

and logistics should not account for the balance of 40,000 personnel in the regular ADF. Even if it does, Australia's resultant inability to deploy and sustain a tri-Service force of little more than 3000 personnel gives us not merely a very small self-defence capability, but also a serious lack of options for governments of any colour to use the ADF in support of its foreign policy.

Fulsome pats on the back from allies and boastful public-relations spin from our own government do not affect the hard-nosed judgements that both allies and potential adversaries will make about Australia in private. Nor should they be persuasive to the Australian electorate.

The real reason for our claimed inability to do any more is the refusal of the government to spend money on operations, which add considerably to the standing costs of the defence force. For all its rhetorical commitment to national security, the present government has cut personnel numbers by 11 per cent. Even now it is talking about capability cuts to a force that has been compelled to retain equipment that has long passed its use-by date while deferring new projects. Defence spending, which averaged 9.0 per cent of total federal outlays in the 1980s, has fallen to an average 7.3 per cent under the present government.

For its part, the Opposition's contribution to the national security debate has been virtually non-existent, at least in any substantial way. Apart from nit-picking criticism of administrative detail, there are no policies and no commitments. The Parliament's joint sub-committee on defence is increasingly restricted to references received from the government while its reports vanish into the archives. Attempts to debate the reports founder on a lack of cooperation from the government or an almost total lack of interest and knowledge by MPs.

What the community thinks of all this is difficult to discern. Public-opinion polls rarely ask about national security and even when they do, the studies lack any sort of context that would force a considered response. With very few exceptions, the mainstream media lacks both interest and expertise with reports and commentary generally lacking any strategic context. As a direct result, the ADF has become less of a national defence force than some sort of utilitarian organisation to be deployed for political aggrandisement rather than national security.

Alternatively, we have a community and a body politic that is unwilling to face up to the hard decisions demanded by contemporary security challenges. ♦

Whither the WMD?

Hectares of newsprint and hours of television and radio coverage have been devoted to the subject of Iraq's apparently undiscovered weapons of mass destruction. Much of this coverage would appear to be more motivated by seeking to embarrass the current US, British and Australian governments than by genuine interest in the whereabouts of the weapons.

The ADA submission to the parliamentary inquiry noted several key points in relation to the matter. The

first and most important of these is that Iraqi possession, development and use of such weapons is indisputable. When UNSCOM was finally forced out of Iraq in 1998 there were numerous unresolved matters. Most of these were taken up by Hans Blix and UNMOVIC in late 2002. The key to the mystery is what happened in the four-year hiatus between UNSCOM and UNMOVIC inspections.

From April 1991 until the collective intervention in April 2003, Iraq continually disregarded its responsibilities and obligations under international law to both disarm and to disarm in a verifiable manner. In a nutshell, Iraq was never able to prove to the UN's satisfaction that it had ceased its WMD programs as required by the international community. On the contrary, UNSCOM continually discovered active Iraqi measures to evade its disarmament obligations and continue some WMD programs, especially regarding prohibited chemical and biological weapons.

As the final head of UNSCOM from 1997–1999, Richard Butler, testified to the current Australian parliamentary inquiry into Iraqi WMD:

'It was expected that, following the invasion and occupation of Iraq, substantial quantities of remaining weapons would be found. But they have not been, and that, of course, is a problem, at least in logic. Why haven't they been found? I put it to you that positing the concept of these things being unaccounted for is not the same as positing the existence of these things there are four possible explanations for this in objective logic.

'The first explanation is that those weapons have been destroyed, and there is some evidence that some destruction has taken place. The second explanation is that they continue to exist, but up to the present point they have been successfully hidden and may one day be uncovered. We do not know yet. The third explanation is that they have been removed to another country or place; that they are not in Iraq. In the past, I saw some evidence of Iraq warehousing some of its material across the border in Syria from time to time, but I am making no accusation about that. The fourth logical possibility is that they have not been found because they actually do not, and did not, exist; that the posited quantities actually did not exist.

'I have already hinted that I think there has been some destruction but, if you want to ask me which of those four I think is the best explanation, the only honest answer I can give to you is that I do not know but I think we should try and find out.'

It's a big country to search and at least part of the problem is public expectations as to what would be found. Rather than Scud missiles on launchers buried in sand dunes, much of the unaccounted for WMD materials are drums of chemicals and bacteriological growth medium. The UN has the documents proving Iraq procured the material. Iraq has not been able to satisfactorily account for what happened to it.

The totalitarian nature of the previous Iraqi regime, and its sudden and violent end, may also be part of the

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