

problem. The methods used to conceal weapons and materials from UNSCOM were known to very few. Hiding places were particularly closely kept secrets. It may well be in some cases the only people who know the whereabouts of some of the hidden caches are now dead or still too frightened to come forward. It may also be that Iraqi officials feared to tell Saddam Hussein the truth, especially if they had inadvertently or deliberately destroyed or lost track of the material.

Finally, the search has been unnecessarily hampered because no UNSCOM and UNMOVIC records have been made available by the UN to the US-led Iraq Survey Team actually searching for the WMD. This is just plain silly. ♦

Good Fences Mean Good Neighbours

The Australia Defence Association applauds the rest of the country finally catching up to its longstanding advocacy of actively assisting Australia's South Pacific neighbours, rather than just throwing money at them and hoping they stay out of strategic sight. Few can seriously doubt that socially and economically strong countries make far more secure neighbours, and a far more secure region, than weak and disintegrating ones.

As one of only two developed states in the region, the arc of national debility and instability to Australia's north and north-east is an arc of Australian strategic and moral responsibility.

For a variety of cultural, political and economic reasons many of the macro, and all the micro, states of the Pacific are struggling to sustain themselves as sovereign states. Our policy of generous foreign aid (\$330 million annually to PNG alone) has often been in vain. Even ignoring how much of it has been squandered, and the corruption it has financed among many of the island political elites, the billions of dollars of Australian aid over the last 20–25 years has unfortunately hindered such countries from making the decisions needed to stand proudly on their own two feet.

Australia's reluctance to risk getting its hands dirty in helping these countries, and our over-reliance on financial aid rather than comprehensive 'hands-on' assistance, may have been necessary for a short period after these states achieved independence from Britain and France. It was, however, continued for far too long and for quite unnecessary reasons. The current government is to be congratulated on its recent initiatives. Perhaps it should also consider resurrecting the Hawke Government's initiative of a Minister for Pacific Island Relations to assist the Minister for Foreign Affairs in this regard.

The current police and military assistance to Solomon Islands, and the support 'offered' to PNG, also demonstrate how our strategic decision-making processes have matured. This strategic maturity was sadly lacking throughout the 1980s and 1990s, fostered primarily by wrong-headed thinking in much of the DFAT and Defence

bureaucracies. This 'groupthink' on avoiding supposed South Pacific entanglements proved remarkably resistant to actual experience. Better integration of advice in a formally constituted National Security Council would help avoid such policy dead ends in future.

The Solomon Islands example demonstrates some clear lessons. If we had provided the assistance required when it was first requested over two years ago it would not have involved anywhere near the size of force now required, nor would it have cost as much, nor would we have probably needed to remain as long. The overall risk of failure would also have been reduced.

That said, our assistance to Solomon Islands has gone far better than anticipated. Most of the worst warlords are cooperating and the disarmament of the factions, and indeed the criminals, has progressed very well. Even most of the doomsayers, wallowing in their outmoded 1950s politico-babble by Fanon and Sartre, have shut up.

The real test of our good neighbourliness is, however, still to come in PNG where the standard of living has actually declined for many since independence. This is a much bigger, more diverse and more populous country than Solomon Islands. In some ways its social deterioration and law and order problems are worse, certainly those caused by urban drift, unemployment and underemployment. Cash for example, has had to be moved to and from highland banks by helicopter for well over a decade.

PNG's political class have also not had the wake up call that their Solomons equivalents experienced after the coups in the latter country and the ensuing economic and social collapse. Too many of them continue to believe they are not primarily at fault and that PNG's problems are caused by 'dark outside forces'. Regional assistance to PNG led by Australia will therefore require considerable tact and patience. ♦

How Crabby is the Hermit?

The contradictory responses from North Korea following the recent and inconclusive six-party talks hosted by China are to be expected. Once again we see a mix of compromise, belligerence and intransigence from the totalitarian North Korean regime.

Judicious pressure on the regime to conform to the norms of international behaviour, especially in standing by agreements it has made, need to continue. Chinese influence on the North has been very positive and China continues to hold the key to the ultimate resolution of the Korean problem. Background activities such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) provide useful checks and balances on North Korea kicking over the traces again.

While there are risks in raising the PSI option they are outweighed by the advantages. The recent PSI maritime exercises conducted in the Coral Sea by the USA, Australia, Japan and France are the type of restrained