

CHAPTER 2

THE PURPOSE OF THE DEFENCE CO-OPERATION PROGRAM

The area of focus of this inquiry, South East Asia and South West Pacific, is Australia's primary area of strategic concern. It is fundamental to Australia's interest that there be stability in both of these regions and that the countries of these regions are capable of acting together to preserve their own security.

With the scaling down of direct Australian military involvement in South East Asia in the early 1970s and a complete British withdrawal from Malaysia in 1971, successive Australian Governments have turned to the Defence Co-operation Program (DCP) to assist in fulfilling our role of maintaining and furthering Australia's defence interest in South East Asia.¹

As the Foreign Minister (Mr Hayden) has said,

Developments in Asia are going to determine the future of Australia ... if we encourage, where we can, stability, harmony, co-operation ... then we are going to get much greater stability in the region and much greater security for our nation than any piece of paper can guarantee.²

In line with this perception, the Defence Co-operation Program is intended 'to promote the national independence of participating countries'. It is also seen as a 'practical expression of our interest in regional security ...'³ which we share with these countries. By contributing to the security of the region, we are also enhancing our own security.

However, there are a number of other purposes of the Defence Co-operation Program over and above the purely military:

- (i) to round out and advance bilateral relationships in which defence links form a part of the friendly and co-operative association with other countries;
- (ii) to promote political stability and economic growth in the region through civil aid projects where they take place under the program;
- (iii) to foster friendly attitudes towards Australia on a popular level.⁴

Clearly then, the program can embrace a wide spectrum of activity, ranging from Australia's considerable defence commitments with Papua New Guinea to the more modest programs with some of the small island states of the South Pacific, which could in many cases be better described as civil rather than defence aid.

It appears from the evidence received that the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs would not disagree on what are broadly the purposes of Australian participation in Defence Co-operation Programs. They agree on the primary aim of the program - the promotion of national independence of participating countries. However, they give different emphasis to the relative importance of the other purposes of the Defence Co-operation Program.

The Department of Foreign Affairs is particularly conscious that defence co-operation activities serve a number of useful purposes over and above the purely military. These activities complement those in the political, economic and cultural fields which are designed to encourage friendly and

co-operative bilateral relationships with our near neighbours, serving both their interests and those of Australia.⁵ It may be that these additional benefits are more important than the strictly military benefits which flow from the program, particularly in the case of the ASEAN countries, where the Defence Co-operation Program is a relatively minor contribution to their defence budgets. Defence Co-operation Programs, according to Defence, are (1) not intended to draw neighbouring countries into our alliance commitments, or (2) to signify Australian endorsement of their policies.⁶

In addition to the value of these activities in developing closer links between Australia and the countries concerned, Foreign Affairs believes they also play a useful role in furthering regional confidence and cohesion by strengthening the self-defence capabilities of most of the partner countries.

This chapter will explore the four purposes in a general way on the evidence received. The later chapters will explore the role of the program in a regional context.

National Security Interests

Perhaps predictably the Defence Department believes the objective of our participation in defence co-operation with others is not primarily to contribute to economic development with partner countries, or to generate goodwill in support of foreign policy objectives; though they acknowledge that such benefits generally flow from effective collaboration to meet practical needs. As previously mentioned, the Department of Defence states in evidence to the Committee that the broad objective of participation in Defence Co-operation Programs is to promote the national independence of participating countries. They believe the programs represent a practical expression of our interest in regional security and promote contacts with the

governments and defence forces of countries with which we have shared strategic interests. Defence goes on to say that by contributing to security in our neighbouring regions, these programs strengthen Australia's own security and thus constitute part of our national defence effort.⁷ This defence co-operation relationship, according to the Defence Department, relies less on formal treaties and arrangements and more on practical contacts.⁸

The Defence Co-operation Program allows Australia to attempt to support states which are strategically significant to Australia and relevant to Australia's overall security⁹ and particularly in the South West Pacific, assists 'all to participate in some degree of regional insurance policy'.¹⁰

Round out and Advance Bilateral Relationships in which Defence Links form a Part of Friendly and Co-operative Association with other Countries

The Department of Foreign Affairs believes that the Defence Co-operation Program can play a useful role in enabling Australia to further its major foreign policy objective of developing and maintaining close and co-operative relations with regions of South East Asia and the South West Pacific.

