

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

demonstration of international resolve needed to further effective diplomacy. North Korean criticism of the exercise was to be expected and can be ignored.

The Korean Peninsula is the last serious flashpoint left over from another era. There are other leftovers from the 1947–1989 Cold War between democracy and totalitarian communism, such as the China–Taiwan dispute, but they are generally not as serious.

Any war on the Korean Peninsula would, of course, be catastrophic unless North Korea imploded quickly with the effort. No matter how catastrophic, however, Australia would be involved. We are a signatory to the 1953 armistice and our alliance with the USA, Japan and South Korea, and our international reputation generally, would be severely damaged if we tried to opt out of our responsibilities.

North Korean threats to use nuclear weapons in its defence continue. No one outside North Korea really knows if that country has nuclear weapons and if so how many. No nuclear explosions have ever been detected and it might all still be bluff. Public estimates by the CIA put the figure at two weapons at most. Other estimates believe it might be higher. The difference is that one or two would constitute a last resort capability only while half a dozen would allow some ability to strike and then counter-strike. No one really knows how much plutonium the North possesses, either processed at its Yongbyon reactor or perhaps smuggled in from overseas.

The most reliable public estimates state that North Korea has about 14.8 kilograms of plutonium derived from Yongbyon in the early 1980s and, on International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) figures, at least 8000 spent fuel rods. If (or when) reprocessed, and it's a big 'if' (and even bigger 'when'), the 8000 rods might allow five or six nuclear weapons depending on the state of North Korea's nuclear engineering technology (another little understood subject).

The North's ability to actually deliver a nuclear weapon is also uncertain. While its bombers have some limited capacity to deliver a bomb of such physical dimensions, the technology gap in airpower compared with the US and South Korea mean the chances of this occurring, except through complete surprise attack, must be considered negligible. Similar criteria and the paranoia of the regime make the covert deployment of a nuclear weapon, on a ship for example, relatively unlikely.

North Korea's longest range missile considered capable of carrying a nuclear weapon payload can reach all of South Korea and most of Japan. In 1998 North Korea actually test fired a 'Taepodong' missile over Japan into the North Pacific Ocean.

The recent deployment by the US of a Patriot Advanced Capability missile battery to South Korea is a prudent step in helping contain the North Korean problem. The North, of course, has described it as a 'provocative action to complete US preparations for war', but as Christine Keeler famously said in another context, 'they would wouldn't they'.

The whole problem of North Korea will go away one day. The real problem is that it might not go away soon enough or that its going away through the inevitable collapse of the regime might be very messy. ♦

Weighing the Balance of Terror

As the first anniversary of the terrorist attack in Bali approaches the recent convictions in Indonesian courts of leading perpetrators of the attacks give some confidence for the future.

Since the attacks in New York and Washington in September 2001, all major terrorist attacks have occurred against soft targets in the 'Third World'. This is not to say that Western countries are safe from such attack as the probability is that we will again be surprised at some time. It does indicate, however, that the ability of transnational Islamic terrorist groups to strike at the 'West' with impunity is not as great as first feared, and will remain so if we do not let our guard down.

As argued in the last *Defender*, the strategic centre of gravity of these groups is their ability to recruit. The civilised world must continue to remove the ignorance that the terrorist's bigotry thrives on, and the 'causes', both real and imagined, that motivate their extremism.

The struggle against transnational terror by Islamic extremists requires us to carry the fight, both physical and socio-economic, to the terrorists and the societies that breed and nurture them. The struggle will not be won if we sit behind our military, social and economic ramparts and cede the initiative to the terrorists. ♦

The Road to International Legal Limbo is Paved with Good Conventions

The provisions of international law usually tend to lag well behind the practice. Determining the status, treatment and duration of detention of those detained at the US-administered terrorist prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba are a case in point.

The US has agreed to provide the detainees with conditions not less than they would be entitled to if they qualified as Prisoners of War (PW) under the Geneva Conventions. This, at least, largely solves the treatment issue.

Few seem to doubt that the overall status of those detained has outrun the provisions of international law. With the possible exception of some wholly Taliban members, especially Afghan ones, they cannot be classified as soldiers fighting for a lawful belligerent as defined by the Conventions. Nor, as armed belligerents, do they fall under the protection of the Conventions as civilians caught up in the fighting.

International law is fairly clear on what those detained at Guantanamo Bay are not. It is much less clear on what they are. The term unlawful combatant is uncertain in