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LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

Sixty years of Australian peacekeeping and peace operations today



an address¹ to the Institute on 27 November 2007 by
Major General Tim Ford, AO (Retd)²
Chairman, Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project

Over the past 60 years, peacekeeping has ranked alongside war-fighting and the provision of humanitarian aid as vital functions of the Australian Defence Force and it is now just as important a function for the Australian Federal Police. Over the past decade, Tim Ford has led United Nations peacekeeping operations and has been a high-level advisor on peacekeeping at United Nations headquarters in New York. In this paper, he traces the history of Australia's involvement in peacekeeping, describes how the role has taken on a more robust and integrated (military, police and international civilian peace-builders) nature since the end of the cold war and concludes with a brief description of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project which he now leads.

Introduction

I thank the Institute for inviting me to speak about developments in peace operations and about 60 years of Australian peacekeeping. It is important that we all appreciate the commitment of Australians to peacekeeping over the last 60 years and how we are likely to continue to contribute to peace operations in the future.

Earlier this year we celebrated the 60th anniversary of Australian peacekeeping. On 14 September 1947, four Australian officers were deployed to monitor the ceasefire and assist the repatriation of Dutch forces from the newly established Indonesian Republic as part of the Good Offices Commission. This mission subsequently became the United Nations Commission for Indonesia. In Australia, we claim this was the first United Nations (UN) military observer mission, a precursor to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNSTO) deployed in Palestine in June 1948, and to the more than 60 UN peacekeeping missions deployed since. A conference was held at the Australian War Memorial from 12-14 September to examine our experience as peacekeepers in over 50 missions over the last 60 years. The event was also commemorated at various services around Australia.

Historical Context

Much has occurred with respect to international peace and security over the intervening six decades. I will discuss the experience of Australian peacekeepers over that period later, but first I wish to address the broader perspective of international peacekeeping, its

experience and development, particularly in the recent past and where it might be heading in the future.

Since June 1945, the UN Security Council has been conferred the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter of the United Nations. The Charter, originally signed by some 51 nations (including Australia), is now supported by 192 Member States and some 55 Observer Organisations.

Between 1947 and the end of the Cold War in 1989, the ability of peacekeeping missions to have a major impact on the overall international environment was limited, with only 15 UN peacekeeping operations being authorized by the UN Security Council. These missions were primarily tasked to monitor compliance with ceasefire agreements and report violations to the Security Council. They normally comprised "Blue Beret" military observers and lightly armed units whose presence provided confidence to assist the political development of limited peace agreements between States.

From 1990, at the end of the Cold War, the UN Security Council became increasingly willing to act more decisively to address a number of long-running regional and intra-state conflicts. Increased exposure through the media of the humanitarian tragedy arising out of a number of ethnic and nationalistic conflicts raised expectations of solutions that were often unable to be delivered. As a result, the UN found that its peacekeepers were deployed in a range of more difficult environments where there was little consent by the combatants to the presence of the "Blue Berets", which were poorly matched to the tasks being asked of them. It became increasingly apparent that there was a need for UN forces to become "Blue Helmets" and to be

¹Attended by 110 members and guests

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