

The Official History of Australian Peacekeeping,  
Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations



# In Their Time of Need

Australia's overseas emergency relief operations, 1918–2006

**STEVEN BULLARD**

**VOLUME VI**



**CAMBRIDGE**



## **In Their Time of Need**

### **Australia's overseas emergency relief operations, 1918–2006**

This volume of the Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post–Cold War Operations recounts the activities of Australia's military forces in response to overseas natural disasters.

The military's involvement in overseas emergency management has focused primarily on the period immediately after disaster strikes: transporting relief supplies, providing medical assistance, restoring basic services and communications and other logistics support. Each chapter centres on a different operation, providing broad context of both the disaster and Australia's political relationship with the affected country and tells the story of the relief operation. Beginning with the 1918–19 influenza epidemic that ravaged the Pacific and culminating with the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, this book covers Australia's response to some of the most catastrophic natural events of the past century.

*In Their Time of Need* is richly detailed, as Steven Bullard weaves together official government records and archival images with the personal narratives and photographs of those who served. This volume is an authoritative and compelling history of Australia's efforts to help its neighbours.

**Steven Bullard** joined the Australian War Memorial in 1997 as a senior research officer with the Australia–Japan Research Project (AJRP). He was project manager of the AJRP from 2002, and in 2007 was appointed to write a volume of the Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post–Cold War Operations. His research interests include the experience of the Japanese in the Second World War, Japanese prisoners of war in Australia, war crimes trials of the Japanese conducted after the war, and Australian peacekeeping operations. Bullard travelled to the Middle East in 2013 to undertake research for the Memorial's collection, and in 2016 was appointed to write one volume of the Official History of Iraq and Afghanistan.

## **The Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations**

**Series Editor: David Horner**

Volume II *Australia and the 'New World Order': From peacekeeping to peace enforcement: 1988–1991*

David Horner

Volume III *The Good International Citizen: Australian Peacekeeping in Asia, Africa and Europe, 1991–1993*

David Horner and John Connor

Volume V *The Good Neighbour: Australian peace support operations in the Pacific Islands, 1980–2006*

Bob Breen

**THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPING,  
HUMANITARIAN AND POST-COLD WAR OPERATIONS  
VOLUME VI**



# In Their Time of Need

**Australia's overseas emergency relief operations, 1918–2006**

---

**STEVEN BULLARD**



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



# CAMBRIDGE

## UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107026346](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107026346)

© Australian War Memorial 2017

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2017

Cover designed by eggplant communications

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printed in China by C & C Offset Printing Co. Ltd., May 2017

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry is available from the catalogue of the National Library of Australia at [www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)*

ISBN 978-1-107-02634-6 Hardback

### **Reproduction and communication for educational purposes**

The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of the pages of this work, whichever is the greater, to be reproduced and/or communicated by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact:

Copyright Agency Limited

Level 15, 233 Castlereagh Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Telephone: (02) 9394 7600

Facsimile: (02) 9394 7601

E-mail: [info@copyright.com.au](mailto:info@copyright.com.au)

### **Reproduction and communication for other purposes**

Except as permitted under the Act (for example a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review) no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission.

All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

# Contents

<i>Maps</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xviii</i>
<i>Prologue: 'A drop in the ocean'</i>	<i>xxiii</i>

---

## PART I AUSTRALIA'S DISASTER POLICIES 1

---

<b>1</b>	<b>From arbitrary assistance to organised chaos: The history of international disaster relief</b>	<b>3</b>
	The Red Cross and the International Relief Union	4
	The United Nations and disaster relief	6
	Efforts to improve relief and coordination	7
	International relief agencies	10
	Strengthening and reforming the system	12
	Post–Cold War humanitarian relief	13
	Funding the relief effort	16
	Conclusion	17
<b>2</b>	<b>Capable, available and willing to respond: Australia's overseas natural disaster policies</b>	<b>19</b>
	Through two world wars	20
	'Forward defence' and the Cold War	22
	Increased self-reliance and the defence of Australia	26
	After the Cold War	29
	After 11 September 2001	32
	Conclusion	34
<b>3</b>	<b>'A plurality of mandates': The context of overseas disaster policy</b>	<b>36</b>
	Interdepartmental disputes	37
	Funding disputes	40
	A centralised approach	42
	Paying for Defence involvement	45
	Military and civilian agency relations	48
	Regional arrangements	51
	Emergency management reforms	54
	Conclusion	56

---

## PART II AUSTRALIA'S DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS 59

---

<b>4</b>	<b>Combating the Spanish Lady: Samoa, Tonga and Fiji influenza pandemic, 1918–19</b>	<b>61</b>
	The Spanish influenza pandemic	62
	Influenza in Samoa	64
	Preparations of the Australian relief party	65
	HMAS <i>Encounter</i> in Fiji and mission creep	68

	Arrival and deployments in Samoa	69
	Arrival in Tonga and crisis in Fiji	71
	Living conditions and return of the relief party	72
	Conclusion	75
<b>5</b>	<b>A tale of two mountains: Volcanoes at Rabaul in 1937 and Mount Lamington in 1951</b>	<b>78</b>
	Australia's administration of Papua New Guinea	79
	Rabaul, 1937	80
	Commonwealth assistance	81
	Aftermath of the eruptions	83
	Mount Lamington, 1951	84
	Local authorities respond	85
	Commonwealth air support	87
	Conclusion	90
<b>6</b>	<b>A sustained relief effort: New Hebrides cyclone, 1959–60</b>	<b>92</b>
	Australia and the New Hebrides	92
	Cyclone, 1959	94
	Request for Australian assistance	96
	Preparations and deployment	98
	The relief effort	100
	Living conditions	103
	Repatriation	104
	Conclusion	105
<b>7</b>	<b>Goodwill in a time of tension: Indonesia, 1960–63</b>	<b>108</b>
	Australia and Indonesia	109
	Tanimbar cyclone, 1960	110
	Java flood, 1961	112
	Flores earthquake, 1961	113
	Mount Agung, 1963	114
	Australia decides to assist	115
	Relief deliveries by HMAS <i>Diamantina</i>	118
	Conclusion	120
<b>8</b>	<b>Help for the highlands: Influenza and famine relief, 1969–72</b>	<b>122</b>
	Australian military forces in Papua New Guinea	123
	Hong Kong flu, 1968–69	124
	Operation Enza – the local phase	125
	Further Australian assistance	127
	Winding up the operation	128
	Madang earthquake, 1970	129
	Cyclone Hannah, 1972	130
	Frost and famine, 1972	132
	Australia's decision for long-term assistance	134
	In the highlands	136
	Conclusion	138
<b>9</b>	<b>Back to Bali: Earthquakes in Irian Jaya and Bali, 1976</b>	<b>140</b>
	Strengthening relations with Indonesia	141
	Response to the Irian Jaya earthquake	142
	Diversion of HMAS <i>Parramatta</i>	144
	Local relief efforts in Bali	145
	Australian command and organisation	146
	Relief work by the crew of HMAS <i>Parramatta</i>	147
	Medical team	148



	Morale and interaction with the local people	149
	Conclusion	150
<b>10</b>	<b>Regional assistance: Disasters in Solomon Islands and Tonga, 1977–82</b>	<b>153</b>
	Deployed forces and disaster relief	154
	Earthquake on Guadalcanal, 1977	156
	Cyclone Isaac in Tonga, 1982	158
	Cyclone Bernie in Solomon Islands, 1982	165
	Living and working conditions	168
	Conclusion	169
<b>11</b>	<b>Disaster relief in post-independence Papua New Guinea, 1975–94: Earthquakes, famine, floods, cyclones and volcanoes</b>	<b>171</b>
	Australian assistance to post-independence Papua New Guinea	172
	Opportunity relief flights, 1975–80	173
	Floods in Lae, 1983	175
	Volcano threat, 1984	179
	Further opportunity flights, 1987–94	181
	Operation Carmine, 1994	184
	Conclusion	186
<b>12</b>	<b>‘The unleashed fury of Mother Nature’: Cyclones in Fiji and Vanuatu, 1979–88</b>	<b>189</b>
	Cyclone Meli in Fiji, 1979	190
	Cyclone Wally in Fiji, 1980	191
	Cyclone Oscar in Fiji, 1983	192
	Cyclones Eric and Nigel in Fiji and Vanuatu, 1985	194
	Relief activities in Fiji and Vanuatu	196
	Cyclone Uma in Vanuatu, 1987	199
	Cyclone Anne in Vanuatu, 1988	204
	Cyclone Bola in Vanuatu, 1988	207
	The eruption of Mount Pinatubo, 1991	208
	Conclusion	209
<b>13</b>	<b>‘An outstanding overall effort’: Cyclone Namu in Solomon Islands, 1986</b>	<b>212</b>
	Cyclone Namu and the local response	213
	Deployment and operations of the RAAF detachment	215
	Operation Navy Help Solomons	218
	Civilian medical assistance	222
	Army engineers	224
	Living and working conditions	225
	Withdrawal of the various detachments	226
	Conclusion	228
<b>14</b>	<b>Cyclone relief in the Pacific, 1990–93: Cyclones Ofa, Val, Betsy and Kina</b>	<b>231</b>
	Cyclone Ofa in Western Samoa, 1990	232
	Cyclone Val in Western Samoa, 1991	236
	Cyclone Betsy in Vanuatu, 1992	239
	Cyclone Kina in Fiji, 1993	242
	Working and living conditions	244
	Other deliveries of relief supplies	246
	Conclusion	250

<b>15</b>	<b>El Niño drought relief: Operation Sierra/Ples Draï, Papua New Guinea, 1997–98</b>	<b>251</b>
	El Niño and Papua New Guinea's response	252
	Operation Sierra planning and implementation	254
	Operation Ples Draï assessments and targets	259
	Aid relief operations	262
	Living conditions, health and security	266
	Working with others	267
	Defence cooperation and end of mission	269
	Conclusion	271
<b>16</b>	<b>Famine relief amid chaos: Operation AusIndo Jaya, Indonesia, 1998</b>	<b>273</b>
	Relations with Indonesia	274
	Flores earthquake, 1992	275
	El Niño in Irian Jaya	276
	Offers of Australian cash and aid	278
	Initiation of ADF involvement	279
	Planning and task force structure	281
	Deployment and set-up in Irian Jaya	283
	Aid relief operations	284
	Transport, engineering and health operations	286
	Living conditions and health threats	287
	Relations with ABRI and the May 1998 riots	289
	The 7 July flag-raising demonstration	291
	Conclusion	294
<b>17</b>	<b>Ples bagarap: Operation Shaddock, Papua New Guinea, 1998</b>	<b>296</b>
	Earthquake and tsunami	297
	The local and international response	299
	ADF planning and preparations	300
	Arrival and set up in PNG	303
	Combined operations	304
	The work of the medical team	306
	Australian air assistance	307
	Civilian medical team	308
	Working and living around the disaster area	310
	Withdrawal	312
	Conclusion	313
<b>18</b>	<b>'The worst in living memory': Operation Niue Assist and disasters in the Pacific, 1998–2004</b>	<b>315</b>
	Responding to disasters in the Pacific, 1998–2004	316
	Cyclone Heta, Niue, 2004	321
	Domestic, New Zealand and international response	322
	Australian response and ADF planning	324
	Arrival and set-up	326
	Work of the medical team	327
	Transition and return to Australia	329
	Conclusion	330
<b>19</b>	<b>Wave of destruction: Indian Ocean tsunami and the international response, 2004–05</b>	<b>332</b>
	The 'Veranda of Mecca'	333
	A strained relationship	334
	The earthquake and tsunami	336
	Indonesian disaster response	338

	The international civilian response	340
	The international military response	342
	Australian ‘whole-of-government’ response	344
	Australian NGO and public response	346
	Australia–Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development	347
	Conclusion	348
<b>20</b>	<b>The road to Banda Aceh: ADF planning, deployment and airlift mission</b>	<b>350</b>
	Initiating the ADF response	351
	Beginning the airlift mission	352
	Initial medical assessments	354
	An expanding commitment	355
	Deploying Combined Joint Task Force 629	357
	Problems in delivering aid	361
	Hueys and Sea Kings over Aceh	363
	Sending an Australian Air Traffic Control team	366
	Conclusion	368
<b>21</b>	<b>‘We saw the worst of it’: Medical and engineering support in Operation Sumatra Assist</b>	<b>369</b>
	Civilian medical teams	369
	Aeromedical evacuation	372
	An increasing medical commitment	373
	Setting up the Australian Field Hospital	374
	Work of the Anzac Field Hospital	376
	The arrival of Australian engineers	380
	Drains and ditches	382
	Water purification	384
	Boats, mosques and automobiles	385
	Conclusion	387
<b>22</b>	<b>Getting the job done: Enabling Operation Sumatra Assist, threats and withdrawal</b>	<b>389</b>
	HMAS <i>Kanimbla</i>	390
	Civil–military cooperation	392
	Combined operations and coalition partners	392
	Relations with the Indonesians	395
	Living conditions and morale	397
	Environmental hazards	400
	Threats from GAM	402
	Other threats to relief workers	404
	Transition and withdrawal	406
	Conclusion	409
<b>23</b>	<b>‘Here is your loved one back, and this is their name’: Operations Cawdor and Thai Assist, Thailand, 2004–06</b>	<b>411</b>
	The tsunami in Thailand	412
	Setting up the AFP response	414
	The DVI process	418
	Australian DVI operations	424
	Australian casualties	429
	The ADF’s Operation Thai Assist	430
	Living and working conditions	432

	Transition and withdrawal	435
	Conclusion	437
<b>24</b>	<b>'In their time of need': Operation Sumatra Assist II, 2005</b>	<b>439</b>
	The initial response	440
	Deployment and initial operations	442
	The crash of <i>Shark 02</i>	445
	Continuing relief operations on Nias	448
	Air operations	451
	Aircraft Accident Investigation Team	452
	Withdrawal and aftermath	453
	Conclusion	456
<b>25</b>	<b>The 'Day of Judgement': Deploying on Operation Pakistan Assist, 2005–06</b>	<b>458</b>
	Operation Iran Assist	459
	Australia and Pakistan	461
	The 8 October 2005 earthquake	463
	Pakistan's response	465
	The 'cluster' approach	466
	Australia's initial response	468
	Planning for an increased commitment	469
	Decision and preparations	471
	Conclusion	474
<b>26</b>	<b>'They have won our hearts forever': Operation Pakistan Assist, 2005–06</b>	<b>475</b>
	Deployment and set-up of the medical contingent	476
	Medical relief activities	476
	Australians with Task Force Eagle	478
	Helicopter operations	479
	Operation Longreach	480
	Living conditions	482
	Security and threats	484
	Extension of the mission	485
	Task Force Falcon	486
	Return to Australia	488
	Conclusion	489
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Australia's overseas emergency relief operations, 1918–2006</b>	<b>491</b>
<b>Appendix I</b>	<b>Australian military forces and domestic disasters</b>	<b>501</b>
<b>Appendix II</b>	<b>List of overseas disaster relief missions</b>	<b>509</b>
<b>Appendix III</b>	<b>Major officer bearers, 1960–2006</b>	<b>514</b>
<b>Appendix IV</b>	<b>Transport aircraft and associated units used in overseas disaster relief</b>	<b>522</b>
<b>Appendix V</b>	<b>Timeline of Operation Sumatra Assist I</b>	<b>524</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>		528
<i>Index</i>		561

# Maps

---

1	Pacific Ocean area	A1
2	Samoa	A2
3	Tonga	A3
4	Fiji	A4
5	Papua New Guinea	A5
6	Rabaul area, Papua New Guinea	A6
7	Mount Lamington area, Papua New Guinea	A7
8	Vanuatu	A8
9	Efate, Vanuatu	A9
10	Indonesia	A10
11	Bali, Indonesia	A11
12	Highlands area, Papua New Guinea	B1
13	Guadalcanal and Malaita, Solomon Islands	B2
14	Solomon Islands	B3
15	South-East Asia	B4
16	Papua New Guinea provinces and famine relief focal areas, 1997–98	B5
17	Aitape area, Papua New Guinea, 1998	B6
18	Niue	C1
19	Indian Ocean tsunami, 2004–05	C2
20	Banda Aceh, Indonesia	C3
21	Thailand	C4
22	Nias, Indonesia	D1
23	Iran and the Middle East	D2
24	Pakistan and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir	D3



# Preface

On 26 December 2004, one of the largest earthquakes on record gave rise to a tsunami that killed approximately 230,000 people in fourteen countries bordering the Indian Ocean. Australia's response to this regional disaster included the deployment of more than 1,100 members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to provide relief and assistance in Banda Aceh, on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. At that time, the Official History project was taking its first steps to tell the story of Australian involvement in peacekeeping operations, and the public profile of the ADF relief mission to Indonesia, Operation Sumatra Assist, gave rise to the idea to include such humanitarian responses in the scope of the series. Subsequently, in February 2007, Prime Minister John Howard authorised the expanded scope and the series was renamed the Official History of Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post–Cold War Operations.

