

Combined defence exercises

Introduction

- 4.1 Coalition operations are likely to be the norm for like minded western forces for the foreseeable future. Few nations will have the complete range of military capabilities required to take unilateral military action but more importantly, few nations are likely to risk the strategic isolation that might result from such an act.
- 4.2 Building and maintaining a coalition is a demanding task. Australia experienced the demands of coalition leadership during the East Timor intervention in 1999. More often however Australia is likely to contribute forces to a coalition led by an ally. Given the global role and reach of the US, the US military is likely to be the lead organisation in such a coalition, whether building a group of like minded nations as occurred in Iraq in 2003 or acting on behalf of the UN Security Council as had previously occurred in the Balkans.
- 4.3 Ad hoc coalitions are fragile and demand constant attention if they are to survive. Coalitions based on extant alliances have the durability to nurture a range of capabilities that can be developed over time, for example 'through sustained cooperation on military exercises and training, the networking of information flows and of forces, and shared experience in joint operations.'¹
- 4.4 Interoperability with US forces and the ability to contribute to multinational coalitions are central themes in Australia's policies,

1 ASPI, *Alliance Unleashed: Australia and the US in a new strategic age*, p. 3.

acquisition programs and training plans.² The policy and acquisition components of interoperability are addressed in chapter 3. This chapter will explore the types of shared training experiences with the US military that are necessary to achieve the high standards of interoperability achieved in recent years in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also evident through the extensive security cooperation over five decades.

The nature of Australia - US defence exercises

4.5 Defence traditionally organises itself for command in three organisational levels – the strategic, the operational and the tactical. These levels are not universally applied, for example a four man Special Forces patrol would normally be regarded as a tactical formation but their actions may have strategic consequences. However the three levels are sufficiently well understood to provide a useful framework against which to discuss military interoperability.

4.6 The Australia Defence Association (ADA) describes the importance of exercising at all three levels:

Given that the United States is our major ally and that we operate with them quite closely within Australia, the region and even further afield, we have to exercise at every level. The current suite of exercises between the two countries is extensive and time-tested...The command post exercises and the strategic level map exercises are important because they set the broad criteria of what each country can and cannot bring to the table. The operational level exercises, particularly those involving deployment, are important because you basically need to test what you promised to bring to the table. The lower level tactical level exercises at unit and subunit level are important because people need to get to know each other and the operational culture.³

4.7 In order to explain this element of the Australia-US Defence relationship, the following definitions should be noted:

- training – preparation of skills for individuals or teams that will allow them to respond to an expected range of circumstances (many ADF pilots for example are trained in the US);
- exercises – part of the training continuum, usually toward the end of a training cycle and used to validate higher order skills for collective

2 Department of Defence, *Submission 6*, p. 7.

3 Australia Defence Association, *Submission 5*, p. 23.

groupings (would usually start at sub unit level and may conclude with complicated groupings across services and countries);

- joint – exercises or operations involving more than one service (an amphibious exercise would involve at least Army and Navy elements); and
- combined – exercises or operations involving more than one country (an exercise might be combined and joint if the US Navy was supporting an amphibious exercise in Australia).

4.8 Major exercises such as the well known Kangaroo or Crocodile series of exercises aim to provide training benefit for all three levels of command and are both joint and combined. They may contain the following elements:

- high level staff discussions. Officials such as the Commander US 7th Fleet may meet with Australia's Deputy Commander Joint Operations Command in Australia. They will discuss each other's capabilities, and in particular what forces may be available in each country to support particular military response tasks. Discussions at this level will then drive exercise planning and objectives at the remaining levels.
- operational level planning may be conducted using a Command Post Exercise or Map Exercise. This level of exercise play is increasingly enabled by sophisticated computer based simulations. Commonality of 'architecture' for such simulations will allow future interactions to occur without forces leaving their home bases, even if these are on different continents. Where 'real' exercise play is involved it is often the large scale deployment, operational manoeuvre and logistic support that create the most significant training advantage at this level of command. In discussion of the importance of this level of interaction with US forces, Defence stated:

Exercise participation helps establish the fundamentals of interoperability such as the connectivity of our communication and data systems, and an appreciation of our approach to issues such as rules of engagement (ROE). Importantly, our performance in major joint exercises builds confidence within the US that we are a capable coalition partner. A further benefit is the opportunity afforded by these exercises for ADF officers to fill important command positions within a large joint [and combined] force conducting complex operations.⁴

4 Department of Defence, *Submission 6*, p. 8.

- tactical level exercise activity is where 'the rubber meets the road'. Commonality of equipment or platforms is important but the ADA believes common doctrine, or 'good understanding of each other's underlying operational culture',⁵ is more important. The interaction of individuals and teams at the level where combat occurs is where the greatest understanding is achieved.

