

Problems of weak governance affect many of our near neighbours. And climate change will add to the frequency and scope of humanitarian disasters. A new Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence (the Centre) will be officially opened by the Prime Minister in November in Queanbeyan, a town near Canberra. It will focus on bringing a range of agencies together to develop practical contributions to stabilisation, reconstruction and peacekeeping. This was a Labor election promise.

### **Ambitious objectives**

The current government's vision for the new Centre, that will be headed by Major General Mike Smith (Retd), a former deputy force commander in East Timor and subsequently CEO of Austcare, is ambitious. In recent speeches to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and in the John Gee Memorial Lecture last month at the Australian National University, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, Dr Mike Kelly (who has been given portfolio responsibility for the Centre) stated that the Centre will 'hardwire integration' into the planning and management of operations and in prevention and cooperation activities.<sup>1</sup>

He saw the Centre contributing to a whole-of-government campaign plan template, which would provide all relevant agencies' perspectives on identifying what success looks like, what the end state should be, and provide information on how each agency can contribute.

Dr Kelly stated that the Centre would harness the whole-of-government and national (NGO, industry, academic) resources and ensure the integrated culture was built. Over time, the government wanted the Centre to develop:

- its role in conflict prevention, through facilitating coordination to achieve cohesion in agency international cooperation/assistance programs
- as a think tank undertaking research and as a platform for developing policy
- to provide better support to decision makers and strategic policy practitioners
- to provide expert input regarding integrated doctrine, training and exercise development

- to network with other agencies such as the UK Stabilisation Unit, the Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force in Canada, the Office of Stabilization and Reconstruction in the US, the UN's Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Unit, as well as relevant peacekeeping centres
- to benchmark international best-practice and incorporate it into the Centre's programs
- to ensure Australia is well-positioned to plug into coalition and multilateral operations where others have developed this capability.

The Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade issued a report in August this year on Australia's involvement in peacekeeping. The Committee also recommended an ambitious program of activity for the Centre. It called for a Task Force to be established to conduct a scoping study to ensure that the Centre becomes a 'regional centre of excellence and a vital part of a web of similar institutes throughout the world.'

There's no doubt that assisting fragile states in our region needs skilful interventions. The rule of thumb for stabilisation solutions is 20% security and 80% social, political and economic actions. As Timor-Leste and the Solomons show, nation-building efforts require enormous cooperation between a range of agencies to help build stable democratic societies. Non-government organisations in particular are critical: more often than not, it's these bodies with the closest ties to civil society in the states where Australia may be deployed.

And these interventions can be required for years: a recent World Bank study by Professor Francis Fukuyama of Johns Hopkins University concluded that an exit strategy for the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) isn't possible. The social conditions that led to the violence persist in ways that make it impossible to consider ending RAMSI's presence any time in the foreseeable future. Professor Fukuyama states that: 'RAMSI is thus operating under rather fictional premises, namely that at some point the country's capacity will improve across the board to the point that RAMSI can be withdrawn.'<sup>2</sup>

### **Engage Japan and Melanesia**

One key country that Australia should issue an early invitation to participate in the new Centre's work program is Japan. Japan and Australia concluded a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in March 2007. Tokyo is keen to cooperate with Canberra in strengthening regional stability: in July this year Japan offered to contribute peacekeepers to the Australian-led stabilisation mission in the Solomon Islands. At the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Niue in August 2008, leaders welcomed and endorsed Japan's interest in cooperating with RAMSI.

Another group of key states the Centre should involve in its operations is the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)—PNG, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu. These are the countries where most Pacific Islanders live, and they are the Pacific states most likely to encounter problems of political stability and human security in the years ahead. The MSG Secretariat was recently opened in Port Vila, built with funds from China. The MSG's first Director-General from PNG has his salary paid by China.

