

RECOGNISING THE PEACE KEEPERS

Address by Senator the Hon Gareth Evans QC, Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the opening of the Peacekeeping Exhibition at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Friday 22 October 1993

When Australians think of a war memorial, we tend to focus on lives lost, famous battles and great sacrifices. The Australian War Memorial - a magnificent example of its kind - honours, and honours brilliantly, the many contributions of this nature made by the men and women of Australia's armed forces in time of war.

But it is eminently appropriate, and not before time, that we also now include in the Australian War Memorial an exhibition dedicated to the peace keeping activities of Australian men and women - for the most part members of our armed forces, but also including those who have worked as civilian police, electoral monitors and human rights observers.

These activities have often involved as much danger, and have required as much courage, as any wartime campaign. And they have played a crucial role in ensuring that many other lives were saved and the world made a safer place.

Australian participation in the UN operation in Cambodia - a high risk but highly successful one - is the best example to date of all these factors at work. In Cambodia, the UNTAC operation brought to an end more than twenty years of what has been one of the great tragedies of this century - involving for the Cambodian people a bloody and awful cycle of war, civil war, genocide, invasion and civil war again.

Lt-General Sanderson, who unfortunately is unable to be with us today, led the military component of that mission with enormous distinction. Widely acknowledged as being perhaps the most professionally effective commander ever to lead a UN military mission, John Sanderson was also a first-rate ambassador for Australia.

So too were great ambassadors for this country all the soldiers, police officers and civilians who contributed in so many ways to the success of the UNTAC operation.

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Their contribution has rightly earned them a profound and enduring debt of gratitude from the

Cambodian people, and the respect and thanks of their own country.

There does seem to be something about the Australian character that lends itself particularly well to these kinds of operations - a willingness to do whatever is necessary to get the job done without much regard to forms and precedents; a willingness to respond to people as they are and as they behave, without any particular regard to rank or station; and a capacity to stay good-humoured under the most trying of circumstances. These are all characteristics which have made our peace keeping men and women - so people keep telling me wherever I go - among the most sought after peace keeping participants in the world.

There is much, these days, for peace keepers to do. Clearly, today's post-Cold War world is fundamentally different to that of even five years ago. We all welcome the fact that the nuclear threat is significantly diminished. At the same time, we must be concerned that the lifting of the Cold War gridlock has rendered the world, in a number of ways, a less peaceful place. It has created more room than ever for states to manoeuvre. Some of the emerging economic powers have yet to acquire political and military profiles commensurate with their new wealth, and the process of adjustment certainly has ample potential to generate regional tensions and conflicts in a number of regions.

We have seen, moreover, a dramatic resurgence of ethno-nationalism, often taking a violent form - the brutal face of which is brought into our living rooms each day by the CNNs of the world. Here, as elsewhere, the proliferating availability of weaponry of every degree of sophistication has given a sharp new edge to these concerns.

So the post-Cold War world has presented the international community with some real challenges. Over the past twelve months, and following on from UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's publication of his report *An Agenda for Peace*, there has been a wide ranging international debate on how best we can promote and secure peace. Such a discussion is, of course, not new. What *is* new however is the degree of attention being devoted to the role of the United Nations, in particular its peace keeping operations.

But before we can have a rational and detailed discussion about the UN's peace role, it is essential that around the world we speak the same language, using the same concepts in the same way, not talking past each other. "Peace making", for example, means different things to different people. Similarly, there is not yet a commonly accepted check list of criteria to guide decision makers in the Security Council or elsewhere in determining when precisely a peace operation - whether by way of peace keeping or peace enforcement - should be set in train, how it should be structured, managed and resources, and how long it should continue.

My book *Cooperating for Peace* - the 'Blue Book' which I launched last month at the United Nations General Assembly - addresses these two issues. It also suggests ways in which the UN might be better funded, structured and organised to deal with the increasing demand being

made upon it and the increasing complexity of peace operations. (Before I go any further, I must thank the War Memorial for including a copy of the Blue Book in this peace keeping exhibition: I have to say, however, that it is a rather disconcerting experience to find oneself - for the first time - as a museum exhibit!)

