

# STRATEGIC AND MILITARY LESSONS FROM EAST TIMOR

## *Context*

The 1999 crisis in East Timor was provoked by international reaction to mass killings of hundreds of people, the destruction of an estimated 80% of property, and the forced migration of at least a third of the East Timorese population to West Timor and other parts of Indonesia, this following a referendum in which almost 80% of the population voted in favour of independence. Around 130,000 people have now returned to East Timor, but 100,000-150,000 remain displaced in West Timor and others unaccounted for.

## *Defence Needs To Be Taken More Seriously By Australia and New Zealand*

East Timor may represent a model for the future where smaller states, unencumbered with global responsibilities and the accompanying negative connotations, will take the lead in organising a coalition of the willing to respond to crises.

The East Timor crisis illustrates that those states which assume the responsibility for leading humanitarian intervention will be expected by other contributors to provide the core of the combat force and its protection (including the deterrence of military threats).

No other state was willing to match either Australia or New Zealand's combat contributions to East Timor in the crucial first weeks of the operation. Australia and New Zealand together underpinned International Force East Timor (INTERFET) with their forces making up four fifths of the early operational capacity of the force. The United States, with military resources over-stretched by other long standing commitments, and unwilling to risk casualties by deploying ground forces, limited its contributions to a warship and logistic support of the core force provided by Australia and New Zealand.

Australia and New Zealand cannot assume others will shoulder the burden of their defence. Both states need to take defence more seriously and develop a genuinely self-reliant military capacity.

## *Conventional Deterrence Works*

Intervention in East Timor was supported by a combination of economic and military deterrence. Direct United States threats to suspend International Monetary Fund loans to Indonesia pressured Jakarta to agree to an immediate United Nations sanctioned intervention (authorised unanimously by Security Council resolution 1264) by the Australian led INTERFET.

The Indonesian Cabinet agreed to the intervention, but at the time did not achieve control over its armed forces. Indonesian military commanders (and their militia allies), operated independently. The Indonesian military threatened to attack INTERFET (especially the Australians) with high tech conventional forces and lower capacity militias supported by Special Forces. While the purpose of these threats is clear, i.e. to destabilise and unnerve INTERFET- the exact responsibility for the co-ordination of these threats remains uncertain.

The Indonesian maritime and air threat (see Fig. 1) to INTERFET was capable of inflicting serious damage to its warships, logistic support ships, and unarmed transport aircraft.

Fig. 1 - Indonesian Threat to INTERFET

System	Qty	Deployed
T209 Submarine	2	One in waters off East Timor the other unaccounted for.
Frigates/ Corvettes/ Missile Craft	17 24	Small numbers Shadowed INTERFET
Combat Air Force	19 A4 Skyhawk 10 F16 46 Hawk	Small numbers deployed forward, Darwin within range, threats to shoot down RAAF fighters.
Air Defence	51 Rapier 42 RBS 70	Possibly deployed in West-Timor
KOPASSUS	6,200	200-300 deployed
Militia	10,500+	2000 hard-core. Small groups ambush/ skirmish with INTERFET 6 Militia KIA

***Warships And Fighters Played a Crucial Role***

The display of maritime and air power (see Fig. 2 and 3) succeeded in deterring a conventional air/sea attack, ensured that INTERFET forces were successfully protected, encouraged the Indonesian military to withdraw air/sea force elements while concurrently laying the basis for military to military co-operation between INTERFET and local Indonesian commanders. The display of force backed by a large ground commitment was able to deter large-scale coordinated militia/special forces operations in East Timor.

Fig. 2 - INTERFET Combat Maritime Forces

Submarines	Cruisers	Destroyers	Frigates
Classified	USS Mobile Bay	HMS Glasgow	HMNZS Te Kaha HMNZS Canterbury FNS Vendemiaire FNS Prairial HMAS Adelaide HMAS Darwin HMAS ANZAC HMAS Sydney

The display of force centred around a coalition maritime force (from Australia, Britain, France, United States and New Zealand) that included submarines, a cruiser, a destroyer, frigates, attendant support ships and was supported by Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) air combat and support aircraft.