At that time, the structure and make-up of the humanitarian volume had not been determined. There had been no detailed studies of ADF involvement in disaster relief operations, so the number of these missions was unknown, and it was unclear what type of activities should fall under the broad rubric of 'humanitarian' operations. Official histories are so named because government authorises access for the authors and researchers to all relevant official government records, including Cabinet records. Prime Minister Howard in February 2007 authorised access to records for humanitarian operations not related to conflict, and this decision guided consideration of what to include and what to exclude from the scope of the volume.

The decision was subsequently taken for this volume to describe the activities of Australia's military forces in response to overseas natural disasters. It does not include detailed discussion of disaster relief operations within Australia, nor does it include operations that might otherwise be considered 'humanitarian' in nature, if the cause of the emergency was conflict, the aftermath of conflict, or political unrest. Examples of such operations include the Berlin airlift in the late 1940s, assistance to refugees fleeing political unrest in Pakistan in 1971, or the humanitarian airlift of supplies to East Timor in 1975. Neither does it include ADF involvement in offshore search and rescue operations, fisheries or border patrols, or ordnance disposal in the Pacific Islands. Furthermore, the Official Historian, Professor David Horner, determined at the outset of the project that the series would cover all peacekeeping missions to which Australia had deployed uniformed personnel, namely members of Australia's military or police agencies. In line with this decision, this volume also includes details of the international disaster victim identification mission in Thailand after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which involved the participation of personnel from the Australian Federal Police (AFP), state police forces and various forensic institutions.

The fundamental reason for determining the scope in this way is that Australia's involvement in disaster relief operations is a cohesive story in itself, and one that deserves to be treated as a distinct object of study. These relief operations also share many of the characteristics of peacekeeping missions that are described elsewhere in this series: they are initiated with broad humanitarian objectives to provide some kind of assistance to

the international community, involve the overseas deployment of Australian military personnel and police in line with defence and foreign policies, require the agreement of host or affected governments, and involve working alongside international partners in often arduous and potentially dangerous environments. These factors demand that the story of these operations be told.

The process of emergency management is generally considered to comprise four main phases: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Mitigation aims to reduce the hazards to a community in order to lessen the impact of disasters, preparedness seeks to prepare people to withstand emergencies and minimise losses, response involves activities to reduce the effects on communities and individuals during or immediately after a disaster, and recovery refers to rehabilitation and reconstruction after the event.<sup>1</sup> This volume focuses on the third phase – response – because this is when Australia's military has primarily been involved: to transport relief supplies, provide medical assistance, restore communications and basic services, or offer other logistics support during the response phase immediately after disaster strikes.

Like the other volumes in this series, *In Their Time of Need* tells the story of Australian emergency relief operations at several levels. First, each chapter tries to place the operation into a broader context, through either a brief examination of the relations between Australia and the affected country or description of any relevant background to the disaster or disaster area. An overview of the insurgency in Aceh in northern Sumatra as background to the tsunami relief operation is a case in point. The volume also tells the political and strategic story of Australia's involvement at this level. Second, each chapter describes the narrative of the relief operation, to place on the national record the names of commanders and units, and to document key locations and events that marked Australia's response. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the volume presents the experiences of individual Australians who participated in these operations, from commanders down to the lowest ranked soldiers, sailors, airmen and other officials, to explore their motivations, challenges and attitudes towards their involvement.

Some of the operations covered in this volume were quite small and discrete, such as a single delivery of relief supplies by a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) transport aircraft on a training mission in the area. Others involved hundreds of personnel over many months. The limitation of space, and in some cases available source material, has meant that coverage of the details of some of these operations is uneven. ADF involvement in Indonesia after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, could be the subject of a complete book, given the size of its response and the complexity of the unprecedented international relief effort. Relevant records for some other earlier operations have been lost or destroyed, their importance not recognised at a time when disaster relief was considered a distraction from the primary role of Australia's military forces: to defend Australia in time of war. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this volume provides a sufficient overview of such operations and that the author will be forgiven any subsequent imbalance in coverage.

The majority of Australia's official responses after international natural disasters have taken the form of financial grants, technical assistance or the provision of relief supplies or other goods transported by commercial means. The context of this study,

---

1 See Coppola, *Introduction to international disaster management*, p. 8; and EMA, *Emergency management in Australia*, pp. 3–5.



within an official history of peacekeeping operations and within a longer tradition of official histories of Australian involvement in war and conflict, has limited the scope to those operations where Australian uniformed personnel were involved. Nevertheless, the volume contains some description of the relief activities of other government agencies where appropriate and of the efforts of Australian non-government or civil organisations, all of which have made significant contributions at one time or another to the international community after disasters.



Disaster relief and emergency management, like any field, has its own range of specialist terminology and jargon. While every attempt has been made to simplify this language and make it accessible to the general reader, the following points may be noted. Modern practice prefers the term 'emergency relief' over 'disaster relief', reflecting the view that hazards can be natural or man-made. This volume prefers the somewhat outdated term 'disaster relief', not only because of its historical use but also because the focus of the study primarily is military involvement in the response phase of natural disasters, rather than man-made emergencies or the broader emergency management field. It is recognised, however, that 'emergency relief' is the more accepted term. Similarly, 'humanitarian assistance' is used in this volume to refer to civilian or military assistance after natural disasters, but this term has also been used in a more technical sense for the response to complex man-made emergencies and conflict.

Likewise, the volume tries to avoid the use of military jargon, particularly the fondness in military circles for an endless parade of acronyms. This series has adopted the practice of using small capitals for acronyms that are spoken as a word, such as 'INTERFET', and using all caps where spoken as initials, such as 'ADF'. Abbreviations and acronyms that appear frequently are listed at the front of the volume. Non-English terms are retained where appropriate, with an explanation provided on the first citation in each chapter. Historic place names are preferred in the volume, with current usage indicated in parentheses. Note that the maps use current spellings of place names, for example, 'Jakarta', not 'Djakarta', as they are used to illustrate multiple relief operations from periods that span the changes in spelling.

Numerical scales have been applied to natural events, such as earthquakes and cyclones, to indicate the relative size and impact of these phenomena. The magnitude of an earthquake was traditionally given by reference to the logarithmic Richter Scale, a measure based on a mathematic model developed by Charles Richter in California in the 1930s. This scale, although still regularly cited by the media and the public, has fallen out of favour in scientific circles and has been replaced by measures that more accurately reflect the size and physical effects of seismic events. The magnitude of earthquakes in this volume has been indicated using the scale known as 'moment magnitude' ( $M_w$ ) or, where this measure is not available, by 'surface-wave magnitude' ( $M_s$ ) or 'body-wave magnitude' ( $m_b$ ).<sup>2</sup>

The term 'tropical cyclone' or just 'cyclone' is the current preferred term in Australia and the South Pacific for the large-scale storms that are known as 'hurricanes' in the United States and 'typhoons' in Asia. The intensity of tropical cyclones is indicated by

2 See 'Measuring the size of an earthquake', USGS website, viewed 22 February 2016, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

the 1 to 5 rating of the Tropical Cyclone Category System, an Australian measure based on the intensity of a storm's sustained wind speed, with Category 1 typically causing minimal damage and Category 5 having the potential to cause catastrophic damage to trees, crops, houses and other infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> This rating is similar to the Saffir-Simpson wind scale in use for hurricanes in the United States.



There are many people to thank for their contributions to the completion of this volume. Foremost among these are the members of the Official History team, including the Official Historian, Professor David Horner, and the other volume and chapter authors: Dr Peter Londey, Dr Bob Breen, Dr Jean Bou, Dr John Connor, Dr Rhys Crawley, Miesje de Vogel and Dr Garth Pratten. Their friendship, expertise and generosity has proved the difference in bringing this volume to completion. The process of peer review within the team was at times challenging, but was ultimately enjoyable and rewarding – one could not wish for a more collegial team. Particular gratitude goes to Professor Horner, who was generous with his time and advice over and above the requirements of the position of Official Historian, and who was a consistent advocate on behalf of the author and the other members of the team. Thanks are also due to the project's volunteers who assisted in various ways over the years, particularly David Oner, Rod Chidgey, Ted Fleming and Rod Walker.

The author was the only member of the project who was employed by the Australian War Memorial for the duration of the Official History project, and the support provided to the author and to the wider project by management and staff of the Memorial is gratefully acknowledged. Successive directors: Major General Steve Gower, Nola Anderson and Dr Brendan Nelson, and the Assistant Directors Public Programs, Helen Withnell, Linda Ferguson and Anne Bennie, all maintained the Memorial's commitment to the project, and displayed a willingness to represent the project's interests to government concerning the scope of the history, funding issues and access to records. Ashley Ekins and his colleagues from the Military History Section provided an environment that encouraged intellectual endeavour – and meaningful conversation over good coffee – and Craig Berelle and Stuart Bennington in the Memorial's Research Centre facilitated access to Memorial records.

The Department of Defence provided additional funding for the inclusion of this volume in the series, and many departmental staff provided invaluable assistance to the author. Dr Roger Lee, head of the Australian Army History Unit, sponsored access to Defence facilities and networks, and his staff, especially Lieutenant Colonel Bill Houston, Major David Bucholtz and Tania Hampson provided crucial assistance or were accommodating in requests for desk space. Dr David Stevens and John Perryman of the Sea Power Centre – Australia provided ready use of the Centre's records, and Dr Chris Clarke and Martin James likewise provided access to and copies of records of the Air Power Development Centre. Kim Byrne, Venessa Matthews, Jenny Oldfield, Karlo Rehak, Mercedes Rehak and Amelia White readily provided access to files at Defence Archives, Queanbeyan. Staff from the Strategic Policy Branch and Melany Laycock and Greg Bell from Headquarters Joint Operations Command arranged for access to

---

3 See 'About tropical cyclones', Bureau of Meteorology website, viewed 23 February 2016, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

the Defence electronic network for more recent records. Thanks are also due to Eamon Hamilton for organising a tour and interviews with serving members during a visit to RAAF Base Richmond.

Official records provided by several government departments were vital to the writing of this volume. Thanks go to Dr Barbara Cooper and Wanda Oram-Miles for facilitating access to records of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and for Paul Lawson-Brown, Kathy Nelson, Stephen Robinson, Sonia Sharp and Daniel Woolstencroft for retrieving DFAT and former Australian Agency for International Development records from their departmental repositories. Kim Huegill in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Pat Caldwell and Alastair Wilson in the Attorney-General's Department, and Chris Cranston and Superintendent Mick Travers from the AFP provided a similar service for their respective agencies.

Thanks are also owing to the National Archives of Australia, particularly David Bell, Andrew Cairns and Michael Wenke, for ensuring that records and copying facilities were made available. Moira Drew, archivist for the Australian Red Cross in Melbourne, opened her organisation's records and provided invaluable advice on the collection.

Many Australians who served on these relief operations provided information and assistance, through interviews, correspondence, submission of personal papers or donation of photographs. Their names are listed in the bibliography at the end of the volume. The author would like to thank John Blaxland, Dave Chalmers, Geoff Mulherin, Hank Nelson, David Stevens and Mick Travers for reading sections of the manuscript and providing useful feedback. Thanks are also owing to Major General Michael Crane and Brigadier Alan Hodges for agreeing to act as independent readers of the completed manuscript. Their comments and suggestions proved very astute and helpful in the final stages of writing of the volume.

Particular thanks go to Karina Pelling from ANU Cartography for producing the excellent maps that appear in the volume. Ian Hodges, a Thai speaker and former colleague at the Memorial, provided useful advice on Thai names and culture. Cathryn Game deserves thanks for her detailed copy-editing of the text for Cambridge University Press, as does Julie King for her efforts in producing the index. Many others who have provided assistance or encouragement might have been omitted from this list, but their help does not go without the author's thanks and gratitude.

My deepest gratitude goes to my wife Heather and to my children, Agnes, Morag and Conor, for their love, support and friendship.

## **Disclaimer**

The Australian Government has provided access to all relevant government records to Professor David Horner and his research team for the purposes of writing the *Official History of Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations*. In keeping with the customary independence of Australian official histories, the author alone is responsible for the interpretations in this volume and for any errors that might be found.

# Abbreviations

AAHU	Australian Army History Unit
AAMC	Australian Army Medical Corps
ABRI	Republic of Indonesia Armed Forces (Indonesian: <i>Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia</i> )
ACFID	Australian Council for International Development (2004–)
ACFOA	Australian Council for Overseas Aid (1965–2004)
ACM	Air Chief Marshal
ADAA	Australian Development Assistance Agency (1974–77)
ADAB	Australian Development Assistance Bureau (1977–87)
ADF	Australian Defence Force
Adm	Admiral
AEST	Australian eastern standard time
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AGD	Attorney-General's Department (1901–)
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIDAB	Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (1987–95)
AIPRD	Australia–Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development
Air Cdre	Air Commodore
AME	aeromedical evacuation
ANZUS	Australia New Zealand United States security treaty
AODRO	Australian Overseas Disaster Response Organisation (1982–93)
APDC	Air Power Development Centre
AQIS	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
ARC	Australian Red Cross (archive – now held at University of Melbourne Archives)
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
ATTU	air transportable telecommunications unit
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development (1995–2013)
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal
AWM	Australian War Memorial
Brig	Brigadier
BRR	Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (Indonesian: <i>Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi</i> )
Capt	Captain
CASTA	Combined Australian Surgical Team – Aceh
CDF	Chief of the Defence Force (1984–)
CDFS	Chief of the Defence Force Staff (1976–84)
Cdr	Commander
Cdre	Commodore
CER	combat engineer regiment
CIMIC	civil–military cooperation (also civil–military coordination)

CJTf	combined joint task force
CMF	Citizen Military Forces
Col	Colonel
CPD	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates</i>
Cpl	Corporal
CPO	Chief Petty Officer
CPSD	Colombo Plan Supply Directorate
DEA	Department of External Affairs (1921–70)
DET	Department of External Territories (1941–73)
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs (1970–87)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (1987–)
DGNDO	Director General, Natural Disasters Organisation
DHA	(United Nations) Department of Humanitarian Affairs (1992–98)
DJFHQ	Deployable Joint Force Headquarters
DOHA	Department of Health and Ageing
DRMS	(Department of Defence) document records management system
DVI	disaster victim identification
ECOSOC	(United Nations) Economic and Social Council
EDMS	(Department of Defence) electronic document management system
EMA	Emergency Management Australia (1993–)
FA	Federal Agent
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FARELF	Far East Land Force
FESR	Far East Strategic Reserve
Flt Lt	Flight Lieutenant
Flt Sgt	Flight Sergeant
FMIR	forensic major incident room
FO	Flying Officer
GAM	Free Aceh Movement (Indonesian: <i>Gerakan Aceh Merdeka</i> )
GDP	gross domestic product
Gen	General
Gp Capt	Group Captain
HOSM	Humanitarian overseas service medal
HQADF	Headquarters Australian Defence Force
HQAST	Headquarters Australian Theatre
HQJOC	Headquarters Joint Operations Command
HR	House of Representatives
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDETF	Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force
IDNDR	International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRU	International Relief Union
JSCFADT	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
JTF	joint task force
KODAM	Military Area Command (Indonesian: <i>Komando Daerah Militer</i> )

KODIM	Military District Command (Indonesian: <i>Komando Distrik Militer</i> )
LCH	landing craft heavy
Leut	Lieutenant (Navy)
LS	Leading Seaman
LSM	landing ship medium
Lt	Lieutenant (Army)
Lt Cdr	Lieutenant Commander
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt Gen	Lieutenant General
Maj	Major
Maj Gen	Major General
MATU	mobile air terminal unit
MFAT	(New Zealand) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MV	motor vessel
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NDC	(Solomon Islands) National Disaster Council
NDES	(Papua New Guinea) National Disaster and Emergency Services
NDO	Natural Disasters Organisation (1974–93)
NGO	non-government organisation
NLA	National Library of Australia
NSCA	National Safety Council of Australia (Victorian Division)
NSSC	National Security Committee of Cabinet
OCHA	(United Nations) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (1998–)
OFDA	US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
OPM	Free Papua Movement (Indonesian: <i>Organisasi Papua Merdeka</i> )
PCRF	primary casualty reception facility
PHCT	primary health care team
PIR	Pacific Islands Regiment
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (1971–)
PM's Dept	Prime Minister's Department (1911–71)
PMI	Indonesian Red Cross (Indonesian: <i>Palang Merah Indonesia</i> )
PNAS	Pacific News Agency Service
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PO	Pilot Officer (RAAF); Petty Officer (RAN)
PST	parachute surgical team
R Adm	Rear Admiral
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force (Britain)
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RHIB	rigid-hulled inflatable boat
RN	Royal Navy (Britain)
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
RNZDF	Royal New Zealand Defence Force
RNZN	Royal New Zealand Navy
SEATO	South East Asian Treaty Organisation

Sg Leut	Surgeon Lieutenant (Navy)
Sgt	Sergeant
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
SMK	Vocational High School (Indonesian: <i>Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan</i> )
SOPAC	South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission
SPC–A	Sea Power Centre – Australia
Sqn Ldr	Squadron Leader
SS	steam ship
SY	steam yacht
TNI	Indonesian National Armed Forces (Indonesian: <i>Tentara Nasional Indonesia</i> )
TTVI	Thai Tsunami Victim Identification
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Office (1971–92)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
V Adm	Vice-Admiral
VMF	Vanuatu Mobile Force
WHO	World Health Organization
Wing Cdr	Wing Commander
WOFF	Warrant Officer (RAAF)
WO1	Warrant Officer Class 1 (Army)
WO2	Warrant Officer Class 2 (Army)





# Prologue: 'A drop in the ocean'

The morning triage round was often the hardest. Patients were chosen for treatment not according to the severity of their condition but by consideration of whether surgery might offer them a reasonable chance to live out the day. Here lies a young woman, her breathing labouring through lungs filled with contaminated water and pus, a vacant stare and the foul odour of infected flesh betraying her slim prospects for survival. Nearby, on a makeshift stretcher, a man grimaces in pain, his body taut and rigid with tetanus. Further on, a young boy barely clings to life, his gasps for air increasingly shallow as his body succumbs to aspiration pneumonia, the result of breathing in water contaminated with sewage, filth and dead bodies. Like many others who were strewn over the floor of the hospital, his prognosis was poor – he would die within the hour.

