



Submission No 34

Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation

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**Submission to the Joint Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade
Inquiry 2012
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**WHY MORE, NOT LESS, GOOD DEFENCE ATTACHES
ARE NEEDED IN THE 21ST CENTURY.**

Executive Summary:

In the 21 st century, the role of Defence Attaches is no less important than before. It has changed to reflect two factors, a million Australians being overseas at any one time and fast breaking regional strife be it Lebanon 2006 or Libya 2011. The overall number of Defence Attache Representative Staff at about 94 may be near the mark, the distribution is another matter urgently requiring attention, eg Lebanon being covered by an Officer based in Berlin, Egypt being covered by an Officer based in Madrid !

Introduction:

Ninety nine years ago developments were unfolding in the Balkans and across continental Europe that led inevitably to World War One. The so called Great War, the war to end all wars, could have been avoided even after the firing gun had felled Archduke Ferdinand on a beautiful street corner in downtown Sarajevo if Defence Attaches had stepped up and reported fearlessly back to their Capitals and if the reports had been taken on board. This was not to be and so millions died in WW 1, thousands of Australians on the Western Front and a lesser number at Gallipoli.

This century so far, large set piece continental warfare has given way to a series of regional based conflicts, necessitating the need to have eyes and ears well placed to anticipate events and also to respond to events be they in South Asia (eg Mumbai) or in the Middle East (eg Conflict within the occupied West Bank, including Jewish Outpost settlers stoning a Bethlehem University Professor and student in 2011, Bethlehem University and other West Bank Universities have Australian staff from time to time).

Example of a modern Attache at work:

The cauldron engulfing the rim of the Med in 2011 / 2012 and previously East Timor are examples of suddenly arising conflicts, one on our doorstep. From the “Balfouresque” letter written by PM John Howard to Indonesian President B.J. Habibie in late 1998 to conflict on the ground necessitating an International Force in East Timor, the time frame was less than nine months. Let us examine the Med first and then one example from East Timor.

Around the Mediterranean, the year 2011 saw changes of Governmental Leaders in more than six countries: Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Greece, Italy and Spain to name some, I say again no less than six countries. In Tunisia, Libya and Egypt there was massive violence and revolution, the so called Arab Spring, with Constitutional upheaval and huge regime change. The Christian Copts in Egypt were targeted and murdered with Churches burnt, I might add in the melee some Muslims helping to defend Copts were killed by the Egyptian Army. The saga in the seventh, Syria, continues to unfold.

As thousands poured out of Libya, including many Australian citizens, it was Consul General Tom Yates helping on the ground, literally driving people around barricades day and night in Tripoli before he too was ordered out due to the growing danger. Many went by special flights, in the rush not without some disconnect, others went on by ferry from Libya to Malta where our Ambassador Anne Quinane and Defence Attaché team members from London met each ferry and provided great assistance. I might add the efficient fast Austal WA built ferry, Maria Delores, played a vital role.

There was one Australian businessman who had been arrested by the Gaddafi regime and was being held in custody, in an unknown location. An effort involving Tom Yates and his tiny team on the ground, along with many others right up to and including Minister Kevin Rudd led to the release of this businessman. High level bilateral links with Turkey really helped and in the end the businessman was flown out gratis on a Turkish military aircraft with Minister Rudd personally and directly thanking his opposite number in Turkey. In all this having a Defence Attache based in Turkey helps greatly.

In sagas like Libya and previously Lebanon, it irks that the shrill complaints of the odd person whose rescue was delayed but later went out via London,

so safely out of harm, often dominate the media. Consular rescue efforts know no bounds and are greatly assisted by Defence Attaches on the ground.

KEN BROWNRIGG: DEFENCE ATTACHE

It is worth detailing the role of a particular Military liason officer, effectively a Defence Attache, by way of example of how vital their work can be. I refer to then Colonel Ken Brownrigg AO.

For many years in the last decade, Ken Brownrigg was Defence Attaché for Australia in Jakarta, but for a period in 1999, he was just one of two Australian Government officials on the ground in Dili, after the ballot for East Timor Independence and before the arrival of INTERFET. His work was dedicated, discerning and saved lives.