Value

- 4.9 Evidence to the inquiry overwhelmingly supports the value of combined exercises with the US. Whether these are combined single service exercises such as Rim of the Pacific 2000 (RIMPAC), Red Flag or Pitch Black or combined joint exercise such as Tandem Thrust or Crocodile, numerous benefits were reported. The RSL stated:

The seventh point was the value of joint defence exercises between Australia and the USA such as RIMPAC. The value of such exercises is immense, both in terms of the experience gained during the exercises—in planning and during—and in terms of effective interoperability of Australian forces with those of the USA in time of war. This value was demonstrated in the UN naval blockade and multinational invasion of Iraq.⁶

- 4.10 Similarly, the ADA commented that 'a defence force fights as it trains.'⁷ Benchmarking with organisational peers is an important component of the maintenance of standards and '[c]ombined exercises with allies and potential coalition partners are essential to maintaining ADF efficiency at world class standards.'⁸ The ADA concluded that such exercises 'increase the chances of operational success and reduce the likelihood of casualties.'⁹

- 4.11 Significant advantages are also reported from the US perspective. Future Directions International stated:

The seamless integration of ADF units into US led operations in the Middle East and elsewhere, and the US integration into Australia-led operations like East Timor, is a direct result of many years of combined training.

5 Australia Defence Association, *Submission 5*, p. 5.

6 Returned and Services League of Australia Ltd, *Submission 1*, p. 6.

7 Australia Defence Association, *Submission 5*, p. 8.

8 Australia Defence Association, *Submission 5*, p. 8.

9 Australia Defence Association, *Submission 5*, p. 8.

Similarly, many US commanders have experienced the ADF first hand during combined training exercises and are therefore confident in Australian operational competence.¹⁰

- 4.12 The Committee received further insight into the US perspective on the value of combined training and the potential of the JCTC when its delegation visited HQ Pacific Command (PACOMD) in Hawaii. Admirals Roughead and Tracey, two of the most senior US military personnel in the Pacific, both spoke in glowing terms of the standards and performance of ADF, both during training exercises such as Exercise Talisman Sabre, and during operational activities such as the Tsunami Relief in December 04 / January 05. They described the very high levels of procedural interoperability achieved between the two defence forces in the Pacific Theatre, based on shared military and social cultures.
- 4.13 Admiral Roughead made particular mention of the shared leadership and decision making between US PACOMD and the ADF at the height of the Tsunami crisis. The mature relationships between the two organisations, developed over many years on exercises, allowed the most effective distribution of aid to the region without overlap and waste, and with unprecedented speed. Admiral Roughead suggested Australia was the only alliance partner in the Pacific Theatre capable of achieving this immediate level of understanding and cooperation.
- 4.14 Admiral Tracey also described the importance to the US of exercises such as Talisman Sabre, now regarded as the major exercise in Pacific Command for enhancing the core skills of US forces and for enhancing interoperability with Australian forces.
- 4.15 While evidence to the inquiry favoured the continuation of combined training between the US and Australia, some groups continue to strongly oppose such training. The MAPW describes three areas for which they have serious concerns. They state:

The environmental impacts of the forthcoming Talisman Sabre exercise are likely to be enormous and go far beyond the single issue of depleted uranium, but at the absolute minimum the Australian Government should ensure that depleted uranium weapons are not used. Failure to do so would be an abrogation of the Government's responsibility towards the health of the people of Australia.

A further health concern in relation to large scale military exercises is the impact on health for women (and men) in the area. MAPW believes that any assessment of the outcomes of such exercises

10 Future Directions International, *Submission 3*, p. 7.

which does not measure the rise of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and other undesirable social outcomes, is incomplete.

A more fundamental concern with such large scale exercises being conducted in Australia is the message this sends to our neighbours and others, who could well ask: Why is Australia doing this? There is currently no threat to Australia for which Operation Talisman Saber is relevant. Therefore the following question remains unanswered: Against whom is Australia preparing to fight? Such uncertainty is destabilising, and can only undermine our relationships with our neighbours.¹¹

Australia - US Joint Combined Training Centre

- 4.16 Discussion of a combined US–Australia Joint Combined Training Centre (JCTC) has attracted significant public and media attention in Australia as some groups linked the centre to a permanent US defence presence in Australia. Progress on defining the exact nature of the JCTC however has been slow. In March of 2004 Defence stated:

At the Senate legislation Committee in February I mentioned that the joint training centre concept is still being investigated and that we have commenced some scoping options. We do not expect to have them completed until about June. Australian officials met in early March in Canberra to try and progress the joint training centre concept a bit further and to establish a sort of task list of things that we might want to address. We currently have a small Australian delegation in Hawaii—they are actually there today—with US Pacific Command officials for further discussions. The focus that really started was a joint training centre for Australia and the United States, but, more importantly, Pacific Command would probably be the principal US user.¹²