Several cases chosen for this particular day's surgery involved amputation of gangrenous limbs. Some refused the potentially life-saving procedure owing to religious beliefs that an 'incomplete' person would not be admitted to heaven. The Australian doctors explained that 'it was either amputate or die', but they had to accept the cultural choices made by their patients, regardless of how personally difficult that was – besides, there were simply too many others waiting in line to dwell on one person. Such decisions were made by the desperately sick Acehnese in a state of emotional shock. One man who drove a bus to transport the Australian medical team had lost his family, all his friends, his home and his entire neighbourhood to the wave. Only the bus seemed to give him reason to carry on.

The operating room was cramped and hot, with hordes of flies attracted to the pile of rotting flesh cut from limbs and the pools of blood on the floor. Rows of body bags and medical waste thrown into the courtyard were visible through the open doorway, a constant reminder, if one was necessary, of the primitive conditions at the hospital. Each day the bodies were taken away, and each day more arrived to replace them. The equipment available to the Australians was minimal – they had no oxygen and no blood for transfusions, the electricity would come and go, and monitoring equipment was virtually non-existent. Anaesthetics were mostly conducted using Ketamine, a dissociative drug that often left patients awake but unaware of the sensation of saw cutting through bone. Doctors washed their hands and the few scalpels and forceps they had for surgery in water of questionable cleanliness, rinsed them with alcohol, and placed the equipment on rusting trolleys. Layers of plastic sheeting were draped over the two operating tables in the room to keep them free of bodily fluids, and were then used to scoop up patients and their mess after surgery ready for the next case.

The Kesdam Hospital where the Australian civilian team worked was just outside the limit of damage from the tsunami that had one week earlier turned most of Banda Aceh into a conglomerate of debris, destruction and death. Black body bags and uncollected decomposing corpses that littered the streets and canals of the city were still a daily assault on the eyes and noses of the Australians as they travelled to

and from the hospital. The frequent after-shocks rocked the already damaged building, shattering windows and breaking wall tiles as the medical team worked on. They were initially unwelcome at the facility, but surgeon and reserve Army Colonel Peter Sharwood pulled rank on the Indonesian officer who controlled the hospital, gaining entry and a little respect for the Australian civilian team. Gradually, the local medical staff and people began to accept the hard-working Australians. Wing Commander Dr David Scott felt the team was outstanding: 'Every day they got up, with good nature, got stuck into their work, worked their backsides off, every day, all day, and then came home and collapsed in bed and then got up the next day and did it all again.'

Lieutenant Commander Dr Paul Luckin RANR recognised that the efforts of the Combined Australian Surgical Team – Aceh (CASTA) at Kesdam Hospital was only 'a drop in the ocean', but he also knew that 'every drop was a life saved'. And there were successes. The patient suffering from tetanus recovered after he was administered some serum that was found and reallocated by one of the Australians. A young woman presented with a severe facial wound that lifted her scalp and exposed most of her forehead. She accepted surgery only after being reunited with her mother, who was found alive in a nearby ward. Both survived. Almost all the patients chosen for surgery by the Australians at Kesdam survived, but the only treatment for many more was to make them as comfortable as possible while waiting for the inevitable.<sup>1</sup>



For survivors of the 2004 tsunami, their lives would never be the same. So it was for those who left their comfortable lives in Australia to help. Many would suffer for their generosity of spirit with signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), manifest in changes in behaviour, attitudes and relations with family, friends and colleagues. Although the experience of the CASTA team was perhaps at one end of the scale of horror faced by Australians who contributed to disaster responses overseas, they are representative of an attitude that manifests throughout this book, from the first operation in the South Pacific in 1918 down to the present. It is an attitude summed up by David Scott, one of the anaesthetists with CASTA. In answering the question posed by an Indonesian patient, 'Why are you here?' Scott replied that it was because 'we are neighbours, and neighbours help each other'.<sup>2</sup>

This book is dedicated to the men and women of Australia who over the span of almost a century have helped their neighbours in their time of need.

---

1 CASTA was also active at Fakinah Hospital in Banda Aceh, as detailed in [chapter 21](#). The experiences of the CASTA team at Kesdam are taken from: interview, D. Scott, 5 July 2013; presentation, P. Luckin, Australian War Memorial, 15 August 2014; and York, *Angels of Aceh*, pp. 177–95.

2 Interview, D. Scott, 5 July 2013.

# Part I

---

## Australia's disaster policies



# From arbitrary assistance to organised chaos

## *The history of international disaster relief*

Despite their proclivity to engage in war and conflict, countries throughout modern history have offered their neighbours assistance after natural disasters. King George II, for example, asked the British parliament in 1755 to offer assistance to Portugal after an earthquake in Lisbon.<sup>1</sup> The United States provided US\$50,000 for relief after an earthquake in Venezuela in 1812.<sup>2</sup> In 1902, the volcano Mount Pelée on the French island of Martinique in the Caribbean destroyed the nearby capital of Saint-Pierre with the loss of more than 28,000 lives. Navy ships from Great Britain, Denmark, Germany, Holland and the United States transported to the island large quantities of donated relief supplies, medicines and other aid.<sup>3</sup> The food provided by US President Theodore Roosevelt after the disaster fed 50,000 displaced residents on the island for a month.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence suggests that the number of both disasters and people affected globally have grown significantly during the last hundred years.<sup>5</sup> Although much of this rise stems from better reporting, especially in the last twenty-five years or so, there are indications that an increasing number of people are vulnerable to the effects of natural hazards. Cyclones and floods seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity, and although the number of earthquakes has not increased over the past three decades, the number of people affected by them has risen.<sup>6</sup> Growing populations and pressure on habitable land, climate change and environmental degradation are several reasons advanced for this trend. Nevertheless, the numbers overall killed from natural hazards are declining, despite periodic disasters that take large numbers of lives, such as the Indian

1 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, p. 17.

2 Foster, *The demands of humanity*, pp. 9–10.

3 Scarth, *La catastrophe*, pp. 1, 182.

4 Cooling, 'The army and flood and disaster relief', p. 62.

5 Disaster statistics are compiled by EM-DAT, a database maintained by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) in Belgium ([www.emdat.be](http://www.emdat.be)).

6 *Cred Crunch Newsletter*, No. 2, August 2005, EM-DAT website, viewed 16 December 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

Ocean tsunami of 2004, and Cyclone Nargis in Burma and the Sichuan earthquake, both in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

This book is the story of how Australia has responded to these disasters in other countries. More specifically, it the story of how Australia has used its military forces in these responses, from the first operation in 1918 down to 2006. This period has seen great changes in attitudes, methods and technology, both locally and globally. Before examining the Australian experience, this chapter will introduce the major actors, evolving procedures and key issues that have characterised international relief activities during this period to place the Australian response in a changing global context.

The United Nations has occupied a central position in disaster relief since its founding; therefore much of the story is told through the various debates and changing organisations with which the United Nations has struggled to improve disaster responses. At the outset, it is important to recognise that it is difficult to speak of an international 'system' of disaster relief. There have been, at various times and with varying success, attempts to systematise these efforts, or to make relief more efficient or accountable, or to better target the requirements of those in most need. But the growing scale of natural disasters, the complexity of some situations in which the line between man-made and natural disasters is hard to distinguish, and the increasing number and type of actors in the field, has made it impossible to escape a certain level of organised chaos in the international response to disasters.

---

## THE RED CROSS AND THE INTERNATIONAL RELIEF UNION

---

From the time of its founding in 1863, the Red Cross has shown a willingness to engage itself in peacetime relief efforts in addition to its better-known activities in wartime.<sup>8</sup> Henry Dunant, founder of the international Red Cross movement, stated that a purpose of relief committees was 'to render great services by their permanent existence during periods of epidemics, floods, great fires, and other unforeseen disasters'.<sup>9</sup> Before the First World War, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had made frequent calls on national Red Cross societies for peacetime programs and relief actions, and in 1919 the national societies formed an executive body, the League of Red Cross Societies (the League), with the specific aim of strengthening their ability to respond to natural disasters.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, the League was instrumental in establishing the International Committee for Relief to Russia during the 1922 famine, and

---

7 Coppola, *Introduction to international disaster management*, pp. 15–17. Data from the EM-DAT database supports these trends.

8 Holdsworth, 'The present role of Red Cross in assistance', p. 9. Unless specified, the term 'Red Cross' is used loosely to describe the separate but affiliated components that make up the international movement started by Dunant in 1863.

9 MacAulay, 'The Red Cross in a changing world', Nobel Lecture University of Oslo, 11 December 1963, Nobel Prize website, viewed 10 July 2008, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

10 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, pp. 17–18; Moorehead, *Dunant's dream*, p. 113; and Macalister-Smith, 'The International Relief Union', p. 365. The name of the League was changed in 1983 to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and again in 1991 to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

provided assistance, for example, after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake and the 1931 floods in China.<sup>11</sup>

After the First World War, the Red Cross promoted the formation of an international union in an attempt to institutionalise international disaster relief. The president of the Italian Red Cross Society, Giovanni Ciraolo, who had lost his family in the 1908 earthquake in Sicily, proposed in 1921 that the Red Cross and the League of Nations establish an organisation to bring relief to those suffering from disaster and to encourage study into disaster prevention.<sup>12</sup> Ciraolo's scheme was discussed at length and modified over the following years, and was eventually adopted by international convention and statute in July 1927.<sup>13</sup> The International Relief Union (IRU) finally came into being in 1932, with initial membership of twenty-seven countries, including France, Great Britain, New Zealand and of course Italy. Australia did not join the IRU, primarily for financial reasons (see [chapter 2](#)). The Convention stated that the aims of the IRU were to provide first aid, funds and other assistance to peoples suffering from a disaster due to *force majeure*, the extent of which exceeded the capacity of local resources. This assistance was to be channelled through national Red Cross societies and other organisations geared to providing similar relief functions.

The IRU failed to attract significant voluntary funds from its member states, and as a result offered little more than symbolic assistance for two disasters and some studies into relief efforts.<sup>14</sup> A deterioration of the international show of solidarity in which the IRU was optimistically founded, combined with the international effects of the Great Depression and delays in formalising arrangements with the Red Cross, doomed the organisation almost from the start. By the late 1930s, with the League of Nations itself in pieces, the IRU was effectively non-operational. Attempts to revive it after the war were hampered by financial deficit, and effectively quashed by the decision of the Red Cross to withdraw from the union in 1948.<sup>15</sup> Its functions and assets were eventually absorbed by the United Nations sometime after 1967.<sup>16</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, relief after natural disasters took a back seat as the international community was faced with the immense challenges of resettling millions of refugees and rebuilding societies dislocated by war. The failure of the IRU to establish itself as an international coordination hub for disaster relief meant that a large proportion of aid for natural disasters continued to be delivered bilaterally from government to government, even while some of it was channelled through the Red Cross and other agencies.<sup>17</sup> The easiest form of assistance was the provision of cash, which could be transferred quickly and used according to the priorities established by the recipient government. A risk in this approach was the

---

11 Beigbeder, *The role and status of international humanitarian volunteers and organizations*, p. 74.

12 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, pp. 18–21.

13 'International convention and statute establishing an International Relief Union', 12 July 1927, Geneva, copy in NAA: A981, LEAGUE INTER R1.

14 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, p. 20; and Macalister-Smith, 'The International Relief Union', p. 370.

15 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, pp. 20–1, 95.

16 UN ECOSOC resolution E/1268, 4 August 1967; and Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, p. 96.

17 UN document A/5845, 5 January 1965.

misappropriation of funds by a corrupt government – in 1974, for example, Grenada was pressured to pay back British aid after it was misappropriated to the tune of £250,000.<sup>18</sup>

Another problem inherent in bilateral aid was the politicisation of disaster relief. Most donor countries, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, did not at this time maintain specific offices for overseas relief, but handled requests for assistance through their respective foreign affairs departments, which would liaise with other relevant departments and agencies. The United Kingdom, for example, did not establish a specialised office until 1974.<sup>19</sup> As the major provider of bilateral funds, the US Government established an office to coordinate disaster relief in 1964, when the Foreign Disaster Relief Coordination office was created within the Agency for International Development (AID) – a direct result of the very public failures of the AID response to the Skopje earthquake the previous year.<sup>20</sup> Australia's overseas disaster relief was until the early 1950s managed from within the Prime Minister's (PM's) Department. After that time, responsibility was transferred to the Department of External Affairs, which maintained close liaison with the PM's Department, Defence and Treasury (see [chapter 3](#)).

---

## THE UNITED NATIONS AND DISASTER RELIEF

---

By the mid-1960s, inadequacies in dealing with more frequent large-scale natural disasters became a prominent issue within the international community. The United Nations, like other organisations that provided international assistance, had dealt with natural disasters in an *ad hoc* way. The General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) could make recommendations to various existing agencies, such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which would provide assistance and relief from existing resources. These efforts, however, were directed more towards the medium and longer-term goals of rehabilitation and reconstruction. The United Nations recognised that their arrangements contained an 'almost complete absence ... of resources which can be used to help meet emergency needs at the first impact of a disaster'.<sup>21</sup> Further, while these needs were generally met by direct contributions from governments and international agencies such as the Red Cross, there were occasions where this relief was not adequate or was poorly coordinated. For example, seven redundant field hospitals were reportedly sent to Skopje in Yugoslavia after the 1963 earthquake, despite the local government and Red Cross having the medical situation in hand.<sup>22</sup>

In response to these perceived gaps, and in line with an increased awareness within the international community after problems in responding to several high-profile disasters in the preceding years, several countries pressed the United Nations for

---

18 Cable LH43643, London to Canberra, 4 December 1975, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.

19 Holdsworth, 'The present role of Red Cross in assistance', p. 12.

20 Olson, 'The Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)', pp. 6–8. This office was renamed in the mid-1970s the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), and the agency became the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

21 UN document A/5845, 5 January 1965, p. 8.

22 'Disaster relief aid used "to get publicity"', *Australian*, 24 February 1971.



stronger disaster measures, including the establishment of a 'United Nations Disaster Fund' and associated machinery to coordinate international relief efforts.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the ICRC had recently requested that the United Nations provide assistance in three key areas of disaster relief: the coordination of the speedy despatch of disaster experts in various fields; the provision of specialist equipment for relief efforts; and the promotion of the development of adequate disaster plans within member states.<sup>24</sup> The Secretary-General agreed in broad terms with the Red Cross and produced a comprehensive report that recommended setting aside US\$100,000 per year from the UN general budget for disaster relief, with a nominal maximum contribution of US\$20,000 per disaster.<sup>25</sup>

The arrangement of providing funds from the United Nations' working capital budget for disaster relief was not universally embraced, especially as it came on the heels of a budgetary crisis that threatened the very existence of the United Nations in 1964.<sup>26</sup> Some countries, including Australia, objected to this use of the budget because of the extra financial burden it would impose, the possibility of embarrassment if some countries made voluntary contributions and others did not, and the expectation that the small amount proposed would be insufficient and would necessarily rise.<sup>27</sup> Other countries, such as Italy and Malaysia, felt the amount was too small, compared to the overall UN budget, to offer any practical assistance.<sup>28</sup> In any case, the United Nations was not prepared to become a primary provider of relief or funds. A manual on disaster relief produced in 1971 made it clear that 'this arrangement is primarily symbolic and that governments and voluntary agencies must continue to bear the principal burden for financing emergency assistance'.<sup>29</sup> Despite argument over the source of the funds, this was generally in line with Australian policy.

## EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELIEF AND COORDINATION

One method of ensuring speedy relief to various parts of the world was the establishment of a network of stockpiles of relief supplies. The League of Red Cross Societies established three warehouses in the early 1950s, in France, Switzerland and Turkey, to supply immediate relief supplies to the international community.<sup>30</sup> The Red Cross proposed the establishment of a further stockpile in Australia to service disasters in the region, including Indonesia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and throughout South-East Asia. The proposal received strong support from various sectors within the Australian

23 UN document E/3938, 10 July 1964, *Official records of the Economic and Social Council, thirty-seventh session, annexes*, pp. 1–2; and brief, UK Foreign Office, 'Assistance in case of natural disasters', 8 February 1965, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

24 UN document A/5845, 5 January 1965, p. 9.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 10; UN ECOSOC resolution E/1090.C, 31 July 1965; and UN General Assembly resolution A/2034, 7 December 1965.

26 Greenwood and Harper, *Australia in world affairs 1961–1965*, pp. 235–6.

27 Memo, UNGA 19/Item 46, 'Assistance in cases of natural disaster', c. January 1965; and minute, E. Ride to White, 17 August 1965, both in NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

28 Memo, J.H. Hoyle (New York) to Secretary, 29 October 1965, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

29 UN document ESA/OTC/4, 25 June 1971, p. 7.

30 Letter, B. de Rouge to A.G. Brown, 23 March 1954, NAA: A1838, 889/700/3.

Government, but it was not adopted.<sup>31</sup> By 1972, the Red Cross maintained seven or eight international stockpiles and UNICEF maintained a warehouse of supplies in Copenhagen.<sup>32</sup>

The United Nations and Red Cross had also made frequent calls for governments and national Red Cross agencies to consider stockpiling emergency supplies to ensure that relief aid could be applied quickly and efficiently.<sup>33</sup> The Inter-Parliamentary Union joined the chorus in 1971 with calls for the establishment of a 'World Disaster Inventory' of relief supplies.<sup>34</sup> Australia argued consistently through this period against creating stockpiles and inventories, or even providing advance notice of what supplies might be forthcoming when needed.<sup>35</sup> Such measures were considered to be too costly and inefficient, the preference being instead to assess requirements after each request for assistance.

Accompanying calls for relief stockpiles were calls for countries to establish specialist disaster units, or to earmark military units to be ready to deploy quickly to international disaster sites.<sup>36</sup> In fact the Swedish and Norwegian governments had in the late 1960s established standby forces to provide international disaster relief – the former comprising a fifty-strong cadre engineering unit and the latter a surgical disaster unit and field hygiene team.<sup>37</sup> The Swiss were also proposing to enlist a voluntary aid corps, comprising civilian doctors, engineers and other technicians.<sup>38</sup> A proposal from within the Australian Joint Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee to form a relief base in Darwin as part of a 'world network' under UN command was quashed by the Prime Minister in November 1970, as were the various external requests to consider establishing relief units.<sup>39</sup> The previous year, a US congressional subcommittee recommended that the United Nations itself establish a 'UN Emergency Relief Force' to render 'massive emergency assistance' after conflict or natural disaster.<sup>40</sup> Strong support was also forthcoming from a November 1972 church conference in London to form an 'International Disaster Relief Force', along the lines of peacekeeping forces, preferably under a UN banner.<sup>41</sup>

With opposition to any more than minimal new infrastructure within the United Nations to deal with natural disasters, such proposals were bound to fail. In fact the

31 Letter, A.G. Brown to R.G. Casey, 30 December 1953, NAA: A1838, 889/700/3; and minute, A.H. Tange to A/g Minister, 'Australian contributions to disaster relief', 14 October 1955, NAA: A1838, 742/1/3.

32 Church Information Office, 'An international disaster relief force', p. 12.

33 For example UN General Assembly resolution A/2435, 19 December 1968; UN General Assembly resolution A/2717, 15 December 1970; and UN document E/C.2/732, 7 July 1971.

34 Brief, 'Inter-Parliamentary Union September meeting, Paris 1971', c. July 1971, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 5.

35 See for example *ibid.*; and memo, Defence to DFA, 16 April 1971, NAA: A463, 1970/3864.

36 For example UN General Assembly resolution A/2435, 19 December 1968; UN General Assembly resolution A/2717, 15 December 1970.

37 Letter, S. Åström to U Thant, 14 December 1967, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

38 Memo, J.A. Forsythe (Berne) to Canberra, 11 February 1972, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 6.

39 Telegram, W.L. Morrison to W. McMahon, 27 November 1970; and letter, W. McMahon to W.L. Morrison, 1 December 1970, both in NAA: A1838, 1585/1/56 pt 1.

40 'Report urges relief force for refugees', *Age* (Melbourne), 18 November 1969.

41 Church Information Office, 'An international disaster relief force', pp. 1–23.

initial response by the United Nations, after the creation of the experimental fund in 1965, was for the Secretary-General to appoint the Office of Inter-Agency Affairs as the 'focal point' for UN disaster relief efforts, thus avoiding establishing a new office to put into action the measures recommended by previous Assembly resolutions.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, delegates in ECOSOC pressed on and proposed the appointment of a dedicated disaster coordinator. The Assembly approved this recommendation, and the UN Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) was established on 14 December 1971.<sup>43</sup>

UNDRO opened on 1 March 1972 in Geneva, close to the headquarters of the Red Cross and other voluntary international organisations involved in disaster relief. Turkish career diplomat Faruk Berkol was appointed the first Disaster Relief Coordinator. He was assisted by an initial staff of five and a modest budget of US\$200,000 for disaster grants. While Berkol's distance from New York gave him a measure of independence and profile, in line with earlier British efforts to appoint 'an eminent and independent personality', the office was largely ineffectual for several years.<sup>44</sup> Primarily, it was underfunded and frustrated in its coordination role because its formation was 'resented and opposed' by other UN agencies, which feared a loss of autonomy, freedom and resources to the new organisation.<sup>45</sup>

Although progress had been made, critics were still by the mid-1970s 'virtually unanimous in their condemnation of the chaos of international relief'.<sup>46</sup> Calls within the United Nations to appoint a 'special representative' to oversee relief efforts for large and complex disasters revealed a continuing distrust of UNDRO's ability. Two factors from this period, however, enhanced UNDRO's capacity to coordinate disaster relief. The first was the establishment in 1974 by the General Assembly of a voluntary trust fund that would enable the expansion of the organisation through donations by large donor countries.<sup>47</sup> A significant donation by the United States in 1975, after calls from Henry Kissinger for a stronger UNDRO the previous year, led to staff numbers more than quadrupling to a modest forty-six.<sup>48</sup> The fund also allowed the General Assembly to earmark a further US\$400,000 for disaster relief and US\$600,000 for disaster prevention and planning assistance.<sup>49</sup> The second factor was the establishment between 1976 and 1979 of memoranda of understanding with other UN organisations – FAO, UNICEF, World Food Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees – which set out more clearly the roles of the various agencies during different kinds of disasters.<sup>50</sup> These factors gave UNDRO a greater visibility within the relief field and improved the mechanisms for coordination within the United Nations itself.

Several reviews at the start of the 1980s, however, identified continuing problems, which included a failure of UNDRO to establish a leadership role within the United Nations, the desire of donor countries for more direct contacts and innovation from

42 UN document ST/SGB/131/Amend.24, 26 October 1970.

43 UN General Assembly resolution A/2816, 14 December 1971.

44 Memo, L. Joseph (New York) to Canberra, 9 August 1971, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 5.

45 Beigbeder, *The role and status of international humanitarian volunteers and organizations*, pp. 47–55.

46 Green, *International disaster relief*, p. 31.

47 UN General Assembly resolution A/3243, 29 November 1974.

48 Green, *International disaster relief*, p. 33. In comparison, UNICEF at that time had 1,669 staff (UN document E/ICEF/AB/L.147, 17 March 1975, p. 76).

49 UN General Assembly resolution A/3532, 17 December 1975.

50 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, pp. 135–6.

UNDRO, and a feeling that the office's mandate was too wide.<sup>51</sup> It was clear that there would always be an element of improvisation in the international response to a range of different circumstances.

---

## INTERNATIONAL RELIEF AGENCIES

---

The Red Cross movement is composed of three main components: the ICRC, a private Swiss corporation based in Geneva that has guided the overall direction of the movement; the individual national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies; and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the executive body governing the national societies. These components come together normally every four years in an international conference, in which major issues and policies are debated. After distancing itself from efforts to reform the IRU after the Second World War, the Red Cross, primarily through the national societies, continued to provide assistance after natural disasters. In the early 1950s, for example, national societies contributed an average of £6 million per year – the Australian Red Cross contributing around £20,000 per year.<sup>52</sup>

The scale of the suffering, the worldwide media attention, the number of agencies involved and the complexity of the relief effort during the Biafran war and famine in the late 1960s led the Red Cross to examine many aspects of its disaster relief activities.<sup>53</sup> Subsequently, in September 1969, Resolution XXIV, 'Principles and rules for Red Cross disaster relief', was adopted at the international conference in Istanbul. This resolution set out basic humanitarian principles by which national Red Cross societies would prepare for and respond both to natural and man-made disasters. It emphasised the importance of national planning, preparation and training in the pre-disaster phase, and designated the League of Red Cross societies as the 'information and coordination centre for all international assistance'. While recognising that primary responsibility for disaster relief resided with national public authorities, the Red Cross saw its role as transcending national borders, within the bounds of respecting sovereignty, to strengthen 'peace and friendship among peoples'.<sup>54</sup> In this regard, the declaration was not intended to give the Red Cross a 'right to intervene' in disaster situations, but would provide a 'moral and persuasive force' on governments and international aid organisations.<sup>55</sup>

For its part, the Red Cross considered that it should remain the primary international disaster relief agency, even while recognising that the United Nations could play a valuable coordinating role. It felt, however, that the key issue in bringing effective aid to victims was comprehensive pre-disaster planning, including establishing national disaster plans, stockpiling of relief supplies, training of personnel, coordination of international donors and the provision of reliable and accurate information. To undertake these activities, the Red Cross was mindful that it needed to protect its own source of

---

51 Beigbender, *The role and status of international humanitarian volunteers and organizations*, p. 52; and Green, *International disaster relief*, pp. 35–6.

52 Letter, A.G. Brown to R.G. Casey, 30 December 1953, NAA: A1838, 889/700/3.

53 Moorehead, *Dunant's dream*, pp. 622–7. An estimated 600,000 people died during the famine, which began in 1967.

54 ICRC, 'Resolution XXIV: Principles and rules for Red Cross disaster relief', *International Review of the Red Cross*, November 1969.

55 Cable 69600, Canberra to Ankara, 3 September 1969, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

voluntary contributions, and warned the United Nations in 1971 that their 'actions in no way impinge upon the ability of these [Red Cross and other voluntary] bodies to continue to receive the support essential to their missions'.<sup>56</sup> The clear implication was that the establishment of a UN disaster fund, and the entry of the United Nations in an operational role, would divert voluntary contributions from those organisations already undertaking relief on a local level. In any case, the Red Cross considered that funding was not the critical issue, for 'given suitable plans, governments and the public could always be relied upon'.<sup>57</sup>

Debate among national societies in the early 1970s supported the view that the Red Cross should be confined to assessment, procurement and distribution of aid during the emergency phase of a disaster. In practice, however, individual national societies were active in a broad range of longer-term relief activities, particularly during extended famines. A comprehensive review of Red Cross activities, which began in 1973, recognised the importance of the organisation as a flexible deliverer of aid during the first phase of disaster relief. In all relief activities, national societies of the Red Cross drew on the support of fellow societies in neighbouring countries, with the League providing information and coordination functions.<sup>58</sup>

The Red Cross is the largest but by no means the only non-state actor in international disaster relief. Oxfam, the World Council of Churches, Catholic Relief Services, CARE and the Lutheran World Federation are but a few of the thousands of non-government organisations (NGOs) that regularly marshal funds and other resources to supply and deliver humanitarian assistance worldwide. Although their increase in numbers alone do not tell the whole story, the statistics are impressive: the number of internationally active NGOs grew from a total of 985 in 1956 to 2,795 in 1972 and to 13,768 in 1985.<sup>59</sup> Many are volunteer-based, relying on the goodwill of the public, and not all are involved in disaster relief. Some focus specifically on one issue or service, while others undertake a range of relief, development or advocacy roles. NGOs usually form in response to a perceived need. Oxfam, for example, formed to provide relief to sufferers during the Greek famine of 1942. Médecins Sans Frontières was formed with the dual role of providing medical assistance and advocacy, after some doctors who had worked with the Red Cross became frustrated by the organisation requiring them to maintain silence and impartiality over issues in the field.<sup>60</sup>

NGOs can mobilise fast and deliver assistance quickly and directly, often bypassing the need for bureaucratic and political niceties. Their contribution is usually small compared to contributions by governments in the country of the disaster and major bilateral sources, but they can fill valuable niche roles within the overall relief effort. The sheer number of small agencies can, however, cause logistics problems; there have been examples of volunteers arriving in disaster areas without support, supplies or, in

56 UN document E/C.2/732, 7 July 1971.

57 Statement, H. Beer, UN document E/SR.1786, 21 July 1971, *Official records of the Economic and Social Council, fifty-first session*, pp. 133–4.

58 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, pp. 86–7; Holdsworth, 'The present role of Red Cross in assistance', p. 75; and Samuels, 'The relevance of international law in the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters', pp. 258–60.

59 'International organizations by year and type (1909–1999)', Union of International Associations website, viewed 22 July 2008, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

60 Moorehead, *Dunant's dream*, p. 625.

some cases, even passports.<sup>61</sup> Neither are they beyond reproach, as some NGOs have been criticised for inefficiencies in their operations, for the percentage of aid used for administration, for corruption and for focusing their assistance in programs designed to enhance their own reputations and maximise their proportion of a generous public's donations.<sup>62</sup>

There have been numerous attempts to coordinate the activities of the many NGOs that operate in disaster relief internationally. In 1972, five of the most powerful established the Licross/Volags Steering Committee for Disasters in Geneva.<sup>63</sup> The Steering Committee, membership of which has changed and grown over the years, aims to provide an informal forum for the exchange of information concerning international disaster relief, and for encouraging cooperation and disaster planning at national and local levels.<sup>64</sup> In addition, most countries maintain committees to monitor and coordinate domestic agencies involved in international disaster relief. The Disasters Emergency Committee in the United Kingdom, for example, was formed in 1963 to coordinate aid by thirteen of the country's largest donors to international disasters.<sup>65</sup> The Australian Council for Overseas Aid was similarly founded in 1965 to provide a mechanism to enable initially twenty NGOs to liaise more effectively with government and to coordinate their overseas relief and aid activities.<sup>66</sup>

## STRENGTHENING AND REFORMING THE SYSTEM

The reviews of UNDRO in the early 1980s highlighted continuing deficiencies in the international system in general, and in particular in the ability of the organisation to coordinate effectively the response to large international natural disasters.<sup>67</sup> The United Nations reacted by strengthening the administration of UNDRO, called on states to contribute to the UNDRO trust fund and to individual appeals after disasters, and attempted to streamline the process of determining the level of response and the lead agency within the UN family of organisations.<sup>68</sup> These problems highlighted a continuing recognition of the importance of coordination in international relief, but also point to the difficulties of managing vast resources from a wide range of states, organisations and other actors, some of whom were reluctant to be externally directed. UNDRO still found itself sidelined after major disasters, when other organisations within the United

61 Holdsworth, *The present role of Red Cross in assistance*, p. 33.

62 See for example Green, *International disaster relief*, p. 31; Cremer, 'On the problem of misuse in emergency aid'; and Schultz and Søriede, 'Corruption in emergency procurement'.