The roles of the maritime force deployed to East Timor included escort and close protection for transport ships, the identification and monitoring of all shipping and air contacts around East Timor, afloat combat support for ground forces, and use of embarked helicopters on reconnaissance patrols of shorelines and coastal waters. As well, maritime forces provided large-scale humanitarian assistance, which included medical aid, restoration of electrical power, the cleaning and reconstruction of damaged buildings and repair of infrastructure.

Fig. 3 - Combat Air Forces Supporting INTERFET

Fast Jet Reconnaissance	Maritime Strike Fighter Ground/Attack	Maritime Patrol
RAAF FA18 F111	RAAF FA18 PC9 RNZAF A4K	RAAF P3

The full role of RAAF combat forces remains classified. The RAAF were used to send a powerful message to Indonesia that Australia possessed an air combat capability of such quality that any Indonesian air or maritime attack on INTERFET would carry a heavy cost. RAAF F18s, F111s and PC9s (in the forward air control role) were on standby, available at readiness and issued with daily tasking orders. RNZAF Skyhawks transiting through the area were immediately available to support the RAAF. Other Skyhawks, maintained at a high state of readiness, could have been used to supplement the RAAF maritime strike and close air support capabilities had the intensity of conflict in East Timor escalated a notch. RAAF Orions flew anti-submarine patrols. Other air forces positioned aircraft. These details remain classified.

***Ground Force Role***

*Ground forces do not operate in isolation, but require the security shield and support provided by fighter cover, surface warship protection and sea/air transport. East Timor was a truly joint operation in all respects.*

Ground forces played an important role in deterring attacks from militias/special forces and in restoring peace and security for the people of East Timor. This role has been described extensively elsewhere.

East Timor reinforced lessons learnt on other peacemaking operations. These lessons include the importance of maintaining deployable (with sufficient logistic and strategic transport) forces at a high state of readiness; that ground forces must provide their own protection, mobility and fire power and be able to call in heavier naval gun fire support and close air support at short notice; all ground forces must be able to interoperate with forces from other states as well as the other services (navy and air force).

***East Timor Worked Because Force Elements From Diverse Countries Could Work Together***

INTERFET functioned in the crucial first week because the Australian armed forces could interoperate with diverse contingents drawn from Britain, France, New Zealand and the United States. These states provided the core of both the maritime and ground contribution to INTERFET. This capacity to interoperate is the consequence of years of shared training, exercising, the

standardisation of doctrine and operating procedures and the operating of compatible equipment.

### *Defence Lessons For New Zealand*

#### *Only Balanced Forces Have The Flexibility Needed For Peacekeeping*

Each of the Single Services (navy, army, air force) maintains a balanced (combat, combat support and logistics) force structure and capabilities. Each of the Single Services force structure and capabilities provides the cornerstone that underpins Joint (that is where the one or more Services works with each other) Combined (where a Single Service works with counterparts from another country) Operations. East Timor emphatically reinforced the enduring relevance of this approach to force structure and capability planning. The most important contributors to INTERFET maintain balanced forces.

*If New Zealand did not have balanced forces it could not have meaningfully contributed to East Timor.*

The NZDF's force structure and capability mix provided the full range of force elements that were directly usable in East Timor (frigates, tanker, special forces, infantry group, transport aircraft, maritime patrol and general purpose helicopters). Had the conflict escalated a notch, the NZDF possessed the capabilities (artillery, air combat) to provide essential reinforcement to the Australian Defence Force.

#### *Equipment Quality More Important Than Age*

Forces deployed on peacekeeping operations should be equipped with world-class equipment. The issue at stake is not the age of equipment, but its performance. The RNZN, NZ Army and RNZAF all deployed some old equipment into East Timor. HMNZS Canterbury is thirty years old (and performed well), the NZ Army's APCs and radios are of a similar age. The recently refurbished APCs, while old, were the best performers in theatre – thanks to a recent upgrade. In contrast the very old radios were inadequate. They were both old and unreliable. The Hercules transport aircraft and Iroquois helicopters were also very old (without much

effect on performance though maintenance rates were higher than for refurbished or new aircraft).

