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PACIFIC ARMIES CHIEFS CONFERENCE/PACIFIC ARMIES MANAGEMENT SEMINAR

In the week of 9 September the New Zealand Army hosted, in partnership with the United States Army, one of the largest international meetings of senior army officials ever held in this region. The Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference and the Pacific Armies Management Seminar, run in Auckland in parallel and with complementary programmes, brought together some 50 general officers from 29 countries, many of them chiefs of their respective armies, and several hundred other officers from the armies of the Asia-Pacific region and further afield. In a first for these conferences, a concurrent programme for senior army enlisted personnel was held, demonstrating the move towards an understanding that military life is not about officers and other ranks in separate worlds, but about a single system with common professional development opportunities for all ranks. Thirteen senior enlisted army personnel from around the region attended the conference.

Notable attendees included the Chief of Staff of the US Army, the commander of the US Army in the Pacific, the Chief of Army from Australia and a senior general from China's People's Liberation Army. Countries not represented from this region included Fiji and North Korea (for obvious reasons), Russia and several smaller countries. Armies represented from outside the region included those from the UK and France, both countries with residual interests in the region.

The two events are of long-standing. The management seminar began in 1978 with 9 nations represented and has now expanded to be an essential part of regional military interaction. The United States initiated the process and remains a permanent co-host, sharing the hosting duties with another nation in turn. The seminar's purpose is to enhance regional understanding of topical military issues and to develop cooperative professional relationships between the participating armies. This is the first time New Zealand has hosted the event. The Chiefs' conference began in 1997 and is held every second year. As with the management seminar, the focus is on both substantive activities and networking between these senior figures.

Unlike some previous such conferences, the conferences had some real substance. The overall theme was 'The Sum is Greater than the Parts: 21st Century Peace Operations in a United Nations Context', reflecting a general understanding that cooperation and coordination are fundamental in modern military operations. (The irony that New Zealand's UN commitments are currently quite low is not important. The issues are much the same within or outside a UN mandate, and there will no doubt be more UN operations in the future).

A keynote opening address was given by Ms Ameerah Haq, Under Secretary General of the Directorate of Field Support from UN Headquarters in New York. Her presentation gave a strategic overview of current and future UN peacekeeping with a focus on the ways that Pacific armies can work more effectively with the UN in peacekeeping operations.

Conference working sessions included consideration of 'unity of effort' and the challenges faced by land forces within UN operations, support to host nation security efforts in areas such as security sector reform, development of national armed forces, and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of insurgency or rebel forces following a conflict and, a highlight for many at the conference, a session on the 'duty of care' to the servicemen and women sent on peace operations. The working sessions included presentations by both experienced military practitioners and New Zealand and Australian academic subject matter experts. Ultimately recommendations reflecting the group wisdom and experience will be forwarded to the United Nations.

The conference has benefits at many levels. The substantive discussion allowed a wider range of viewpoints than is normally possible to consider issues of current importance to the UN. That conclusions will be forwarded to the United Nations for active consideration by officials from that organisation (who do not necessarily have the breadth of operational experience of the conference attendees) means that the conference is meeting its own mandate to enhance and develop professional knowledge.

Common and shared understandings of the issues are an important component of multilateral military operations. Conferences such as this allow for discussion and consideration of the issues to be held in advance of and away from the imperatives of day-to-day operational activities. Operational activities themselves will be informed by and ultimately enhanced by this kind of consideration before operations are undertaken.

The conference was also a chance for New Zealand to demonstrate its credentials as a modern and intellectually aware army and as a significant contributor to the development of the shared regional and professional understanding of issues that are important if the armies

are to work together effectively in peace support and other such operations in the future. New Zealand also gained immeasurably through the networking opportunities of having so many international colleagues in the country. Networking is fundamental to developing a common understanding of issues and values, and the benefit of exposing a significant part of the New Zealand Army to such a range of international experience in one setting is incalculable.

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Dr Rolfe attended the Pacific Armies Management Seminar as a subject matter expert on security sector reform