

Rudd's Army: A Deployable Civilian Capacity for Australia
by Anthony Bergin and Bob Breen

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Last year's 2020 Summit generated 962 ideas. The federal government gave the green light to nine Summit proposals in April this year. The one national security proposal to receive the government's tick of approval was a commitment to facilitate the rapid deployment of civilian experts to assist in international disaster relief, stabilisation and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Some in the media have dubbed a Deployable Civilian Capacity (DCC) as Rudd's or Dad's Army. We can expect cartoonists and sitcom writers to have some fun with this description.¹ However, the DCC idea warrants strong support.

Tim Costello, the head of World Vision Australia, is on board. He has pointed out that many people will support the idea of a civilian force that could assist other countries in the region. He stated: 'It's the region where most of the world's poor live. It's the region, thanks to climate change, that has far more cyclones, tsunamis, droughts. So you've got great poverty and I think this deployment of volunteers building on East Timor and Solomons, and even our generosity with the Tsunami, is a fantastic idea.'² While volunteers, it should be noted that members of the DCC would be paid professionals assisting in reconstruction and stabilisation work.

The DCC complements the government's agenda for strengthening civil-military collaboration for responding to overseas emergencies through the establishment of the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence in Queanbeyan, NSW.

It's time to adapt and consolidate. Emergencies no longer divide easily into ones that require only coercive responses and others that require only humanitarian assistance. Population displacement, civilian casualties, disease and destitution invariably accompany emergencies that originate in intra-state conflict. Those that originate from a natural disaster also displace, injure and impoverish as well as spawn violence and looting in some cases.

A good outcome would be a 'Team Australia' approach to overseas emergencies. Australian civilians would plan and then deploy at the same time or soon after their military and police compatriots in order to participate in operations that carefully calibrate the use of armed deterrence and force in order to facilitate the delivery of life-saving aid. As soon as

the emergency phase is over, Australian civilian expertise would be on hand to restore governance and essential services immediately, not weeks and months away as was the case after the Asian Tsunami in 2004.

Applying the lessons and anticipating emergencies

The lessons of history and looming crises obligate the government to get its civil-military collaboration act together. Since the dramatic events of 1999, when Australia led a large-scale international peace enforcement and humanitarian intervention at short notice into East Timor, we've responded to a number of emergencies caused by natural disasters or conflicts in our neighbourhood: Solomon Islands in 2003 and 2006, the Asian Tsunami in 2004, Timor-Leste in 2006, Tonga in 2006 and the floods in Papua New Guinea's Oro Province in 2007.

These operations have all involved several Australian government departments and agencies simultaneously in the company of regional partners as well as emergency organisations from the national and international humanitarian sectors. These types of multi-agency and coalition interventions are now the norm: they require joined-up military, police and aid responses early that can set the foundation for a return to pre-emergency normalcy. Important lessons for the future abound.

There's now a domestic, as well as regional, expectation that Australia won't respond to overseas emergencies by simply presenting an over-sized 'cardboard cheque'. Australians and neighbourhood governments expect to see Australian soldiers and police restoring law and order on the ground in response to unrest that overwhelms local authorities and displaces citizens from their homes. Australians also expect their government to attend to the human suffering that results from conflict and natural disasters by facilitating humanitarian aid, not just announcing a donation.

Looming crises may soon test the DCC and the nation's arrangements for civil-military collaboration. The potential for another similar disaster near the Swat Valley in Pakistan may obligate Australia to participate in another international intervention into a contested area. The possibility of a request for Australian participation in a new peacekeeping mission in Bougainville before the independence 2015 referendum can't be ruled out.³ Whilst not likely at this point, Australia and our South Pacific neighbours may have another multi-agency intervention like the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) on our hands in Fiji. The scale, complexity and nation-building challenges would be more demanding than it was for RAMSI.

Scientists expect climate change to lead to more extreme and frequent weather events in our region. At short notice, ADF ships, logistic support and aircraft could be required to transport humanitarian aid and to sustain emergency efforts until Australia's humanitarian sector can get on the ground. It will be important to have civilian capacity ready for these contingencies. More generally, there have been calls by human rights organisations and other groups for the UN to send troops into complex emergencies under the 'responsibility to protect' principle. That doctrine, which Australia supports, establishes unprecedented international responsibilities to prevent and respond to situations where war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity are imminent or in progress.

The Defence White Paper

The 2009 Defence White Paper *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* identifies the need for a joined-up, whole-of-government approach to responding to overseas emergencies. The document states that Australia will continue to have 'particular responsibilities to assist our neighbours in dealing with humanitarian and disaster relief needs, and to support their stability and security. Given our size and resources, Australia will be expected to take a leadership role within the South Pacific if these states are overwhelmed by a natural or man-made crisis' (paragraph 7.11).

The White Paper states that new collaborative arrangements will be needed. Future operations in the near region will require a blended response, 'extending beyond individual agency operations, and integrating security and other objectives into comprehensive political-military strategies.... it will be crucial to ensure that the ADF can work effectively alongside civilian agencies that specialise in law enforcement, development assistance, humanitarian relief, health, correctional services, municipal services (such as water and infrastructure), education, and political and administrative governance,' (paragraph 2.27).