63 These were the League of the International Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches and Oxfam (Beigbeder, *The role and status of international humanitarian volunteers and organizations*, p. 78).

64 Caritas International et al., 'When disaster strikes and help is needed', p. 6.

65 'Who we are', Disasters Emergency Committee website, viewed 11 November 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

66 The Council now has almost a hundred members, and is called the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) (Rugendyke and Ollif, *NGOs as advocates for development in a globalising world*, p. 22).

67 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, pp. 138–41.

68 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/36/225, 17 December 1981.



Nations, better placed by means of their resources and capabilities, were appointed on an *ad hoc* basis to act as the focal point for the international relief effort.<sup>69</sup>

In 1987, the United Nations estimated that natural disasters over the preceding two decades had caused the deaths of around 3 million people, affected more than 800 million and resulted in more than US\$23 billion in damages.<sup>70</sup> Population growth, pressures on habitable land, and climate change were some of the factors that led to an increase in the scale, complexity and frequency of disasters during the 1980s.<sup>71</sup> Prolonged drought throughout central and southern Africa early in the decade, for example, led to widespread famine in which up to a million people are thought to have died.<sup>72</sup> Ethiopia, in the midst of civil war, was most severely affected, leading to a large-scale and highly visible international effort. The 'Band Aid' and 'Live Aid' events organised by Bob Geldof were indicative of the growing power of the media to inform and mobilise the public.<sup>73</sup> While the so-called CNN effect – the power of the media to influence government policy – has been influential in some cases in increasing aid to humanitarian crises, the impact of security interests and the level of commitment by donor governments and organisations have also been crucial factors in determining policy and levels of assistance.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, improvements continued to be made in various areas of disaster relief. The ability of the United Nations, in particular, to provide relief goods at short notice were enhanced with the establishment of an UNDRO relief warehouse at Pisa in Italy in 1986.<sup>75</sup> The warehouse, supported by donations from Italy, Finland, Norway and later Japan, was located at Pisa airport on the site of the UN supply depot and provided primarily shelter materials, generators, emergency rations, medical supplies and water purification equipment.<sup>76</sup> UNDRO during the 1980s began to rely more on computer and satellite technology to improve efficiency of operations. UNDRO field officers communicated by satellite directly with headquarters in Geneva for the first time, for example, after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico.<sup>77</sup>

## POST-COLD WAR HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

The end of the Cold War in 1989 led to great optimism that the United Nations would be freed from its traditional veto constraints to play a significant role in the so-called New World Order.<sup>78</sup> The united front shown by the international community in the first Gulf War seemed to justify the optimism, but the large-scale humanitarian crisis that accompanied the war, involving millions of displaced persons in neighbouring Iran, Jordan

69 Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance*, p. 146.

70 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/42/169, 11 December 1987.

71 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/41/201, 8 December 1986.

72 Coppola, *Introduction to international disaster management*, p. 91; and Jansson, Harris and Penrose, *The Ethiopian famine*, p. 74.

73 Jansson, Harris and Penrose, *The Ethiopian famine*, p. 155.

74 Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen, 'Humanitarian crises', pp. 39–41; and Livingston, 'Clarifying the CNN effect', pp. 1–15.

75 UN document A/43/375, 1 June 1988, p. 7.

76 UN document A/45/271, 1 June 1990, p. 10.

77 UN document A/41/295, 1 May 1986, p. 12.

78 For more on this, see Horner, *Australia and the 'New World Order'*, pp. 3–24.

and Turkey, revealed continuing problems in the international humanitarian response machinery. The scale and breadth of the response was immense, with contributions of food, shelter, transport and logistics support from various UN agencies, the affected countries, the allied coalition, the international community, the Red Cross and various NGOs. Within the United Nations, however, the response highlighted continuing problems of overall leadership, coordination, speed of response, levels of expertise, mandate of activities and the relationship between the United Nations, the military and NGOs.<sup>79</sup>

The United Nations responded by restructuring and reforming its humanitarian sector, after a further review by the Secretary-General of the organisation's central role in international humanitarian relief activities.<sup>80</sup> UNDRO was abolished and its coordination functions incorporated in the new Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in 1992.<sup>81</sup> The DHA had a broad mandate to include man-made as well as natural disasters in its portfolio under the direction of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Policies and measures were introduced to strengthen the ability of the DHA to lead and coordinate the UN response. These included the formation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, where representatives from various UN agencies and external organisations met to develop comprehensive and coordinated policies, ethical frameworks and systems of response after a range of humanitarian emergencies.<sup>82</sup> Further, DHA placed an emphasis on issues other than response to emergencies, such as prevention, preparedness and capacity to respond, and linking relief to longer-term development.

Despite these efforts, a number of complex humanitarian crises and wars of an increasingly brutal nature through the decade led to large numbers of people being affected, displaced and/or killed. The international community failed to prevent the death and displacement of millions, for example, in Rwanda.<sup>83</sup> This led to further scrutiny and evaluation of the United Nations and wider international humanitarian relief sector.<sup>84</sup> As part of the comprehensive 1997 'Program for reform' of the incoming Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the short-lived DHA was replaced by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).<sup>85</sup> Although the DHA had some successes, overall it lacked the resources and expertise to impose its leadership adequately on other UN agencies, coordinate the international effort or influence field operations.<sup>86</sup> OCHA was given three core functions: policy development, advocacy of humanitarian issues and coordination of emergency response.<sup>87</sup> Significantly, all operational functions,

79 See for example Minear et al., 'United Nations coordination of the international humanitarian response to the Gulf Crisis 1990–1992'.

80 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991.

81 Weiss, 'Civilian–military interactions and ongoing UN reforms', p. 50.

82 Coppola, *Introduction to international disaster management*, pp. 458–9. The external organisations include the ICRC, the IFRC and the World Bank.

83 Cutts, *The state of the world's refugees*, pp. 245–73. See volume IV of the present series (Bou et al., *The limits of peacekeeping*) for an examination of the crisis and Australia's role in the subsequent peacekeeping mission.

84 For example, UN document E/1997/98, 10 July 1997.

85 UN document A/51/950, 14 June 1997, pp. 59–63.

86 Weiss, 'Civilian–military interactions and ongoing UN reforms', pp. 56–9; and Crisp, 'Humanitarian action and coordination', p. 489.

87 UN document A/51/950, 14 June 1997, p. 60.



including responsibility for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness, devolved to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as these activities were seen to be more closely related to capacity building. Responsibility for the UN's demining programs, which had been with the DHA, was moved to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Many of the problems, however, remained unchanged for the new office. OCHA was more streamlined than its predecessor, but it still had to grapple with the issue of coordinating a response effort that had grown exponentially in size and complexity in recent times. Further, many of the agencies and actors participating, both inside and outside the United Nations family, remained wary of being coordinated. The increasing role of the military in disaster relief, not to mention in complex emergencies where the boundaries between the so-called military and humanitarian spaces are blurred, brought added problems in coordinating a response to best suit those most in need: the victims of disasters.

The response to natural disasters by the international relief system is often driven by a wider response to a range of complex emergencies and humanitarian crises. A review of the United Nations humanitarian system prompted by the internally displaced persons crisis in Darfur, as well as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, led to reform of what had been called the 'collaborative approach' in use by OCHA.<sup>88</sup> This led to adoption of the 'cluster lead' or 'sector group' approach, in which a designated agency, which could be a UN agency, NGO or the IFRC, takes leadership responsibility for a particular sector, or cluster, of required functions in a disaster or humanitarian crisis situation.<sup>89</sup> These clusters included nutrition, health, water/sanitation, emergency shelter, camp management, protection, early recovery, logistics and emergency telecommunications. Designated lead agencies work at a global cluster level to ensure predictable and accountable systemic responses to disasters, while a flexibility in cluster leads at the country level is designed to provide coordinated and efficient responses in areas of need.

The cluster system was first implemented with mixed success in the response to the October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.<sup>90</sup> Many United Nations and NGO staff were confused with the complexities of the new system, and there were criticisms that non-UN agencies, especially local organisations and government structures, were not adequately involved. Nevertheless, there were positive aspects to the response, including the advantage for donors and active agencies of having one lead organisation responsible for a particular aspect of the response. The United Nations has continued to develop and refine the cluster system, but its adoption has been vetoed by several host countries during recent disaster responses.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the ICRC does not participate in the cluster approach, and the IFRC has taken on a qualified role as 'convenor' – rather than

88 Crisp, 'Humanitarian action and coordination', pp. 490–1.

89 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 'Guidance note on using the cluster approach to strengthen humanitarian response', Humanitarian Reform website, November 2006, viewed 16 December 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

90 'The evolving UN cluster approach in the aftermath of the Pakistan earthquake', International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) website, April 2006, viewed 16 December 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1. See chapters 25 and 26 of this volume for a discussion of Australia's role in the disaster response.

91 These include Peru, Bolivia and Mexico in 2007 and 2008 (Harvey, 'Towards good humanitarian government', p. 8).

leader – of the global emergency shelter cluster.<sup>92</sup> The evident difficulties in coordinating complex disaster responses will require continuing reform of systems at global and local levels.

## FUNDING THE RELIEF EFFORT

The amount of funding required for relief has grown in recent times in response to the increasing scale and frequency of disasters. The international community provided US\$436 million in 1970 for humanitarian assistance worldwide.<sup>93</sup> By 2008, this amount had grown to US\$18 billion, out of which approximately US\$1.3 billion was provided in response to natural disasters.<sup>94</sup> Of this total amount, around US\$3 billion was provided as donations by the general public to NGOs, UN agencies and the Red Cross, with the remainder mostly provided by member states of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC).<sup>95</sup> In recent years, the amount of funding from non-DAC states is rising, with Saudi Arabia contributing more than US\$700 million in 2008.<sup>96</sup> The international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 was exceptional, totalling more than US\$15 billion in private and public donations for the relief and recovery effort.<sup>97</sup>

The majority of funding for response and recovery after natural disasters up until the 1970s and 1980s was bilateral, from government to government. Much of this funding, or the provision of relief goods, was often channelled through the Red Cross or other NGOs in the affected country. From the 1990s, a higher percentage of disaster funding was directed through international aid agencies, the United Nations or other multilateral organisations.<sup>98</sup> The latter category included funding from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, and other regional multinational coalitions, such as the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department. The IFRC has since 1984 maintained a Disaster Relief Emergency Fund that allocated in 2008 approximately US\$18 million in grants through sixty-nine national societies.<sup>99</sup>

The United Nations established a trust fund to provide token grants for immediate disaster relief in 1972, but the organisation was reluctant to become a major funding provider at that time. This fund was reformed in 1984, with the hope of attracting US\$4–5 million to act as a revolving fund to provide cash advances in lieu of pledged contributions to ensure an immediate cash response to disasters.<sup>100</sup> By the end of 1987,

92 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 'Guidance note on using the cluster approach to strengthen humanitarian response', Humanitarian Reform website, November 2006, viewed 16 December 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

93 Development Initiatives, 'Global humanitarian assistance report 2006', p. 7.

94 Development Initiatives, 'Global humanitarian assistance report 2009', p. 1; and UN document A/64/331, 27 August 2009, pp. 7–8.

95 The DAC is a body of the OECD that deals with aid to developing countries (OECD, 'DAC in dates', p. 7).

96 Development Initiatives, 'Global humanitarian assistance report 2009', p. 122.

97 This figure does not include an amount of US\$2.7 billion from the budgets of affected countries (Cosgrave, 'Synthesis report: expanded summary', p. 19).

98 Harvey, 'Towards good humanitarian government', p. 37; and Development Initiatives, 'Global humanitarian assistance report 2009', p. 21.

99 IFRC, *Annual report: Disaster Relief Emergency Fund*, p. 1.

100 UN document A/41/295, 1 May 1986, p. 17.

the fund had failed to attract the necessary level of funding, and the average grant per disaster had fallen to only US\$22,000.<sup>101</sup>

The United Nations established the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) in 1992 to provide immediate funding to various UN agencies for complex emergencies.<sup>102</sup> The CERF was to have a projected balance of US\$50 million, with the funds provided as a loan to be repaid from pledged contributions within six months. By the end of the decade, the fund was not being fully utilised, although US\$185 million had been dispersed over the eight years since it was founded. In 2000, the amount of the fund was lowered and the scope of the fund expanded to include funding for security arrangements in complex emergencies, and for responses to natural disasters.<sup>103</sup>

Simultaneous with the establishment of the CERF was the introduction of a mechanism for the Emergency Relief Coordinator to launch a common appeal for funding within seven days of a complex emergency.<sup>104</sup> This emergency measure developed into the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), which became the major forum for assessing needs and common responses in concert with UN agencies, and several hundred NGOs, governments, donors and the Red Cross.<sup>105</sup> In the short term, a Flash Appeal is launched to cover needs and requirements in the early stages of an emergency.<sup>106</sup> Since 1992, the CAP has provided more than US\$42 billion for more than 330 appeals.<sup>107</sup>

In 2005, the CERF was renamed the Central Emergency Response Fund and reformed to include a component of US\$450 million for immediate grants, in addition to reinstating the original US\$50 million for the revolving fund.<sup>108</sup> The new CERF attempted to alleviate funding shortfalls in the critical emergency phase of disasters, and to provide funds for 'forgotten' disasters and emergencies that did not receive widespread media exposure. The grant component of the new CERF had received sufficient donations to achieve its target balance by 2008.<sup>109</sup> By November 2009, it had contributed almost US\$1.4 billion to provide immediate funding for disasters across the globe.<sup>110</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Great advances have been made in the speed and efficiency of the response by the international community to disasters that overwhelm the capacity of individual states. Nevertheless, pressures from growing populations, increasing levels of urbanisation, climate change and other factors have led to increasing levels of loss and damage from

101 UN document A/43/375, 1 June 1988, p. 22.

102 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991.

103 UN document A/55/649, 28 November 2000.

104 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991.

105 Bassiouni, *A review of the consolidated appeal process*, pp. 3–6; and leaflet, OCHA, 'The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP)', 2008.

106 Coppola, *Introduction to international disaster management*, p. 487.

107 'About the CAP', CAP website, viewed 17 December 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

108 UN document A/60/432, 20 October 2005, pp. 6–7.

109 'UN document A/64/327, 24 August 2009, pp. 14–17.

110 'CERF figures', CERF website, viewed 16 November 2009, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/806/1.

disasters over recent decades. Often, it has been the poorest countries that have suffered most because of the lack of infrastructure, preparedness and planning for events of this type. For this reason, the focus has changed in recent decades from responding to disaster, to mitigation and preparedness, in order to strengthen the capacity of poorer countries to bear the impact of natural hazards.

More research and funds have recently been directed to development and capacity building in areas much wider than disaster management. For this reason, the United Nations declared the 1990s the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR).<sup>111</sup> The aim of the IDNDR was to reduce the impact of natural disasters, especially in developing countries, through sustained international action and programs.<sup>112</sup> Various organisations, domestic committees, regional associations, NGOs, the private sector, the international scientific community and agencies within the United Nations worked to improve the capacity of vulnerable states to mitigate the effects of disasters, formulate strategies and guidelines, and use scientific advances to prepare for and predict natural hazards.<sup>113</sup>

Improvements were evident during the decade, such as the implementation of disaster policies and institutions in various developing countries, increased awareness of the benefits of a culture of prevention, and efforts to incorporate disaster risk reduction into development policies.<sup>114</sup> The successor to the IDNDR within the United Nations, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, has an extremely difficult and complex task in the face of the reality of human loss and suffering, and economic and social dislocation due to natural disasters. In the meantime, the international community continues to respond to the misfortune of others with offers of funding, relief goods, expertise, technology and, above all, hope.

---

111 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/42/169, 11 December 1987.

112 UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/44/236, 22 December 1989.

113 UN document A/CONF.172/9, 27 September 1994.

114 UN document A/CONF.206/L.1, 20 December 2004.

# Capable, available and willing to respond

## *Australia's overseas natural disaster policies*

In early 1921, the Queensland Government sought approval from Prime Minister Billy Hughes for one or two 'war vessels' to be stationed at Brisbane or Cairns to provide assistance after the annual cyclones that ravaged the northern coast of the state. On the advice of the Naval Board, Hughes refused the request, stating that such actions were 'outside the province of the Royal Australian Navy which is charged with the primary duty of the defence of the country in war'. The solution proposed by the Prime Minister was for the Queensland Government to purchase several tugboats of 'good seagoing quality' fitted with wireless telegraphic communications.<sup>1</sup> By way of contrast, when a massive earthquake and tsunami left a trail of destruction in countries around the Indian Ocean at the end of 2004, the immediate question posed from within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was not whether or not they would be involved, but rather where and for how long.