Using good local knowledge, he intervened in a positive way, persuading General Peter Cosgrove to change the order of battle and insertion of INTERFET, with many lives saved and objectives obtained, back in September 1999.

((NB Incorporated details: This saga is detailed in the first book I wrote "Ballot and Bullets: Seven days in East Timor (Allen and Unwin) EXTRACT FOLLOWS:

It was a day to day existence as the crowded UN compound was threatened, the Australian HQ likewise and much of Dili was torched by wild pro Indonesian gangs throughout September 1999. At one stage, Ken had a member of the militia point a gun through the vehicle window at his head, but he kept his cool and continued to do both his military and his diplomatic job.

It is a matter of public record that, on the Sunday 26 September 1999, the eve of the arrival of the INTERFET force in East Timor, led by General Peter Cosgrove, a reconnaissance was carried out by the General and discreet briefings provided re the battle plan for the INTERFET insertion the next day.

General Cosgrove then returned to Darwin, on that Sunday night where he received a message and call by secure line from Ken Brownrigg, who took

the unusual and brave step of suggesting to the General that the SAS helicopter insertion planned for pre-dawn at Dili airport might not be the best way to proceed.

Rather, the INTERFET Force should arrive by Hercules as the Indonesian Forces in and around Dili airport were used to Hercules coming and going every day. The concern of Ken Brownrigg was that in the confusion of pre-dawn darkness, with SAS slipping down ropes, a shooting match could unfold.

His argument won the day, with General Cosgrove cancelling the helicopter insertion. Further Colonel Ken Brownrigg went around to all of the Indonesian Army weapon pits advising in fluent Bahasa Indonesian that there would be a few extra Hercules in the morning, carrying international forces approved by Jakarta and involving several Asian countries and Australia.

He gave out extra supplies of tea and coffee, suggesting that these could be useful to welcome the new arrivals and it all worked smoothly, with the INTERFET Forces arriving by Hercules at Dili Airport and soon after assuming command and control of this airport without casualty.))ENDS

Often the role of the Defence Attaché is overlooked on the diplomatic front, in war and peace it is a vital part of the fabric of diplomatic weaponry and resources, a very valuable element in situations such as the Lebanon War in the Northern summer of 2006, when many Australian citizens were trapped in Beirut and seeking a way out as well as East Timor.

Conclusion:

However Australia has a scarcity of Defence Attachés where it counts, in postings abroad. Our Defence Attaché` based in Madrid, Spain has to cover half the Med, right through to and including Egypt. It has not been a quiet twelve months in Egypt I hasten to remind and Madrid is a long way from Cairo. Right now our Turkey based Defence Attaché` has to cover Israel as well, no matter that diplomatic relations have recently been ruptured between Turkey and Israel.

The Defence Department and Minister Smith have not so long ago split South Africa from the duties of a busy New Delhi based Defence Attache in

India, I am glad to say. We need more Attachés on the ground in many more countries than at present, in my personal view.

Defence Attaches, for that matter Minister Counsellor Agriculture or Agriculture Attaches as well, are doing vital work that is worth far more than having an extra person being squirreled away in a HQ somewhere within Australia, such as east of Queanbeyan.

Yes it costs to have a position overseas but with a million Australians abroad, with a fast moving set of sagas unfolding somewhere in the world each year, with Al Jazeera, ABC, BBC, CNN and Sky providing instant coverage but not able to do the actual rescuing, certainly not large numbers, you get the picture. Better still, a well briefed and activist Defence Attachés can anticipate and advise ahead of the worst developments, with a particular saga, helping Ambassadors and DFAT HQ to adjust Smart Traveller advice.

Australia has about 100 posts abroad at this time, the first quarter of 2012. Whilst not every post should or could justify a Defence Attache, many indeed could. Currently one quarter of all “Representative staff” or Defence Attaches of various ranks are located at one location , namely the USA and there maybe a case for this. Equally if just one quarter of the 24 listed as USA were moved to fill the obvious gaps, then a near zero cost solution can be obtained.

The Brady Report may cover this aspect or it may not but wholesale dismantling of the Defence Attache network in 2012 is exactly the way not to go, given the trends to more fast breaking regional strife involving both Australia’s strategic interests and often enough hundreds of Australians on the ground, caught in the crossfire.

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