'Co-operation or exchanges in the defence field' are seen 'as one facet of a healthy and co-operative relationship between two countries which have some measure of shared interests'.¹¹

The absence of any defence related links, while working to develop political, economic, cultural and other areas of a relationship, would mean that relationship would be lacking in one important respect.¹²

The Defence Co-operation Program with its emphasis on the region of primary strategic importance to Australia, is seen to contribute both to the strategic stability and self confidence of that region and to an acceptance of Australia's place in it. In that way it complements a range of foreign policy goals.¹³

To Promote Political Stability and Economic Growth in the Region through Civil Aid Projects where they take place under the Defence Co-operation Program

There are two separate areas in terms of the type of assistance Australia provides under defence co-operation projects. Defence co-operation to South East Asian countries, including ASEAN, has a military focus, whereas many of the defence co-operation projects undertaken in the South Pacific have little or no military focus and are distinguished from all other development assistance activities only by the involvement of Australian Defence Force resources.¹⁴ The use of the Defence Forces in this role merely reflects the availability of expertise and the logistical advantages which the use of the forces represents.

A number of witnesses suggested that the use of defence forces in this way is unwise and counter-productive. The involvement of the Defence Forces in Development Co-operation Programs, no matter what the intended motivation, would result in the general public in the donor and recipient communities seeing the project as having ulterior defence motives.¹⁵

The Committee does not believe that Australia's use of the Defence Forces in this way is having the results suggested. The Committee will comment further on this in Chapter 7, The Defence Co-operation Program and Civil Projects.

Foster Friendly Attitudes Towards Australia

There are seen to be three aspects to fostering attitudes towards Australia at a popular level.

First, in the South West Pacific and in Papua New Guinea the type of assistance provided is much more clearly and demonstrably directed to people. There is, according to the Department of Defence, a clear feeling of good-will towards Australia and an appreciation of the contribution that Australia has been able to make to assist those countries in a variety of ways through the Program.

Second, in the ASEAN countries the situation differs depending upon the role of the defence organisation in these countries. The Department of Defence said that:

In Malaysia we have a very close and friendly relationship with a professional military organisation which has a clear and positive role in Malaysian society. I believe that role is clearly accepted by the Government of Malaysia. I think you would realise it is very difficult to assess down to the grass roots but certainly from our point of view our assistance to Malaysia is greatly appreciated, as is our assistance to Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In continuation, Defence stated that:

where our projects and activities bring us in contact with the people of the country we have found that all of them have reflected well on Australia.¹⁶

Thirdly, the Defence Language School at Point Cook, Victoria, provides overseas Defence personnel with an opportunity to live and work in Australia, gaining an understanding of Australian society. Those who pass through

Point Cook do not necessarily remain in the defence organisations of their own countries. They emerge again 'as businessmen, school teachers, and cultural and civic leaders', all of them, according to Defence, with a very warm understanding and feeling towards Australia. (See Appendix 5 for the number of trainees and study visitors to Australia under the Defence Co-operation Program since 1963.)

ENDNOTES

1. See Department of Defence Annual Reports, in particular 1973, 1975 and the Government White Paper on Australian Defence, 1976.
2. Submission, (Foreign Affairs), p. S133.
3. Submission, (Defence), p. S8.
4. Submission, (Foreign Affairs), p. S131.
5. Submission, (Foreign Affairs), p. S130.
6. Submission, (Defence), p. S8.
7. Submission, (Defence), p. S8.
8. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Defence), p. 4.
9. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Defence), p. 5.
10. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Defence), p. 42.
11. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Foreign Affairs), p. 47.
12. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Foreign Affairs), p. 47.
13. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Foreign Affairs), p. 50.
14. Submission, (Foreign Affairs), p. S132.
15. Submission, (Australian Council for Overseas Aid), p. S190.
16. Evidence, (23 February 1984, Defence), p. 12.