What brought about this change? How did Australia move from a viewpoint whereby its defence forces were considered solely for war fighting to one where participation in responses to natural disasters in the region was taken for granted? The refusal of Queensland's request in 1921 came only two years after HMAS *Encounter* transported a medical team to the islands of the South Pacific following an outbreak of Spanish influenza, a deployment that became the first overseas emergency relief mission by Australian military forces (see [chapter 4](#)). Even so, such assistance to a foreign country was not repeated until an engineer contingent was deployed to the New Hebrides in 1960 (see [chapter 6](#)), and thereafter remained infrequent and limited in scope until the 1970s.

By that time, the military had become a frequent contributor to domestic disaster responses, a situation reflected in the establishment of the Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO) within the Department of Defence in 1974 (see [appendix I](#)). One decade later, in February 1984, the government agreed that the NDO would also take the lead

---

1 Letter, W. Gillies to W.M. Hughes, 5 January 1921; and letter, W.M. Hughes to Premier (Qld), 3 February 1921, both in NAA: A457, 503/4.

in coordinating Australia's material responses to natural disasters in the region. This decision provided a policy framework to a trend that had emerged from the late 1970s, in which ADF participation in overseas relief efforts focused almost exclusively on disasters in independent Papua New Guinea and the island states of the South Pacific.<sup>2</sup> This situation did not substantially change until after 2003, when a one-off delivery of relief supplies to Iran (see [chapter 25](#)) was followed by an unprecedented deployment of a medical team and helicopter detachment to Pakistan in late 2005 (see [chapters 25 and 26](#)).

Any deployment and use of military forces needs to be examined in light of contemporary defence policies. This chapter seeks to understand why Australian military forces were used for disaster relief overseas by examining these operations within the context of Australian defence and foreign policies. Spanning as it does almost a hundred years from the time of the first operation in 1918, the chapter will by necessity provide only an overview of some of the main directions and influential trends of these policies on overseas responses. The majority of relief operations in which Australian military forces participated were undertaken in the South Pacific, so particular attention will be paid to defence policies as they relate to this region. The chapter will start with the First World War, as context for the first operation to Fiji, Samoa and Tonga after an influenza epidemic in the islands in 1918.

---

## THROUGH TWO WORLD WARS

---

Despite the emergence of a nascent nationalism, the British Empire was a dominating factor in the political and social lives of Australians at war and during peace in the early decades of the twentieth century. These attitudes were implicit in Australia's response to the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914, with the country's politicians pledging to stand by Britain 'to our last man and our last shilling'.<sup>3</sup> This call to defend the Empire led to more than 330,000 Australian volunteers deploying overseas to join other dominion forces on land, in the air and at sea under British command. The fledgling Royal Australian Navy (RAN), founded in 1911 and comprising only 3,800 personnel and sixteen commissioned ships at the outbreak of war, was quickly placed under the control of the British Admiralty.<sup>4</sup>

Ships of the RAN participated in many of the major naval engagements across the globe during the war, but its most significant contributions were arguably in the region: as a deterrent to German plans to disrupt shipping in the Indian and Pacific oceans, and its patrolling and interception role in the China Station to demonstrate Great Britain's continuing authority.<sup>5</sup> This regional role of the RAN was reflected in one of its first operational tasks: to participate in the capture of the German territories of the Pacific, which included New Guinea, Nauru and Western Samoa.<sup>6</sup> At the Paris peace talks after the war, one of the central aims of Billy Hughes was the annexation

---

2 After a relief operation in Bali in 1976 and delivery of relief supplies in Thailand in 1978, the ADF did not again contribute to a relief mission in a country other than PNG or the Pacific Islands until 1991.

3 Statement by Andrew Fisher, cited in Millar, *Australia in peace and war*, p. 74.

4 Stevens, *The Royal Australian Navy*, p. 29.

5 Stevens, *In all respects ready*, pp. 374–6.

6 Mackenzie, *The Australians at Rabaul*, p. 23; and Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy, 1914–1918*, p. 47.

by Australia of all these territories. Although motivated by his desire to prevent Japanese expansion, Hughes wanted to increase Australia's influence in the region, a policy supported by the navy's continuing assessment of the need for a presence in the former German territories.<sup>7</sup>

Australia's approval of the despatch of a medical team on HMAS *Encounter* to the islands of the South Pacific in November 1918 (see [chapter 4](#)) was both an expression of concern for the welfare of the peoples of the islands and an opportunity to demonstrate Australia's willingness to maintain a presence in the region. This relief mission did not immediately lead to other similar deployments, primarily owing to the post-war demobilisation and scaling down of Australia's armed forces. Thereafter, the need to reduce spending in the immediate post-war period began a trend of naval reductions that continued after the limitations placed on the Navy by the Washington treaties of 1922. Increased naval spending in the five-year defence plan announced after the Imperial Conference of 1923 did not bear fruit until the completion of the new HMAS *Australia* (II) in 1928, by which time the Great Depression was about to lead to more severe defence cuts.<sup>8</sup>

Neither was the relief operation an indication of a wider willingness by Australia at that time to contribute directly to countries affected by natural disasters. The exceptions were financial grants to Italy after the 1908 Sicilian earthquake, to Russia after the 1922 famine and to Japan after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake.<sup>9</sup> The means of distribution of all three grants, through British representatives in London and Tokyo, reflected Australia's reliance on Britain for its diplomacy and other machinery of foreign relations. Until just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Australia relied on the British Foreign Office for information and contacts to guide its limited foreign policy initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

Indicative of Australia's attitude at this time was its refusal to join the International Relief Union (IRU), which, as outlined in [chapter 1](#), was under discussion during the 1920s. Australia's objections, which stemmed from advice from the Department of Defence and the fact that the Australian Red Cross would not support the originally proposed scheme, was that membership of the IRU would result in frequent calls for assistance from Australia with little benefit in return.<sup>11</sup> The government would not commit the proposed annual fee, estimated to be £3,000 to £4,000, when there was little likelihood of disaster in Australia requiring substantial outside assistance.<sup>12</sup> Revisions to the proposal, which gained the support of Treasury and the Australian Red Cross, set a low one-off financial contribution for Australia, the equivalent of £1,370 in local currency.<sup>13</sup> The Australian Government, however, while expressing sympathy with the aims of the IRU, maintained its objections and refused to join.

7 Dutton, 'A British outpost in the Pacific', pp. 54–5.

8 See Sears, '1919–1929: Imperial service', pp. 55–80.

9 Note, 'Reply to questionnaire', c. May 1925, NAA: A981, LEAGUE INTER R1; and 'Aid from Australia', *Western Argus*, 18 September 1923.

10 Watt, *The evolution of Australian foreign policy, 1938–1965*, p. 292.

11 Memo, Defence to PM's Dept, 10 April 1924, NAA: A981, LEAGUE INTER R1.

12 Letter, G.F. Pearce to Secretary-General (League of Nations), 23 April 1924; and note for file, 'International relief union (Ciraolo scheme)', c. April 1926, both in NAA: A981, LEAGUE INTER R1.

13 Note for file, 'International Relief Union', 29 August 1933, NAA: A981, LEAGUE INTER R1. The actual amount was 18,900 Swiss francs, calculated as a ratio of Australia's contribution to the League of Nations.



Subsequent requests during the early 1930s for Australian participation in the IRU were rejected owing to a need for the 'strictest economy' in Australia's financial circumstances – the direct result of the Great Depression. The growing uncertainty in the international situation throughout the decade was followed by Australia again committing resources and manpower to the cause in Europe after Great Britain's declaration of war on Germany in 1939, and then to the defence of Australia when Japan entered the war in December 1941. Although Australia had turned to the United States in its darkest hour in 1942, it remained a member of the British Empire, albeit with a new sense of independence of strategy and action. This was amply demonstrated by the country's war record and by the development of formal diplomatic relations with the world's powers.<sup>14</sup>

A priority for the international community in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War was to resettle refugees and rebuild societies disrupted by war. Australia, represented by the Minister for External Affairs, Herbert Evatt, was an enthusiastic founding member of the United Nations and subsequently made financial contributions to a number of the international institutions established to deal with these problems. From 1945 to the end of the 1965 financial year, Australia had contributed a total of £72 million in multilateral aid to various UN organisations.<sup>15</sup> Australia's attitude to foreign aid during these decades has been described as 'tending towards ambivalence', yet the government contributed an additional £75 million in economic aid to other countries and a further £233 million in development aid to Papua New Guinea during this period.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Australia's financial contributions to international emergency relief after natural disasters amounted to a modest £0.9 million during the same twenty-year period.<sup>17</sup> As a measure of comparison, both the Canadian and US governments contributed amounts of this magnitude after the 1960 earthquake in Chile alone.<sup>18</sup>

## 'FORWARD DEFENCE' AND THE COLD WAR

The government of Robert Menzies, which came to power in December 1949 in an election fought largely over the issue of communism,<sup>19</sup> immediately faced a range of international security concerns stemming from the onset of the Cold War, the advance of the Soviet Union in Europe, victory by the communists in China, and uncertainty brought on from communist or nationalist-inspired movements towards independence and decolonisation across much of Asia. The Second World War had demonstrated the importance to Australian security of an alliance with the United States, and Australia again sought a closer alliance in the light of Cold War uncertainties.<sup>20</sup> The decision to deploy troops to Korea in mid-1950, the concluding of the Australia New Zealand United States (ANZUS) security treaty in 1951, and the formation of the South East

14 By 1945, this included Brazil, Canada, China, France, India, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Soviet Union and the United States (Millar, *Australia in peace and war*, p. 160).

15 *Ibid.*, p. 508; and note for file, 'Relief aid', 3 November 1965, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

16 Millar, *Australia in peace and war*, p. 508. Quote from Greenwood and Harper, *Australia in world affairs, 1966–1970*, p. 223.

17 Note for file, 'Relief aid', 3 November 1965, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3.

18 Note for file, 'Chile earthquake disaster', c. June 1960, NAA: A463, 1960/4654.

19 Edwards, *Crises and commitments*, p. 63.

20 See Millar, *Australia in peace and war*, pp. 197–222.



Asian Treaty Organisation in 1954 in particular were indicative both of the importance of the US alliance to Australian foreign policy and of the way Australia perceived the threats in the region through a US anti-communist perspective. Traditional loyalty to Great Britain remained strong among Menzies and his conservative colleagues, as demonstrated by the deployment to Malaya of Australian troops under the British-led Far East Strategic Reserve (FESR) from 1955, and support for the British during the Suez crisis in 1956, yet Australia gradually came to see its security residing in the region, albeit within a US alliance rather than through old-world ties to Europe and Empire.<sup>21</sup>

Percy Spender, Minister for External Affairs, articulated this position as early as 1950: 'Our first and constant interest must be the security of our own homeland and the maintenance of peace in the area in which our country is geographically placed.'<sup>22</sup> Economic and development aid, epitomised in the ideals of the Colombo Plan founded in 1951, were considered means to encourage cooperation with states in the region to protect against communism and communist China.<sup>23</sup>

Consistent with this policy was the emergence of the practice during the course of the 1950s of Australia providing foreign governments with financial grants after significant natural disasters. Significantly, the first were contributions to the governments of developed Western countries, such as Great Britain, the Netherlands and the United States, but by the end of the decade most were directed to underdeveloped or newly independent countries in South and South-East Asia, such as Ceylon (Sri Lanka), East Pakistan and India. Although this was seen as a sign of the government's continuing interest in contributing to international humanitarian relief efforts, it was also in line with a realignment of priorities towards the region in defence and foreign policies.

The Australian response to a series of typhoons in East Asia at the end of the decade illustrates these connections. Australia initially did not provide a relief contribution to Formosa (Taiwan), Korea or Japan after severe flooding in September 1959, ostensibly because the acting Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, considered the matter addressed by contributions from the Australian Red Cross.<sup>24</sup> After questions in Parliament highlighted the government's inaction, and a realisation of the extent of the disaster in Japan – 5,000 were dead and 1.5 million were homeless – Barwick reconsidered and recommended to Prime Minister Menzies a financial grant totalling £40,000 for the three countries. Barwick's reasoning, in addition to the humanitarian scale of the emergency, was that the contribution was consistent with 'our post-war policy of assisting to meet international relief requirements' and that Australia's 'political and material interests would be served'. Japan was Australia's second largest trading partner, and 'goodwill considerations' were important to future trade deals. The grant to Formosa, in particular, was seen as an opportunity to 'encourage the Chinese Nationalists' despite Australia being 'somewhat inhibited politically and diplomatically'.<sup>25</sup> Menzies' approval of the grant in early November noted Japan's importance to the 'free countries around the Pacific'.<sup>26</sup> Australia did not, by comparison, provide assistance,

21 See for example Bell, *Australia and the United States in the American century*, pp. 89–96.

22 Statement by Spender, 'International affairs', CPD, HR, 9 March 1950, p. 623.

23 On the history of the Colombo Plan and its relations to the Cold War, see Oakman, *Facing Asia*.

24 Minute, K.H. Herde to M.C. Timbs, 9 October 1959, NAA: A463, 1959/6001.

25 All citations from letter, G.E. Barwick to R.G. Menzies, 28 October 1959, NAA: A463, 1959/6001.

26 Minute, K.H. Herde to Prime Minister, 10 November 1959, NAA: A463, 1959/6001.

nor was it asked to, after flooding of the Yangtze River in communist China earlier in 1959 led to the deaths of an estimated 2 million people.<sup>27</sup>

Australia's strategic response to these Cold War tensions in the region was characterised by a policy known as 'forward defence'. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, military units from the three services were deployed under coalition arrangements to various locations in South-East Asia to strengthen the defence of friendly countries and to prevent any further spread of communism in the region. These deployed forces participated in a range of activities, from humanitarian missions and hearts-and-minds operations in response to localised conflict, to war-fighting during the Malayan Emergency, Confrontation with Indonesia, and the Vietnam War.<sup>28</sup> The proximity of these deployed forces to areas vulnerable to natural disasters also led to consideration of their use in relief operations. This corresponded to a time when military forces were beginning to become more involved in disaster responses in Australia (see [appendix I](#)), but there was little inclination towards Australian military involvement in such activities overseas.

The RAN, Army and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) units deployed to Malaya and Singapore in 1955 to join British and New Zealand forces in the FESR is a case in point.<sup>29</sup> In 1958, the Malayan authorities approached the British seeking approval for contributing forces to the FESR, especially air forces, to be used in local disaster responses. Before Malayan independence in 1957, British forces had been used in this way on several occasions, but this was not an activity specified in the directives covering the roles of FESR contributing countries.<sup>30</sup> The Australian Defence Committee agreed to the request, with the proviso that the Federation of Malaya may be charged for stores and supplies in some cases, that the British authorities in Malaya inform Australia each time a request was made, and that approval for the use of Australian military in disaster responses did not involve them in operations aiding the civil powers in times of civil disturbances.<sup>31</sup> The Australian Government had insisted on this last condition at the time of Malayan independence in August 1957, and this was incorporated into general directives governing the use of FESR troops from 1959.<sup>32</sup>

All Australian directives issued after late 1958 to commanders and participating units of the FESR authorised participation in relief after floods and other natural disasters.<sup>33</sup> The Navy Office initially objected to these instructions, which they considered would

27 Casualty information from: EM-DAT database, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters website, viewed 1 July 2015, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/801/16. Contemporary reports of the floods did not mention casualty figures. See for example 'Millions fight Chinese floods', *Canberra Times*, 23 June 1959; and R. Essoyan, 'Threat of food crisis in China', *Canberra Times*, 6 August 1959.

28 For an overview of these activities, see Edwards, *Crises and commitments*, and Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War*.

29 A detachment of C-47 Dakota transport aircraft from No. 38 (Transport) Squadron was in Malaya from June 1950 until December 1952, but there is no record of the aircraft participating in disaster relief.

30 Cable 17363, Kuala Lumpur to Canberra, 7 October 1958, NAA: A1209, 1958/6060, and draft directive, attached to letter, G.E. Blakers to R.G. Menzies, 16 May 1955, NAA: A6059, 41/441/82.

31 Report 58/1958, Joint Planning Committee, 17 October 1958; and minute, Defence Committee, 'Use of Commonwealth forces in Malaya to assist during natural disasters', 23 October 1958, both in NAA: A1209, 1958/6060.

32 Note, 'Statement of External Affairs and Defence views', November 1957; and 'Directive for British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve', attachment to report, ANZAM Joint Planning Committee, 24 July 1959, both in AWM: AWM121, 207/B/1.

