

Military partnerships

not political pandering

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In November 2005 the United States Senate voted to amend a \$A676.2 billion Defence spending bill to require President Bush's administration to set benchmarks and make regular progress reports in respect to the US military's ongoing involvement in Iraq. Part 3 of the Republican-moved amendment ordered that the 'calendar year 2006 should be a period of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty'. Part 5 ordered that the Bush Administration 'should tell the leaders of all groups and political parties in Iraq that they need to make the compromises necessary to achieve a broad-based and sustainable political settlement'.

US Senators from both parties are clearly becoming increasingly alarmed that the White House is providing an open cheque book to the current interim Iraqi administration and thus removing pressure for them to get their own house in order. This evidence of a bipartisan alarm bell in the United States about the ongoing mismanagement of the Iraq war should serve as a wake-up call for the Howard Government.

Our present open-ended and open cheque book approach to participation in Iraq is fundamentally flawed. The recent AUSMIN talks in Adelaide saw Foreign Minister Alexander Downer say the Government has 'an open mind' to additional Australian troop deployments in Iraq. The Defence Minister has similarly left our troops in the lurch when asked about military planning for Iraq. On 17 November 2005 he was quoted in *The Australian* as stating:

'It shouldn't be assumed that... by the end of next year, we'll have less forces there. ...there will be plenty of important work in Iraq to help the new government.'

The failure to precisely identify our mission and set appropriate goals and bench marks, let alone an estimate as to when they are likely to be achieved, leads to an inescapable conclusion. The future destiny of our \$A1.2 billion involvement in Iraq will have more to do with satisfying the political audience of the current US administration than pursuing Australia's primary strategic interests.

It is noteworthy that independent strategic experts have highlighted the political significance of Australia's involvement in Iraq. In the Australian Strategic Policy

Institute's authoritative *The Cost of Defence* budget brief for 2005-06, Dr Mark Thomson wrote:

'In assessing our contribution to Iraq, it's important to remember that the conflict – especially the combat phase – has not enjoyed universal support among US allies. From a purely political perspective then, then key point is that we played an active role when few others would. It was the fact of our contribution, rather than its size and composition, which ultimately mattered.'

The United States alliance is vitally important to Australia's national security but we should not be discharging our obligation by political symbolism. There is actual doubt that we are doing little more than that.

American assessments

The United States Department of Defense each year presents to the United States congress a document entitled *Allied Contributions to the Common Defence*. This document measures the United States' assessment of a country's share of total contributions to military operations relative to its share of ability to continue to contribute. The assessment is expressed as a ratio.

A ratio of between 0.8 and 1.19 indicates that a country's contribution is roughly in balance with its ability to contribute. A ratio of 1.2 or greater indicates 'substantial contributions' relative to a country's ability to contribute. Ratios below 0.8 indicate 'very low effort' relative to ability to contribute.

With the exception of one criterion, Australia's contribution was rated as being 'a very low effort'. In respect to personnel which includes all military personnel provided as a contribution to military operations we were rated as 0.56. On ground combat capability which includes major combat systems, including tanks, artillery and attack helicopters in support of army units we were rated at 0.33.

In respect to fighter/interceptor, fighter/bomber, conventional bomber and tactical fighter reconnaissance aircraft (including combat capable trainer and electronic warfare aircraft) we were rated at 0.74. In respect to naval supplies, tender and transport tonnage, which includes

amphibious warfare ships, various types of tenders, landing ships, tankers, transport and other support ships we were rated at 0.57.

In terms of transport aircraft capacity which includes military fixed-wing transport aircraft and multi-role tanker/transports we were rated as 0.45. For tanker aircraft fuel offload capacity which includes fixed-wing air-to-air refuelling aircraft and multi-role tanker/transports we were rated as 0.38.

The only area where we only achieved more than very low effort was in respect to the funding share of our defence compared to gross domestic product which was rated at 0.87. In other words, if Australia were to be chosen for its military contribution to the overall alliance it will be left on the bench every time.

Value-adding more effectively

There is no doubt that our servicemen and women have a deserved global reputation for playing above their weight. The reality remains however that Australia's population of 20 million people places natural constraints on the potential size of our military. It is therefore and imperative that the national government maximises our military's competitive advantages.

To be most effective we should focus on where we can provide the greatest value-adding to both our own security as well as discharging our obligations as an effective military alliance partner. Clearly we are living in a dangerous neighbourhood and it is that South East Asian region where our historic, diplomatic, military and geographic ties give us greatest scope to assure our own security and maximise our contribution to the alliance.

In that context our open-ended deployment in the war in Iraq must be seen as a massive opportunity cost. There can be no denying that the \$A1.2 billion that we have spent in Iraq are resources that are not available to fight terrorism in our region. For instance we have spent more on the war in Iraq than the entire annual operating budget of the Australian Federal Police.