#### *All Services Relevant*

The NZDF's Single Services each provided contributions to East Timor that were self reliant and relevant in the face of the threat to INTERFET from Indonesian naval, ground and air elements, could work in a demanding environment isolated by sea and air, and in a total joint-combined operating environment.

*Approximately 70% of RNZN, 45% of the (regular) NZ Army and 56% of RNZAF capabilities were directly used in East Timor.*

A very small proportion of the NZ Army's Territorial Force (mainly medical specialists) was used in East Timor. East Timor illustrates that the RNZN needs a four frigate navy to maintain two frigates on station at any one time (the RNZN was tasked to simultaneously provide a frigate to East Timor and another to the Multinational Interception Forces in the Gulf), and that the full range of the RNZN's, NZ Army's and RNZAF's capabilities would have been relevant to INTERFET had the conflict escalated.

The planning and movement of combat and logistic force elements to East Timor absorbed a considerable proportion of each Services planning and logistics capabilities.

#### *The NZDF Is Adept At Joint Force Planning And Operations*

*A Joint Force Commander appointed by the Chief of Defence Force undertook NZDF planning for East Timor. Cooperation between the NZDF Joint Force Commander and his Australian counterpart was smooth. All NZDF force elements were able to interoperate with force elements drawn from differing Single Services from a wide range of countries.*

# Strategic Realities Of Defending Australia

## *Closer Defence Relations*

*New Zealand's commitment to the Closer Defence Arrangement (CDR) with Australia is driven by strategic imperatives that underpin both countries strategic and defence interests.*

## *Defending Australia*

Advocates of an army first approach to New Zealand's defence (with the navy and air force reduced to logistics and transport roles) assume that an army centred contribution will be wanted by Australia. This assumption is based on a misreading of the realities that underpin strategic thinking for the defence of Australia.

*Any attack on Australia will have to traverse the sizeable air-sea gap to its North West and its North. Australian strategic planners have long accepted that the best place to stop an attack on Australia is as far from its shores as possible.*

This is why submarines, warships and fighter aircraft supported by sophisticated long-range early warning and intelligence-gathering capabilities are central to Australian defence thinking. The role of ground forces is to secure from direct attack Australia's vital infrastructure supporting the defence of the North. Australia has the ground forces it needs for this role.

Australia's strategic dilemma is that it has an enormous sea and land area to patrol but only the resources of a smaller state.

*Australia alone lacks the air and sea power to defend itself. The United States can fight one large (Gulf war type) and one small (Kosovo type) of war simultaneously while also maintaining its security commitments to Europe, the*

*Middle East, Japan and South Korea, that collectively cover most of the Northern hemisphere. The United States is severely limited, by budget constraints, in its capacity to support other allies as well. If Australia is directly attacked the United States may only provide limited military support. The United States expects smaller allies, especially in South East Asia, and Australia to take responsibility for their own defence.*

East Timor starkly illustrated the limits of the United States capacity to support a smaller ally not covered by its core security umbrella.

This is why New Zealand ANZAC frigates, perhaps F16s and Orions are so important to Australia.

*New Zealand has the capacity to add an extra 20% to Australia's capacity to defend itself.*

In this context, if New Zealand decides to commit to a purely ground force contribution to the defence of Australia, Wellington would be ironically offering a capability that is not central, and takes an enormous logistic effort to move and sustain. (There are sound arguments for New Zealand strengthening its ground forces but these are not directly linked with the defence of Australia).

If New Zealand wants to genuinely contribute to the defence of Australia it should continue to provide sea and air combat forces. If New Zealand decides to withdraw from providing sea and air combat contribution, Australia will be left alone to defend itself. At the heart of the F 16 issue is a decision. Does New Zealand want to help Australia?

*Ultimately, New Zealand's defence rests on the defence of Australia. If Australia goes down New Zealand will surely go with it.*