33 See for example directive to Commander, Australian Army Forces, FARELF, December 1958, AWM: AWM121, 207/A/2.

place captains of ships in an ‘unacceptable position’ by allowing assistance to local authorities after a disaster, but restricting their ability to help prevent looting and civil disorder that may result from that disaster. The objections were, however, dismissed on the grounds that actions by ships’ captains would be governed by the same restrictions in place for situations of civil disorder, and that the Army or RAAF would most likely be involved in disaster responses.<sup>34</sup> That proved to be the case, with the only contributions by Australian forces deployed to the FESR being the RAAF and Army after floods in Malaysia in 1967 and 1971 (see [chapter 10](#)).

Soon after completion of arrangements for FESR troops to contribute to disasters in South-East Asia, a confluence of circumstances led to the deployment of Australian Army engineers to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) to contribute to the reconstruction of the capital, Port Vila, after it was destroyed by a cyclone at the end of December 1959 (see [chapter 6](#)). The deployment originated from a specific request by the British administrators of the New Hebrides, owing to the need for engineers and tradesmen in the reconstruction effort, and from a desire to counter French military support with a show of British military in the response. It was enabled by the availability of an Australian unit with the suitable readiness to deploy at short notice, and by the recent acquisition of the Hercules transport aircraft. This readiness was because the unit in question had been identified as part of a possible deployment to Laos to combat communist insurgents should the Laotian Government appeal for assistance.<sup>35</sup>

Further, the RAAF and RAN were used to transport relief supplies to Indonesia after several disasters in 1961 and 1963. As discussed in [chapter 7](#), these requests originated from the Department of External Affairs (DEA) during a time of increasing tension with Australia’s northern neighbour, and the cargo was generally transported on aircraft and ships that were already undertaking missions to the region. These precedents led to further consideration and proposals by staff of DEA and the Prime Minister’s Department for the use of RAAF aircraft in subsequent disasters, but very few of these led to actual relief missions, primarily because of the cost (see [chapter 3](#)).

Australian units assigned to the war in Vietnam were also in a front-line position to be considered for disaster relief, but this was not a high priority for deployed formations. A typhoon in the country in November 1964 led to questions from the press concerning the possible use in the relief effort of RAAF Caribou aircraft recently deployed to Vietnam, but these aircraft were already exceeding planned flying rates in support of the war.<sup>36</sup> Further consideration for Hercules aircraft to fly a gift of blankets from Australia was also precluded by the heavy workload for the aircraft, which included supply flights through Butterworth in support of Australian units deployed to Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> The DEA briefly considered a similar proposal to airlift tents to Laos after flooding in September 1966, but this was not even taken to Defence because of a recognition that the aircraft would not be available owing to operational and training commitments.<sup>38</sup>

34 Memo, Navy to Defence, 9 January 1959; and minute, M.C. Timbs to Secretary, 25 February 1959, both in NAA: A1209, 1958/6060.

35 For the context of the situation in Laos, see Edwards, *Crises and commitments*, pp. 210–16.

36 Minute, A.M. Morris to G. Jockel, ‘Use of RAAF detachment in Vietnam’, 12 November 1964, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 3, and Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam*, pp. 44–5.

37 Cable 30420, Canberra to Saigon, 26 November 1964, NAA: A1838, 1585/1/9.

38 Annotation on minute, J.A. Piper to E&TA, SEA Branch, 26 September 1966, NAA: A1838, 1585/1/27.

Forward defence as a basis of the defence of Australia was effectively ended after the election of Gough Whitlam's Labor Government in 1972, but strategic and international trends had led gradually to this point and remnants of the policy remained for several years. Alliances with the United Kingdom and the United States remained important, but these were modified and reinterpreted in line with British and US policies to reduce military commitments to South-East Asia. Whitlam reinterpreted ANZUS in 1972, for example, as an 'instrument of justice and peace, and political, social and economic advancement in the Pacific area' rather than as a Cold War alliance against communism.<sup>39</sup> The effect on defence policy of this realignment was a gradual withdrawal of military personnel from deployments in South-East Asia. Subsequently, opportunities for involvement of these forces in disaster responses also decreased, but there were two more opportunities for RAAF involvement after flooding in Thailand in 1975 and 1978 (see [chapter 10](#)).

In line with these trends, the FESR was replaced in November 1971 by the ANZUK Force, an Australian-led coalition of Australian, British and New Zealand air, land and sea forces to provide for 'security and stability of South-East Asia', especially Malaysia and Singapore, and by extension to provide for the defence of Australia and New Zealand.<sup>40</sup> Respective national commanders in the ANZUK forces inherited FESR provisions to provide disaster relief assistance, but the British High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur proposed in May 1971 setting up a disaster fund of £10,000 at the discretion of the ANZUK force. The ANZUK partners agreed in principle fairly quickly to the establishment of the fund, but the scheme was never implemented or even presented to the Malaysian or Singaporean authorities because of bickering over the details, primarily by Australian government departments.<sup>41</sup> An increasingly frustrated deputy High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, Geoffrey Brady, wrote several times to the Department of Foreign Affairs, as it was then known, bemoaning the protracted and detailed deliberations, which he believed were 'quite out of proportion' to the goodwill to be gained by a relatively unlikely relief effort.<sup>42</sup> By the time concerns over the issues were allayed and agreement was reached between high commissioners of the three countries on 31 May 1974, it was considered too late to implement, as New Zealand forces had already reverted to national command, and ANZUK was due to wind up early the following year.<sup>43</sup>

## INCREASED SELF-RELIANCE AND THE DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA

By the mid-1970s, the Australian Government was gradually coming to terms with the implications of the British and US policies to withdraw military forces from South-East Asia, in that the country would need to rely more heavily on its own resources to defend its strategic interests. This policy had emerged in strategic assessments in the early 1970s

39 Cited in Hudson, *Australia in world affairs: 1971–75*, p. 179.

40 Agendum no. 6/1972, Defence Committee, 'The five power arrangements and ANZUK', 4 April 1972, NAA: A7942, F59.

41 Memo FA1111, J.S. Holloway (Kuala Lumpur) to Canberra, 31 May 1971; and memo, N.F. Parkinson to HQ ANZUK Force, 27 October 1971, both in NAA: A1838, 696/1/10.

42 See for example memo, G.V. Brady (Kuala Lumpur) to Canberra, 19 December 1973; and memo 113, G.V. Brady to Canberra, 15 February 1974, both in NAA: A1838, 696/1/10.

43 Memo 904, F.W. Truelove (Singapore) to Canberra, 30 August 1974, NAA: A1838, 696/1/10.

and was clearly enunciated in the 1976 White Paper, *Australian defence*, which noted that Australia's primary area of strategic interest was in the region; maritime areas adjacent to the Australian mainland, the South-West Pacific, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and South-East Asia.<sup>44</sup> Australia's future defence force was considered more likely to undertake joint operations in this region, rather than further afield as part of other nations' forces.<sup>45</sup>

Although analysts considered direct military threat against Australia in the post-Vietnam era to be unlikely,<sup>46</sup> Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser consistently preached on the dangers of increasing Soviet influence in the region, particularly in the Indian Ocean, but also among the independent island states of the South Pacific. The latter was brought especially into relief after Soviet attempts in 1976 to secure fishing rights in Tonga, a measure that Fraser interpreted as a precursor to a Soviet base on Australia's doorstep.<sup>47</sup> Although such overtures proved false, Fraser, echoing the words of US President Jimmy Carter, announced to parliament in February 1980 that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the previous year was the 'most dangerous international crisis since World War II',<sup>48</sup> and that it 'change[d] substantially for the worse the strategic order underpinning Australia's security'.<sup>49</sup>

The assessments contained in the 1976 White Paper *Australian defence* had a direct influence on relations with island states of the South Pacific, through which ran the major trade and communications routes to Australia's largest allies.<sup>50</sup> Bilateral aid to South Pacific countries increased from a figure of \$15 million over the three years 1974–76, to \$150 million for the three years 1981–83.<sup>51</sup> Prime Minister Fraser directly linked this rise to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> This lifted Australia from third on the list of donors to independent South Pacific island states to first, in a period when overall Australian foreign aid declined as a measure of GDP.<sup>53</sup> Further, Australia increased its diplomatic representation in the region in the late 1970s, establishing high commissions in Western Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Justification for this increase of diplomacy, itself set against a background of independence for Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Vanuatu in this period, included oversight of the increased aid budget and development programs.<sup>54</sup> This increased strategic interest in the South Pacific sought to deny opportunities for unfriendly states, such as the Soviet Union, to buy influence in the area.<sup>55</sup>

44 Dibb, 'The self-reliant defence of Australia', p. 14; and Defence, *Australian defence*, p. 6.

45 Quoted in Dibb, 'The self-reliant defence of Australia', p. 15.

46 O'Neill, 'Defence policy', pp. 15–17.

47 See for instance Tsamenyi and Blay, 'Soviet fishing in the South Pacific', pp. 155–62.

48 Carter used this phrase in his State of the Union address the previous month (Carter, 'State of the Union address, 23 January 1980', American Presidency Project website, viewed 24 August 2015, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/801/16).

49 J.M. Fraser, ministerial statement, 'Afghanistan: Australia's assessment and response', CPD, HR, 19 February 1980, pp. 17, 23.

50 Boyce and Angel, *Independence and alliance*, pp. 44, 50.

51 Herr, 'Australia and the South-West Pacific', p. 287.

52 J.M. Fraser, ministerial statement, 'Afghanistan: Australia's assessment and response', CPD, HR, 19 February 1980, p. 26.

53 Herr, 'Australia and the South-West Pacific', p. 279. This ranking excluded aid from France and the United States to their respective dependencies in the region.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 284.

55 Herr, 'Regionalism, strategic denial and South Pacific security', p. 175.



Defence cooperation programs and other forms of military aid through this period continued to focus on encouraging order and stability in the wider region, favouring Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. There were, however, several smaller-scale projects initiated in Fiji, Tonga and Solomon Islands in line with the increased security concerns in the South Pacific.<sup>56</sup> The decision by the international community to institute a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone in the late 1970s provided further opportunity for Australia to offer assistance to island states with greatly expanded areas of sea under their control. Australia provided technical advice on maritime surveillance in 1980, and later, after the zone was formalised by the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, Australia provided patrol boats to twelve Pacific island nations, as discussed further in [chapter 14](#).

The growing links established between Australia and the Pacific Islands as a result of this increased diplomatic representation, aid and defence cooperation led to Defence involvement in several disaster responses from 1977, to Solomon Islands, Fiji, PNG and Tonga (see [chapters 10](#) and [11](#)). These operations included the transport of relief supplies from Australia using RAAF Hercules, the deployment of RAAF helicopters and personnel for distribution of relief supplies, and the use of Army engineers for reconstruction and clearing tasks. Despite this increasing involvement in the Pacific during a time of little other overseas defence activity, these operations were not grounded in policy within the Australian Defence Force until arrangements were formalised in 1984 for the Natural Disasters Organisation to coordinate Australia's material responses to disasters in the region, as described in [chapter 3](#).

The Hawke Labor Government gained power in the March 1983 national elections, but they made no immediate substantial changes to defence policy. Although the Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs resolved for the NDO to coordinate overseas disaster responses in February 1984, this merely formalised an arrangement that had been under consideration for several years under the previous government. The NDO subsequently coordinated the deployment of substantial ADF resources in the response to disasters in the region, including helicopter detachments, transport aircraft, Army engineers and several Navy vessels.

The RAN in particular was keen to be involved in these disaster responses in the region in the mid-1980s. The Hawke Government decided soon after gaining office in early 1983 not to replace the ageing aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* and to disband the Navy's fixed-wing squadrons. Over subsequent years, budget and staffing cuts, the introduction of joint commands, and a corresponding rationalisation of shore facilities and ship upgrades left the RAN with low morale and a diminished sense of purpose. In 1986, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Michael Hudson, stated a need for stability from these 'past few years of shock and muddle'.<sup>57</sup> In February 1987, Defence Minister Kim Beazley, in foreshadowing themes that would appear in the White Paper later that year, made a policy statement that emphasised the importance of the island nations of the South Pacific. Among the measures announced to improve defence relations with these countries were increased naval deployments to the region and an increase in defence cooperation activities.<sup>58</sup> The desire by the RAN to be involved in disaster

---

<sup>56</sup> Smith, 'Defence policy', pp. 48–50.

<sup>57</sup> Stevens, *The Royal Australian Navy*, pp. 228, 239–40, 243.

<sup>58</sup> Statement by the Minister, K.C. Beazley, *CPD*, HR, 20 February 1987, pp. 433–6.

relief in the region was an extension of these activities and an attempt by the RAN to contribute in a useful, visible and meaningful way to broader strategic objectives.

Kim Beazley, who replaced Gordon Scholes as Minister for Defence after the December 1984 election, commissioned a review of Australia's defence capabilities in the light of continuing rivalry between the civilian and uniformed sections of the department and the need for a review of Australia's strategic situation. This report, produced by Paul Dibb, a former Defence official, formed the basis for the 1987 White Paper, *The defence of Australia*. The White Paper outlined a program of increased capabilities to support 'self-reliance' within an alliance framework to provide a 'defence in depth' against the most likely threat: low-level conflict in Australia's 'area of primary strategic interest, covering South-East Asia, the eastern Indian Ocean, and the South-West Pacific'.<sup>59</sup> The response by the ADF to the coup in Fiji in 1987, unrest in Vanuatu in 1988 and the outbreak of civil war in Bougainville, also in 1988, seemed to justify the focus on Australia's primary area of strategic interest, namely the South-West Pacific and South-East Asia, as outlined in the 1987 White Paper, and heralded a period of peacekeeping in the region that culminated in the deployment to East Timor in 1999.<sup>60</sup> This willingness to project Australian military force into the region was interpreted by analysts as a return to forward defence within an enhanced self-reliance posture.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the increase in Defence involvement in overseas disaster responses over this period, the 1987 White Paper made no specific mention of these activities. This reflected a statement by Beazley in 1985, when he implied that overseas disaster relief was essentially a 'non-defence' activity.<sup>62</sup> Many Defence practitioners would have agreed with Beazley that assistance to the civil community was a distraction from the main purpose of the ADF, yet there was a discernible change in mindset during the 1980s. Air Vice-Marshal John Lessels, Director General of the NDO, for instance, articulated in late 1986 the benefits of overseas disaster relief missions to the ADF, which included opportunities for training and testing of equipment, positive effects on morale, and the ability to project a good domestic and international image through the publicity of participation.<sup>63</sup> The issue seemed to have been settled by the following year, when a draft position paper produced by Defence noted that disaster relief to PNG and the South-West Pacific were to be considered a 'normal defence function' because 'Australia's defence policy recognises the significance of Papua New Guinea and nations of the South-West Pacific'.<sup>64</sup>

## AFTER THE COLD WAR

Although Australia had demonstrated a willingness in the closing years of the 1980s to take a more active military role in regional affairs, the changing international strategic situation that ultimately led to the end of the Cold War also provided opportunities for peacekeeping deployments outside Australia's area of primary strategic interest.

59 Defence, *The defence of Australia*, p. 10.

60 Horner, *Australia and the 'New World Order'*, p. 42.

61 See for example Cheeseman, *The search for self-reliance*, pp. 16–22.

62 Letter, K.C. Beazley to W.G. Hayden, 25 March 1985, Defence: A6721, 87/4085 pt 1.

63 Paper, 'Overseas disaster response operations – costing policy', attached to minute, NDO to Defence, 19 December 1986, Defence: A6721, 87/4085 pt 1.

64 Draft policy paper, 'Policy for Defence Department response to overseas disasters', attached to minute, Maj Gen B.W. Howard to DPUBS, 29 July 1988, Defence: A6721, 87/4085 pt 2.

Australia sent peacekeeping monitors to Iran in 1988 and engineers to Namibia in 1989, then contributed RAN ships to the Gulf to enforce UN sanctions against Iraq in 1990. The hope of the international community for a 'New World Order' after the end of the Cold War was reflected in Australia's enthusiastic contribution to further international peacekeeping missions in the first half of the 1990s, with substantial numbers of ADF personnel being deployed across the globe, including to Cambodia, former Yugoslavia, Mozambique, northern Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia and Western Sahara.

This newfound willingness to deploy peacekeeping forces more broadly did not, however, lead to a greater role for the ADF in overseas disaster responses outside the area of Australia's primary strategic interest. Nevertheless, Australia in the early 1990s had new challenges with respect to the way it engaged with South Pacific nations and the wider international community. The end of the Cold War and the changing global strategic situation led to a shift in Australian strategic policy from a position of preventing or denying any perceived anti-Western interests in the region, to one styled 'constructive commitment' by Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.<sup>65</sup> The government gradually realised that Australia's security was directly influenced by the stability and prosperity of nations of the South Pacific. As enunciated by Evans in his major policy statement in 1989, *Australia's regional security*, measures to promote this stability and prosperity included increasing defence cooperation and exchange programs, enhancing diplomatic engagement with regional leaders and refining economic development assistance.<sup>66</sup> The impact of natural disasters placed a huge burden on the relatively small economies of South Pacific nations, sometimes setting back development many years. Australian assistance after cyclones, in particular, was both a demonstration of goodwill towards Pacific neighbours and an investment in regional security.