When I visited the United States last year it was made clear to me that the United States Military and Law enforcement agencies would welcome a greater Australian contribution to their efforts to develop effective security arrangements in South East Asia.

The United States contribution to security in South East Asia is impressive and despite our proximity significantly exceeds our own. The recent announcement by Senator Hill to work in greater partnership with the Philippines Government in the fight against terrorism in the Southern Philippines is welcome. Indeed it is the sort of thing we should have been doing over a number of years. The United States has been actively involved since October 2001.

The United States provided military observers to the Southern Philippines to assess and assist Philippines military operations against Abu Sayyaf in Mindanao. They have provided a 180-foot patrol vessel to the Philippines – their most effective interdiction vessel against drug traffickers as well as potential terrorists. Train-the-trainer programmes

have been developed for the military and civilian law enforcement authorities. The United States has also assisted with updating technologies and in June this year one of the three US-trained Light Reaction Companies apprehended two New People's Army commanders.

Between January and July 2002 the United States deployed 1200 military personnel for the Balikatan joint operation against Abu Sayyaf in the province of Basilan. Plans were then developed for a second-phase Philippine-US operation against Abu Sayyaf on the island of Jolo. In May and September last year a co-operative investigation between the US Department of Homeland Security and Philippine officials resulted in the first-ever money laundering charges against Abu Sayyaf terrorists.

In Thailand the United States has institutionalised anti-terrorism co-operation through the Joint Counter Terrorism Intelligence Centre. The contribution of financial support and the participation of CIA agents in developing expertise as part of that centre unquestionably resulted in the capture of the notorious terrorist Hambali and a number of other suspected Jemaah Islamiyah operatives.

In Indonesia the United States has assisted with the establishment of a national police counter-terrorism unit and a financial intelligence unit. American experts have also provided technological assistance to the Indonesian national police headquarters, provided joint training in explosive incidents and counter-measures, trained law enforcement officials in anti-money laundering strategies and have provided expertise for the training of prosecutors and counter-terrorism intelligence analysis including developing an exchange program for intelligence officers.

This financial year the US Department of Defense has also provided \$US600,000 to a defence regional counter-terrorism fellowship program to provide training on counter-terrorism and related issues to the Indonesian military. As an excellent example of enhancing security through community building, in October 2003 the US instigated a \$US157 million program to improve the quality of Indonesian schools by strengthening secular public education in order to combat the dangerous development of fundamentalist schools.

In March 2004 Cambodia, with US assistance, destroyed its entire stock of man-portable air defence systems in part to ensure these weapons would never fall into the hands of terrorists.

Bolstering the fight against trans-national crime

Another successful example of United States involvement in the security of South East Asia is the through the Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF West). The task force was initially established in 1994 to assist in the fight against the escalating narcotics trade but extended to include a wide range of transnational crime and is now vital in the fight against terrorism. It draws together relevant specialists from the military, the intelligence community, the FBI, the Coastguard and the Department of Homeland Security.

The view was put to me in the US that Australia could greatly assist in opening doors and supplementing task force activities. The functions of JITF West include detection, monitoring and support of interdiction operations including detection and monitoring of drugs and gun shipments, as well as illegal immigration. JIATF West also supports partner nations in their enhancement of law enforcement activities in neighbouring countries. This includes assistance with logistics; intelligence analysis; maritime security; police training; developing common communications and computer technology platforms; and developing inter-agency communications intelligence fusions, both domestically and, where relevant, with neighbouring countries.

The more law enforcement activities we can undertake offshore and in particular by assisting partner nations to develop effective law enforcement strategies, the safer our own cities and towns will be at home. For a relatively modest investment significant leverage could be obtained by working through JIATF West which has specifically stated that it would welcome a closer relationship with Australia.

Examples of work currently being undertaken by JIATF West are directly relevant to Australia. In the Philippines the task force is providing ground training, developing a maritime intelligence centre and providing improvements to maritime training infrastructure. In Indonesia it is assisting in the development of the Maritime Intelligence Centre and has provided maritime training. In Malaysia JIATF West is providing ground training and in Thailand it is developing a train-the-trainers program for both ground and marine operations.

Last year the United States Congress also approved \$US660 million for a global peace operations initiative aimed at alleviating the world-wide shortage of trained peacekeepers, including police, civil-engineering, civil servants, medical and social services support. This program acknowledges the security consequences of failed states and has provided resources to prevent countries falling into that cycle. The South East Asian region has been identified as a target recipient for that funding. Again Australia could make a worthwhile contribution to this programme.

The sheer volume of US security efforts in our own backyard demonstrates there is a tremendous amount of work to be done close to home to confront terrorism, money laundering, the drug trade and smuggling of all kinds.

Past experience has shown us that this is the region where we can play a vital role in enhancing our own security, and where we can most effectively contribute to the international fight against terrorism. In doing so we would unquestionably be adding significant value to our alliance relationship with the United States. ♦

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