- 4.17 The range of options appeared to vary from a formalising of existing US access to Australian training areas such as Shoalwater Bay and Bradshaw Field Training Area through to an Australian version of the US Combat Training Centre, examples of which are currently operated in both the US and Europe. Dr Rod Lyon and Ms Lesley Seebeck suggest that 'opportunities should be explored to maximise the range of joint training

11 Dr Susan Wareham, Medical Association for Prevention of War, *Submission 22*, p. 5

12 Mr Shane Carmody, Deputy Secretary, Department of Defence, 26 March 2004, *Transcript*, p. 8.

between the two countries, including training in the difficult areas of urban operations and 'stabilization' missions.'¹³

- 4.18 What was agreed is that the proposed facility will not be a US base on Australian soil. The US Ambassador stated:

I have not heard anybody talk about the necessity of basing anything in Australia. As far as I am aware and as far as I have heard General Myers, the Chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff, was here in January and he specifically said that that was not contemplated by anybody. Admiral Fargo, the Commander of our Pacific Command, has said the same thing. Doug Feith, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Defense Department, who is in charge of all this, said the same thing when he was here. So I do not think anybody contemplates the need for a base or a request for a base in Australia.¹⁴

- 4.19 In a later submission to the inquiry Defence updated the Committee on progress in defining the JCTC. Defence stated:

At AUSMIN [Australia / US Ministerial Talks] in July 2004, Ministers agreed to advance the JCTC as a means to improving high-end interoperability of Australian and US forces. The JCTC will also provide valuable assessments of Australia's operational preparedness and inform future capability development. Subsequent working-group meetings have produced a roadmap to test the Centre's capability in 2007 at the major Australia-US exercise, Talisman Sabre, to be held at Shoalwater Bay Training Area.

- 4.20 Defence continued by describing the nature of the JCTC when they stated:

A mature JCTC should not be seen as a test range or even a series of ranges. The JCTC should function as a training system that links training management systems, training areas, simulations, headquarters and units. It is proposed that the JCTC should be linked to the US Pacific Command's Pacific Warfighting Center and the US Joint Force Command's Joint National Training Capability as part of the US Global Joint Training Infrastructure. The JCTC concept envisages the enhancement of a number of Australia's ranges, including SWBTA, Bradshaw Field Training Area and the Delamere Range Facility. Ultimately these ranges could be networked through a series of interoperable systems and interfaces, enabled by advances in information technology.

13 Dr Rod Lyon and Ms Lesley Seebeck, University of Queensland, *Submission 4*, p. 7.

14 US Government, *Submission 7*, pp. 14-15.

- 4.21 HQ Pacific Command also stressed the importance to the Command of the ongoing development of the shared JCTC in Australia in discussions with the delegation in June 2005. The US officers explained that the JCTC will form an important step in the PACOMD preparedness pathway, particularly in the development of core warfighting skills and for interoperability with Australian forces. The delegation was given the impression that HQ PACOMD would be happy to see development of the JCTC move as quickly as practical toward resolution.
- 4.22 Despite the advantages combined training brought to activities such as Tsunami relief operations in Indonesia early in 2005 some groups continue to oppose such training. Equally, regardless of whether US forces will be permanently based at the JCTC, support for the concept is not universal. WILPF believe that 'no US base or 'training facility' can be in the long term interest of Australia as it will diminish Australia's standing with SE Asian and Pacific countries.'¹⁵

Exercising National Command

- 4.23 Recent military operations have been significantly more complex than many of the significant conflicts of the 20th Century. Threat forces in Afghanistan and Iraq have chosen to operate from amongst the population in those countries. In the insurgency phases of these operations threat combatants have rarely worn uniforms and have chosen to target the civilian population and civilian contractors as well as coalition service personnel. In such confused and demanding conditions, participating countries have imposed different national constraints on their military forces when these forces are required to apply force. These constraints are referred to as National Rules of Engagement (ROE).
- 4.24 As the nature of modern conflict has evolved, so too have Defence training activities. Defence evidence to the inquiry describes how Australian National Command and ROE are incorporated into all exercises with the US. This serves to ensure that US Commanders are aware that Australian Military Forces will at times have different restrictions placed upon them than those applying to US forces. Defence state:

Australian National Command and Rules of Engagement (ROE) are incorporated into all Australian exercises with the US. This is a fundamental aspect of ensuring our forces understand and can operate together effectively. ADF "Standing ROE" documentation is reviewed regularly to ensure currency, with training and

15 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Submission 17*, p. 7.