A pivotal role for AusAID

AusAID will play a crucial role in marshalling the nation's civilian expertise as well as linking its coercive capacity for responding to offshore emergencies with the nation's humanitarian response. AusAID was given \$1.582 million in the 2008-09 budget to fund a whole-of-government task force that will:

- develop a Deployable Civilian Capacity for Australia
- select civilians from within Commonwealth, state and local governments, and from the humanitarian and private sectors
- manage training and pre-deployment planning in close cooperation with other government agencies
- identify, train, administer and rapidly deploy civilian technical expertise offshore in a range of situations and environments and direct and sustain them thereafter.⁴

On the coercive side, when humanitarian responses and reconstruction efforts need protection, AusAID will be the link to military and police planning that will precede the despatch of forces to create secure environments for delivery of humanitarian aid. Of course, if there is an armed contest ahead, the military will take the lead until civilian compatriots can deliver humanitarian aid in safety.

The way ahead

There is a need to take a strategic approach to synchronising Australia's instruments of national power with the nation's humanitarian and commercial sectors. Australian civilian expertise and industry capacity are needed for both the initial surges of humanitarian aid required in response to emergencies and for subsequent reconstruction, recovery and nation-building. The DCC and the role of AusAID as an intermediary between departments and agencies, as well as between government and the humanitarian and commercial sectors, will be very helpful components of a unifying strategy for civil-military collaboration for responding to overseas emergencies. It should be noted of course that the ultimate success of the DCC will only be as good as the resources put into it.

More particularly, there will be a need to specify responsibilities, accountabilities, authority, legal obligations and resources to achieve a 'Team Australia' approach. Equitable conditions of service for civilian participants on overseas operations that are comparable to military and police entitlements will be important. There will also be obligations on civilians to perform and behave in a professional and ethical manner that brings credit to Australia and enhances our regional and international reputation for giving people a fair go and respecting human rights.

Business is important here: it has the capabilities and capacities that are not available in the public sector. The capacity of Australia's humanitarian sector to surge, supply and reconstruct comes from industry and civilian expertise. Military logistic support increasingly depends on commercial suppliers of goods and services. An emergency response register of specialist personnel, such as medical teams, engineers, logisticians, sanitation experts and communications technicians, would enhance DCC responsiveness. Another register that monitors the quantity and location of commercial stocks for emergency humanitarian assistance would also help. Modern, 'just-in-time' automated logistic systems now underpin the nation's logistic support system. These systems have overtaken inefficient and costly military and humanitarian aid stockpiling.

Defence and AusAID recently consolidated their cooperation by signing a strategic partnership agreement that provides a framework for closer cooperation between their organisations.⁵ The agreement articulates the guiding principles, strategic goals, relative organisational strengths of Defence and AusAID, and coordination arrangements required for effective cooperation on future activities. Defence and AusAID will meet at least annually at senior executive level to review the strategic partnership and set priorities for cooperation and joint work.

The next step should be a practical expression of this agreement's intentions. AusAID should join a multi-agency response group inside the state-of-the-art Headquarters Joint Operations Command at Bungendore that would plan, prepare and deploy the military and police elements of national power. AusAID would be the link between the coercive elements of national power and a high-readiness DCC task force. This would better institutionalise Australia's whole-of-government and whole-of-nation first response to overseas emergencies.

It may also be worth considering, particularly in the aftermath of the recent Victorian bushfires, how best to draw on the same civil-military instruments that project coercive force and humanitarian assistance overseas to respond to life-threatening disasters and delivery of humanitarian assistance to Australians at home when natural disasters threaten life and property.⁶

Finally, the DCC and recently established Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence should be partners in facilitating a 'Team Australia' approach. One of the Centre's priorities is to advise agencies on civil-military matters relating to the development of integrated capabilities to achieve a coherent, whole-of-government strategy for peace and stabilisation operations.⁷ The DCC must be a part of that strategy and a partner in its development, and also contribute to the creation of industry and humanitarian sector preparedness registers for responses to emergencies.

Concluding remarks

The lessons of history, the conclusions of the Defence White Paper and looming international crises create a teachable moment in Australia's national development. The Rudd government is strengthening civil-military collaboration for responding to overseas emergencies. The DCC will be an important part of the nation's organisational muscle groups that need to work together.

Faced with the prospect of more short-notice overseas emergencies that will require rapid multi-agency responses, the DCC will no doubt be busy responding to our neighbours' triple zero call when the next man-made or natural disaster hits. That is a real job for a high-readiness, robust and well-rehearsed civil capacity, not a Dad's Army.

Endnotes

- 1 'Rudd focuses on dad's army and channel for kids', *The Australian*, 23 April 2009
- 2 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/04/22/2550132.htm>
- 3 May, Ron, *Improving development and respecting sovereignty: Australia and Papua New Guinea, Strategic Insights* 43, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 2008, p11
- 4 http://www.ausaid.gov.au/hottopics/topic.cfm?ID=4340_2958_671_9343_142
- 5 'Defence and AusAID sign strategic partnership', *Defence Department media release* 143/2009, 29 April, 2009
- 6 This point is argued by Anthony Bergin, 'Defending the home front is top priority', *The Age*, 21 February 2009
- 7 http://www.civmilcoe.gov.au/uploads/files/Strategic_Plan_2009_V2.pdf

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