The Melanesian states are currently examining the costs and benefits of establishing a sub-regional intervention force to respond to security situations. The idea is gaining currency in Melanesian political circles. The possibility of a request for Australian participation in a new peacekeeping mission in Bougainville, for example, can't be ruled out: serious local differences are emerging over the resumption of mining and negotiations with foreign mining companies.<sup>3</sup>

China is now lavishing money on its loyal South Pacific allies and expanding its military links in the region, with military cooperation agreements with Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea. China has announced future plans to train their senior military officers in Beijing.

While the Centre would no doubt want to engage with China on relevant civil-military issues, it would be in our long term interests if Canberra, not Beijing, took the lead through the newly created Centre, to develop the doctrine and training for any regional intervention force. It would be ironic if we found that China was coaching our Pacific neighbours in civil-military relations.

### **Include domestic emergencies and involve business**

It's critical the new Centre examine what's needed to develop a whole-of-nation capability for operations not just in the region, but also at home: civil-military cooperation is essential during the response to any catastrophic disaster scenario. Climate change will result in increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters in Australia: the ADF will thus face greater demands to assist in disaster management and response.<sup>4</sup>

The Centre should also make it a high priority to engage the business community. Given the increasing reach of global emergencies the role of business in responding to such crises will increase in importance. The private sector can move quickly, without the constraints of bureaucracy. The first radio installed on the Superdome in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was by Federal Express. Home Depot and Wal-Mart responded with thousands of staff to restore community infrastructure, while government officials debated what actions to be taken.

The resources and expertise of the private sector in logistics, distribution of supplies and strategic planning will be crucial in many complex emergencies. As the incidence and severity of regional disasters intensify the Centre should encourage collaboration between business and humanitarian actors.

The private sector is part of a changing regional order, one in which business has a role that extends beyond that of the bottom line. The capacities of business, military, and humanitarian sectors can build on the strengths of each, so that we develop the most effective response to disasters of all kinds.

### **Shift accountability**

Given the likelihood of Australian military intervention or action to redevelop a community or country, the work of the Centre will have implications for defence force structure, doctrine and training. The new Centre will be responsible to Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon, but given its mission to encourage a more whole-of-government approach to complex emergencies

it should over time be accountable to the Prime Minister through the Office of National Security in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

### Concluding remarks

There's no doubt that given Australia's national resources and geographic location, we will be called on to respond to emergencies in our troubled island neighbours and elsewhere. The 'responsibility to protect' doctrine embraced unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 2005 is also relevant here: the responsibility of a sovereign state to protect populations within its own borders, and the responsibility of other states to step in with appropriate action if it is unable or unwilling to do so. The Centre should over time make an important contribution in strengthening Australia's contribution to regional stability and development.

The real challenge to long-term regional security, however, is for Australia to become more proactive in preventing conflicts rather than simply being reactive through the deployment of intervention forces. Instability is a symptom of the underlying economic, social and political problems facing many of our neighbours and it's those sources of conflict that need to be addressed.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The John Gee lecture of 31 August 2008 is available on the Parliamentary Secretary's website
- <sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama *State-Building in the Solomon Islands* July 9 2008 <http://209.85.175.104/search?q=cache:7qjty2mwnPMJ:www.sais-jhu.edu/faculty/fukuyama/Solomons.doc+Fransis+Fukiyama+RAMSI&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=8>
- <sup>3</sup> Ron May 'Improving development and respecting sovereignty; Australia and Papua New Guinea' *Strategic Insights* Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 2008, p.11
- <sup>4</sup> See Anthony Bergin and Jacob Townsend A change in climate for the Australian Defence Force, Special Report, Australian Strategic Policy Institute July 2007

### About the Author

**Dr Anthony Bergin** is Director of Research Programs.

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ASPI  
**Tel + 61 2 6270 5100**  
Fax + 61 2 6273 9566  
Email [enquiries@aspi.org.au](mailto:enquiries@aspi.org.au)  
Web [www.aspi.org.au](http://www.aspi.org.au)

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