exercise of these procedures occurring at all levels of Australia-US military engagement (from Command Post exercises to tactical level training). For example, Australia uses the Combined Rules of Engagement when exercising with US Pacific Command forces. Interaction between Australia's Asia Pacific Military Law Centre (APMLC) and the US Army Centre for Law and Military Operations makes important contributions to enhancing interoperability. The APMLC's charter is to facilitate cooperation amongst military forces of the Asia Pacific region in the research, training and implementation of the laws governing military operations.¹⁶

- 4.25 This aspect of combined training, while not as high profile as the amphibious landings on an activity such as Exercise Talisman Sabre, is critical to the success of modern operations. Members of the Committee who have travelled to Iraq and Afghanistan to visit ADF task groups in recent years have observed that significant differences exist in the Australian and US approach to the application of force and the development of ROE. Interaction on exercises will ensure that such differences are not a surprise to either side once operations commence.

Impact of High Operational Tempo on Training Activities

- 4.26 Since 1999, when the ADF became heavily committed to stabilisation operations in East Timor, the ADF has had a relatively high operational tempo. US forces began a similar high tempo period even earlier, with significant involvement in both Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. Since September 2001 US forces have entered a particularly demanding period of operations in which many US formations have deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan every second year.
- 4.27 The demands on both countries have impacted on the availability of force elements for training activities. Defence states:

The high tempo of operational commitments for both Australia and the US has had an impact on training. Because of our tsunami relief efforts and Australia's deployment of the AMTG to Iraq, some military assets previously assigned to exercises, such as Talisman Sabre 05, were not available for training. The US is also heavily committed to operations in Iraq, and their assistance to tsunami and earthquake disasters in Indonesia has resulted in a

16 Defence, *Submission 20*, p. 9

short-term reduction of personnel and equipment available for exercises with Australia.¹⁷

- 4.28 Defence were confident that the reduction of forces available for training exercises would not impact on preparedness levels. Defence state:

This will not necessarily impact on interoperability between Australian and US forces because Australia's participation in operations with the US has allowed us to test 'real-time' interoperability, providing a better understanding of how our forces operate and can combine more effectively. The access Australia has in US-led operations, through senior command positions and embedded liaison officers, greatly improves our understanding of US forces.¹⁸

Conclusion

- 4.29 Evidence to the inquiry has been overwhelmingly in support of the value of combined exercises with the US. Submissions highlight the high standards of interoperability achieved in recent operations such as Tsunami Relief and in the Middle East as examples of the benefits of such exercises. The dangers of such issues as fratricide, a real concern when operating different or unfamiliar equipment in a dense, complex operating environment, mean that such interoperability is not a trivial issue.
- 4.30 The Committee are also aware of the extent of differences in national ROE. In Iraq for example, a recent Committee delegation was briefed that the US remains on offensive ROE, with very few restrictions on the application of force, while Australian forces have progressed to defensive ROE. The Australian troops that comprise the major Australian task group in Iraq, the Al Muthanna Task Group (AMTG), regularly participate in such exercises as Gold Eagle – a reciprocal exchange with the US Marine Corps – and so understand the US military culture and their very different ROE. Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan, while likely to have ROE close to those of their coalition partners, will still have a very different national view on the application of force. Perhaps more than any other group in the ADF, the Australian Special Forces will have worked long and hard to cross pollinate understanding of techniques with their US partners during extensive training exchanges.
- 4.31 The issue raised in earlier chapters about the nature of the alliance and possible perceptions about the lack of Australian independence mean that

17 Defence, *Submission 20*, p. 10.

18 Defence, *Submission 20*, p. 10.

support for combined Australia - US training is not universal. The Committee also acknowledges concerns over the potential environmental impact of such training, and that major offensive exercises such as Exercise Talisman Sabre may send a negative message to some of the more sensitive countries in the region. Equally the Committee acknowledges community concern over the prospect of the JCTC, should that concept develop into a US base or facility.

- 4.32 However, the Committee strongly supports the need for combined training with the US across all three levels of command. The exposure of all echelons of the ADF to the culture and capability of the US military is critical to subsequent Australian success on operations. The US operates at a size and breadth of capability well beyond the experience of members of the ADF. For these members to develop the ability to contribute to large scale coalition operations they must have the opportunity to observe US forces in training.
- 4.33 The Committee also expects that interaction between the ADF and the US military may lead to enhanced levels of understanding within the US of the strengths of the Australian way of conducting operations. In some cases it is possible that the smaller ADF may have been able to adjust to the demands of modern military conflict more quickly than the much larger US forces. In such cases interaction with the ADF may have a positive impact on US performance.

Recommendation 4

The Committee supports the continuation of joint training between the Australian and US Defence Forces and recommends that the Joint Combined Training Centre (JCTC) concept be codified in a Memorandum of Understanding before Exercise Talisman Sabre 2007.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Defence Force continue to apply the most appropriate rules of engagement consistent with the Australian assessment of application of force.

