination mechanism for the delivery of aid ensured the worst affected victims of Cyclone Nargis were provided with humanitarian assistance.

However, this was only one part of Australia's response to the disaster. While Australia had pledged \$25 million in humanitarian assistance, delivery of other responders' aid was still an issue and the World Food Programme requested logistical support from Australia for the worst affected areas. Drawing again on the ingenuity and responsiveness of the ADF, the RAAF picked up a pair of SA330J Puma helicopters in South Africa, and delivered them to Thailand on behalf of the WFP.

This operation was the first time a RAAF Globemaster had carried Puma helicopters, which are larger and heavier than the ADF's Black Hawk helicopters, and required the RAAF to develop new procedures to carry the load safely to Burma. The clearance of new loads for carriage on ADF aircraft can often take months depending on the complexity of the load – but for Op Nargis Assist this was condensed into days. Combining the ADF's knowledge and experience with Australia's cooperation with regional partners made an immediate and positive contribution to this vital international humanitarian assistance effort. Of particular note was the superior capacity the Globemaster has given us for situations such as these.

Similarly we will greatly benefit from the LHD vessels that will come on line in a few years time. These will enable us to conduct mass civilian evacuations and provide disaster relief in addition to enabling the projection and sustainment of force as part of peace or stabilisation operations.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion I hope in this presentation I have given you some impression of our thinking and new direction, particularly with respect to the practical applications we seek to achieve in enhancing regional security as a middle power. I believe under this Government, Australia has an opportunity to reach its full potential as a force for good in the region and internationally. I am greatly excited to be a part of it.