Cooperating for Peace has already generated a good deal of healthy discussion in the local and international media. Not surprisingly, discussion in the Australian media has revealed a range of views about Australia's involvement in peace keeping operations. What is perhaps a little disturbing in the peace keeping debate is the emergence of what I would call a creeping isolationism, and I would like to take this opportunity to say a little more about that.

In the Blue Book, I listed seven criteria which should be satisfied before a decision is made (by the Security Council or other relevant decision-making body) to set in train any peace keeping operation: clear and achievable goals; adequate total resources; closer co-ordination of peace keeping and any necessary continuing peace making activity; a capacity to maintain impartiality; the necessary degree of local support; the necessary degree of external support; and what I call a "signposted exit" - a clear termination point. If closer attention is paid to these criteria in the future than has been the case with some recent UN operations, there would be, I suggest, much less danger of erosion of international confidence in the whole process.

When we face a decision as to whether Australia should become involved in a particular peace keeping operation, some additional considerations are necessarily involved: consistency with the overall balance of Australian national interests; capacity to provide the support requested; an acceptable level of risk to Australian personnel; and evident community support.

Peace keeping is more than just presenting a friendly face to the world, and a decision to deploy a peace keeping force, or to participate in one, should never be one made just for the sake of doing something. Just as the Security Council should make hard-headed decisions about the merits of each mission and its ability to realise its goals, so should every country make its own hard-headed decision as to whether to participate. This means we must decide any Australian participation on a case by case basis against the criteria I mentioned earlier.

It is important that we approach these various issues in a cool and consistent way. Reference to the "national interest" can sometimes be a smokescreen for a lack of rational argument or moral conviction. When Australian peace keepers were first deployed in Cambodia, there were any number of politicians, officials and media commentators who said the deployment was not in our national interest. Today, you would be hard pressed to find a commentator who wouldn't agree, albeit grudgingly in some cases, that the Australian peace keeping operation in Cambodia was an undoubted success. Similarly, you would be hard pressed to find any commentator who would now deny that Australian peace keepers - be they in Cambodia, Somalia, or Namibia or anywhere else - have been great ambassadors for Australia.

It is natural that we have tended to place particular emphasis on peace keeping operations in our own Asia Pacific region. Apart from its fundamental humanitarian significance, our participation in the UN Cambodian operation has undoubtedly been helpful in regional terms. It has increased our standing in dialogue on regional security issues; facilitated further regional security cooperation, particularly through our contact with Indonesian and Malaysian forces; and thereby contributed directly to our security interests.

But while it is natural to be region focused, we should never be region exclusive. Despite our overall defence posture's strong regional orientation, we should continue, from time to time, to participate in peace operations outside our region. Quite apart from the kind of humanitarian considerations that compelled, for example, our involvement in Somalia, we have - as a middle power - a more immediate national interest simply in ensuring the strength and credibility of the multilateral cooperative security system. Putting it at its simplest and most direct: Australia would be less well placed to call on extra-regional nations to contribute to peacekeeping operations in the Asia Pacific region if we were not prepared to contribute elsewhere.

Given the practical limits to our capacity to influence our own security environment - and the unlikelihood that, in the near future at least, regionally-devised security arrangements could match those available through the United Nations - Australia's national interests will continue to be served by conflict prevention, management and resolution through UN mechanisms. Support for UN peace keeping, accordingly, is and should continue to be an important element in the multilateral pursuit of our security interests. Australian participation in peace keeping operations contributes directly to Australian security interests, while also indicating to the world at large that we are ready to play our role as a responsible international citizen.

It is for all of these reasons that it is not only right, but particularly timely, for the Australian War Memorial to have chosen to develop this place to honour our peace keepers. I am delighted, and honoured myself, to have had the opportunity to participate in this opening ceremony.

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