

Chapter 26

Conclusion

26.1 Since 1947, Australian peacekeepers have been involved in international peacekeeping operations. They are widely recognised for their commitment, dedication and high standards. As noted earlier in the report, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery, Governor-General of Australia, recently added to the praise often bestowed on Australian peacekeepers:

All three services of the Australian Defence Force, as well as Federal, State and Territory police officers and experts from other government agencies have served with compassion and professionalism and at times with high personal bravery. They have earned the respect and admiration of governments, aid agencies and civil populations throughout the world. We have a proud history of Peacekeeping service.¹

26.2 Today's peacekeepers face new challenges. During the past 60 years, the profile of peacekeeping missions has changed substantially. In the early years, Australia was involved exclusively in UN-led operations that were focused primarily on preserving the peace. The Australians engaged in these traditional operations served in small contingents primarily as military observers monitoring truce lines or state borders with the consent of the host countries.

26.3 In recent times, however, Australia has been required to contribute to a number of peacekeeping missions that are both complex and multidimensional in scope. Often the disputes involve protagonists in intrastate conflicts and occur in volatile circumstances with greater risks and costs than experienced in traditional peacekeeping operations. Many of these missions encompass long-term objectives that seek to address the deepest causes of conflict. Beyond the security component, the objectives include economic development and sustainable governance, humanitarian support, fiscal management, democracy building and election monitoring. These missions rely on a greater range of skills and personnel, including military, police, civilian and NGO participants. To be effective, the different components of an operation must work together as an integrated whole to achieve the objectives of the mission.

26.4 Australian peacekeepers have experienced first hand the difficulties coordinating the various elements of a peacekeeping operation and in making the transition from one phase of a mission to the next. They have served in UN peacekeeping operations that have come under severe criticism such as the troubled missions to Somalia and Rwanda. In these cases, Australian peacekeepers witnessed

1 Governor-General of the Commonwealth Australia, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC, Speech, Reception for Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project Committee, Admiralty House, Sydney, 25 October 2007.

the horrors created by intra-state conflict. Australia has also taken on leadership roles in peacekeeping missions to Cambodia, East Timor and Solomon Islands. Regional engagement is a major focus of Australia's current involvement in peacekeeping.

26.5 These changes have profound implications for Australia as a member state of the UN and a long-time contributor to peacekeeping missions. The committee has made a number of recommendations concerned with ensuring that Australian peacekeepers are well prepared to meet the challenges of today's missions. In particular, the committee emphasised the importance of interoperability at all levels of an operation—between relevant government agencies; government agencies and NGOs; Australian peacekeepers and the host country; and between Australian peacekeepers and their partners in the operation. It suggested that better communication, training and joint exercises, and collaboration in developing shared doctrine would help to improve coordination between all participants in a peacekeeping operation.

26.6 The committee was also interested in developing a more effective whole-of-government, whole-of-nation approach to Australian participation in peacekeeping from the earliest decision-making and planning stage to the evaluation and final reporting stage. The committee's two key recommendations dealt with developing a whole-of-government policy that would be articulated in a white paper on peacekeeping and with building on the government's announced establishment of the Asia–Pacific Centre for Civil–Military Cooperation.

26.7 Other committee recommendations dealt with more specific aspects of Australia's engagement in peacekeeping operations, including: the adequacy of a mission's mandate; emerging doctrines such as the responsibility to protect; the legal basis of a non-UN mandated operation; exit strategy; and women in peacekeeping. Protecting Australian peacekeepers from unnecessary harm, including to their mental health, was also addressed in the committee's recommendations.

26.8 The executive summary brings together the committee's main findings and all its recommendations.

SENATOR MARK BISHOP
CHAIR