The Keating Government outlined its defence policies in response to the changing international strategic situation after the end of the Cold War in its 1994 White Paper, *Defending Australia*. While maintaining a focus on Asia and the Pacific in light of economic growth in the region and the uncertainty of the strategic situation, there was less emphasis on engagement with the South Pacific and more on promoting capacity and cooperation within the region. This was particularly evident with assistance for maritime surveillance, through additional support for the Pacific Patrol Boat Program and targeted Defence Cooperation Program projects.<sup>67</sup> *Defending Australia* also noted the role the ADF played in supporting the civil community in times of emergency and that involvement in regional disaster responses demonstrated Australia's wider policy interests and 'contributes to Australia's standing as a responsible nation'.<sup>68</sup>

Despite this recognition during the 1990s of the role disaster relief could play, international trends in emergency management, government financial policies (see [chapter 3](#)), and a growing disaster resilience in the region moderated the use of the ADF for disaster responses, particularly in reducing the frequency of RAAF aircraft used to transport relief supplies to the Pacific Islands. After the responses to cyclones in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in early 1993 (see [chapter 14](#)), the RAAF did not participate in another relief operation to the South Pacific until early 2002, when

65 Evans and Grant, *Australia's foreign relations in the world of the 1990s*, p. 175.

66 The statement is reproduced in Fry, *Australia's regional security*, pp. 169–216.

67 Defence, *Defending Australia*, p. 92.

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 136–41.



the unavailability of civilian aircraft led to a one-off flight by a Hercules to Tonga after Cyclone Waka (see [chapter 18](#)). During this period, however, RAAF aircraft undertaking regular flights to PNG continued periodically to be used to transport relief supplies on an ‘opportunity’ basis.

John Howard outlined his government’s foreign and defence policies in 1997 with the publication of two policy papers. Both the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT’s) White Paper, *In the national interest*, and Defence’s *Australia’s strategic policy*, indicated the expansion of the government’s strategic focus to cover the wider Asia-Pacific region, with an emphasis on policy to strengthen bilateral relations with, in particular, the United States, Japan, Indonesia and China.<sup>69</sup> These documents also presented the government’s cautious approach to multilateral solutions to international issues through such organisations as the United Nations, a position partly representing Howard’s own bias against the institution, but also reflecting, for instance, the international disillusionment in peacekeeping born out of the tragedies of Rwanda and Bosnia earlier in the decade.<sup>70</sup>

Defence’s role in disaster responses through this period was increasingly seen as a normal defence function, despite their reduction in frequency and the absence of specific mention in either of the 1997 policy papers. The basis of this understanding was clearly articulated by the Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, who declared before the International Force East Timor deployment in 1999 that the ADF had evolved into an organisation that provided government with a range of non-combat-related options. He concluded: ‘In short, we have a dual role – we must actively work for peace, as well as prepare for war.’<sup>71</sup> This role ‘for peace’ was emphasised the following year in the White Paper, *Defence 2000: Our future defence force*, which included regional disaster relief missions within ‘lower level operations’ as a second priority behind the defence of Australia.<sup>72</sup> This evolving attitude had found expression in the late 1990s with several of the largest overseas disaster operations by the ADF to that time (see [chapters 15–17](#)). These responses were consistent with the government’s desire for social and economic stability in the region, particularly given the potential impact of the financial crisis that struck Indonesia and the region from mid-1997, the so-called Asian Financial Crisis.

*Defence 2000* further emphasised the growing international trend since the end of the Cold War away from conventional war to a proliferation of intra-state conflicts. The additional demands placed on defence forces as a result of these trends included humanitarian relief, evacuations, and peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations.<sup>73</sup> With an escalating Defence budget to provide for upgraded and new capabilities across the services to meet the new strategic situation, the White Paper outlined conditions for involvement in these lower-level operations, noting that defence forces do not always provide ‘a useful or practical response to a crisis’. The conditions included Australia’s

69 DFAT, *In the national interest*, p. iii; and Defence, *Australia’s strategic policy*, pp. 9–10.

70 See for example DFAT, *In the national interest*, pp. 47–9; Defence, *Australia’s strategic policy*, pp. 33–4; and Howard, *Lazarus rising*, pp. 468–9.

71 Cited in keynote address, Adm Chris Barrie, Food, Water and War: Security in a World of Conflict conference, Parliament House, Canberra, 15 August 2000.

72 Defence, *Defence 2000*, p. xi.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

strategic, humanitarian, political and alliance interests; costs and benefits to the ADF; achievable goals and mandates; and the risks and consequences to personnel and wider relationships.<sup>74</sup> As a reflection of this muted enthusiasm for Defence involvement in operations of this type, the ADF's contribution to overseas disaster relief in the three years after 1998 was limited to one delivery of relief supplies by the RAAF to Vietnam in 2000 and a local delivery of water by HMAS *Kanimbla* during a scheduled visit to Vanuatu in 2001 (see [chapter 18](#)).

## AFTER 11 SEPTEMBER 2001

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 fundamentally changed the international strategic situation, and led to a closer alignment of Australian interests with those of the United States – the only remaining global super-power in the post–Cold War world. Australia subsequently joined the ‘coalition of the willing’ in the international fight against terrorism by contributing troops to the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan from 2001, and by joining the United States in the controversial deployment of troops to Iraq in 2003 to remove Saddam Hussein and his capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Defence Minister Robert Hill announced an update to defence policy in 2003 to provide a ‘re-balancing of capabilities and expenditure’ in the light of the emergence of the two new threats: terrorism and the spread of WMDs.<sup>75</sup>

Howard's reaction to the changed strategic situation was characterised by analyst Hugh White as an interplay between a response to the threat of terrorism and longer-term security issues in the region.<sup>76</sup> Both had policy implications for ADF involvement in overseas disaster operations. Howard's willingness to contribute to coalition operations outside areas of Australia's traditional strategic interests, particularly to the Middle East, opened up the possibility of disaster relief operations further afield. This had been foreshadowed in *Defence 2000* with the recognition that Australia might have to ‘support wider interests’ by contributing to coalition operations, ranging from peacekeeping and disaster relief to high-intensity conflict.<sup>77</sup> Although only the latter was envisaged outside the Asia-Pacific region, Australia's subsequent military commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq after the 2001 terrorist attacks were followed by the first disaster relief missions outside South-East Asia and the Pacific region: a one-off delivery of relief supplies by the RAAF to Iran in 2003 (see [chapter 25](#)) and the contribution of a medical team and helicopter detachment to the international response to the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 (see [chapters 25 and 26](#)).

Howard's willingness to ‘support wider interests’ further afield was qualified by his continuing concern over security in the region.<sup>78</sup> *Defence update 2003* provided the assessment that trends in the region indicated a potential decline in regional security and the necessity for further calls on military and civil assistance.<sup>79</sup> Although these

74 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

75 Defence, *Australia's national security: A defence update 2003*, p. 5.

76 White, ‘Security, defence, and terrorism’, p. 175.

77 Defence, *Defence 2000*, pp. 51–2.

78 See Cotton and Ravenhill, *Middle power dreaming*, pp. 26–7.

79 Defence, *Australia's national security: A defence update 2003*, pp. 18–22.

possibilities included assistance after disasters, they led to few actual operations. The exceptions were several deliveries of relief supplies to Tonga and Solomon Islands in 2002 and 2003, and a short-term deployment of medical personnel to Niue in early 2004 (see [chapter 18](#)). This regional focus was also reflected in development aid policies as outlined in DFAT's 2003 White Paper, *Advancing the national interest*. Approximately 96 per cent of Australia's bilateral development aid was directed to the region, including PNG (34 per cent), the South Pacific (16 per cent) and South-East Asia (46 per cent).<sup>80</sup> The largest sector in the aid program was good governance, reflecting concerns that unstable regional democracies and underdevelopment might be a breeding ground for terrorism.<sup>81</sup> Terrorist attacks in Bali in 2002 and in Jakarta in 2003 and 2004 seemed to confirm these concerns, but the extensive cooperation between the Indonesian and Australian governments and security agencies after these attacks ironically improved relations between the two countries.<sup>82</sup>

These networks were well utilised and the relationship further enhanced by Australia's speedy and generous response to the Indian Ocean tsunami on Boxing Day 2004 (see [chapters 19–22](#)). This was symbolised by the Australia–Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development, an aid package worth \$1 billion announced by Prime Minister Howard on 5 January 2005. Although ostensibly for reconstruction after the tsunami, most of the funds were used to expand Australia's development aid in Indonesia, with substantial infrastructure, education, governance and health programs in line with the policies set out in the 2003 White Paper (see [chapter 19](#)).

Twelve months after the tsunami, Defence Minister Robert Hill released a further review of Australian strategic policy. *Defence update 2005* reiterated the immediacy of the threats of terrorism, WMDs and regional failed states, highlighting the increasing role of globalisation, the spread of technology and porous borders in exacerbating the impact of these asymmetric threats.<sup>83</sup> The response to the 2004 tsunami was raised as an example of the benefits of good regional partnerships that served Australian security interests through the promotion of economic and political well-being in the region. Disaster relief also came to figure in future defence procurement outlined in *Defence update 2005*, with the announcement of enhanced amphibious and aerial transport capabilities.<sup>84</sup> The acquisition of the Canberra-class landing helicopter dock and C-17 Globemaster aircraft were not determined by humanitarian assistance requirements, but they were certainly justified in terms of enhancing Australia's capabilities in that area.

*Defence update 2005* also emphasised the increasing role of defence forces in what were known as 'whole-of-government' responses to security threats. Although these responses involved the ADF in operations 'far beyond war fighting', such as border patrols, fisheries and resource protection, they also categorised the government's response to overseas disasters and other emergencies.<sup>85</sup> During the tsunami response in 2004–05, for instance, Defence joined numerous other agencies, including the Australian Agency

---

80 DFAT, *Advancing the national interest*, p. 94.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 114; and McDonald, 'Perspectives on Australian foreign policy, 2004', pp. 161–2.

82 Frost, 'Perspectives on Australian foreign policy 2006', p. 408.

83 Defence, *Australia's national security: A defence update 2005*, pp. 3–4.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 23–4.

85 Citation from *ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

for International Development, the Australian Federal Police and state police forces, Centrelink, DFAT, the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (see [chapter 19](#)). Coordination of these departments was undertaken by an interdepartmental emergency task force, a mechanism chaired by DFAT and first established after the Bali bombings of 2002. ADF involvement in overseas disaster operations reflected the wider government trend of multi-agency responses, leading to the ADF working with an increasing number of civilian, government and non-government organisations, as discussed in [chapter 3](#).

---

## CONCLUSION

---

It remains to return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: how did Australia move from a viewpoint whereby its defence forces were considered solely for war fighting to one where participation in overseas disaster responses was taken for granted? The chapter has shown how Australia's changing strategic situation over the course of almost a century provided opportunities for its defence forces to become involved in overseas disaster responses. The occurrence of these disasters was, of course, not predictable, but in one situation after another, the military posture adopted by Australia in response to its changing strategic situation provided a military capability that could be adapted and applied to this task. This in itself was not sufficient to determine military involvement, but a confluence of trends within a changing domestic and international context provided the availability of forces and a willingness for the government of the day to apply these military capabilities, within certain limitations, to responses to international disasters. These limits were broadly determined by the priorities of defence and foreign policy, which did not directly include participation in disaster responses as a central activity of Australia's military forces. Nevertheless, by the turn of the twenty-first century, this participation had become an accepted and legitimate role for the ADF as articulated in the highest levels of Australian defence policy.

Despite the initiation of the first overseas relief operation immediately after the end of the First World War, Australia showed little inclination to provide financial or material assistance for international disasters until the 1950s. The emergence of the practice of providing financial grants after international disasters coincided with the deployment of Australian military personnel in various countries in South-East Asia and the increasing use of military personnel for disaster responses in Australia. This latter trend did not extend to providing similar 'material' assistance overseas, but it was natural for military personnel stationed in forward defence positions to become involved in local disaster efforts in these aligned countries.

The change in strategic policy towards self-reliance and a 'defence of Australia' position during the 1970s and 1980s led to an increased role for cooperation and assistance on various levels with regional states, particularly those of the South Pacific, as a recognition of the importance of regional security to the security of Australia. The placement of the NDO within the Department of Defence and the decision in 1984 for the NDO to coordinate disaster responses to the immediate region were a reflection of this understanding and of the role Defence could play, particularly in disaster relief. The strategic realignments after the end of the Cold War, and broader concepts

of security adopted in the light of the threat of terrorism led to an overall decline in the frequency of relief operations, but provided opportunities for ADF involvement beyond the region of Australia's direct strategic interest. The unprecedented response to the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 demonstrated the capabilities of the ADF, the availability of forces for immediate deployments of this kind, and the willingness of government to assist the international community in this way.

This chapter has provided an overview of the development of policy guiding ADF involvement in these overseas disaster responses in the context of changing defence policy. [Chapter 3](#) continues this discussion with an examination of policies that guided how and why the ADF responded, including which agencies were responsible for the initiation of these missions, how the government funded these operations, and how the ADF related to other involved agencies and players in the field.

## ‘A plurality of mandates’

### *The context of overseas disaster policy*

A protracted interdepartmental debate erupted after the government of Robert Menzies in March 1960 approved a grant of £100,000 to India to assist the resettlement of refugees fleeing Chinese oppression in Tibet. That the situation was serious enough to justify the grant was not in question; the debate centred on the nature of the grant and which department should control the process of providing such relief after disasters overseas. The Department of External Affairs (DEA), with support from the Department of the Treasury, argued that the grant related to India–Australia relations and that they should control the process because grants of this type concerned the foreign relations function of DEA.<sup>1</sup> John Bunting, secretary of the Prime Minister’s Department, replied that approvals for such grants should remain with the Prime Minister as they went beyond ‘the needs of international politics’ and should be ‘regarded as being extended by the people of Australia to the people of another country through the head of state’.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 2 examined the emergence and development of policies governing the use of military forces in overseas disaster responses in the light of the changing international strategic situation and Australia’s subsequent defence policies. This chapter addresses the question of what motivated Australia to assist in the first place, and examines the role played by Australia’s defence forces in this policy discussion – in other words, the why and how of the debate. In order to understand why the government decided at various times to respond to international disasters using military forces, it is necessary to address the fundamental question raised by officials during the 1960 debate over financial assistance to India. Was Australia motivated in these instances by humanitarian concerns for the international community, or was the government acting in the national interest or political self-interest? Further, how did the tension inherent in this debate over humanitarian or political motivations manifest in the formulation

1 See for example memo BA 59/3600, Treasury to PM’s Dept, 7 March 1960, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.

2 Memo 60/3375, PM’s Dept to Treasury, 19 October 1960, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.

of policies that governed how these responses were undertaken, particularly those policies that determined the level and type of involvement by Australia’s military forces?

These issues are approached here from several angles. First, the chapter examines the government departments and agencies that controlled Australia’s emergency relief program to determine the policy basis for their actions. The debates in the early 1960s led to agreement on procedures involving several related departments, but there remained a policy tension through the early 1970s as government continued to review and adapt its position. There follows an examination of several reforms of the Whitlam Government that proved to be milestones in the development of these disaster policies. These reforms include the establishment in 1973 of a single agency to unify Australia’s aid programs and the subsequent decision in 1984 that the Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO), also a creation of the Whitlam era, should coordinate the material responses to overseas disasters.

Next, the chapter looks at debates regarding funding the military contributions to these overseas relief operations. Decisions regarding the recovery of interdepartmental costs had a substantial influence on the quantity and type of Defence participation. The chapter then turns to the relationships that developed between Australia’s military and several key groups during these relief operations, including with civilian agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs), and with other regional military forces. The development of these relationships casts further light on the role of the military in regional disaster responses. Finally, the chapter comments on trends in disaster management that emerged from the late 1980s, and how these trends and the subsequent policy changes in Australia affected military involvement in disaster relief operations.

In implementing the recommendations of a substantial review of the aid program conducted in 1984, the so-called Jackson Report, the Hawke Labor Government recognised that Australian aid was motivated by a ‘plurality of mandates’ in the ‘coincidence of humanitarian, foreign policy and economic objectives’.<sup>3</sup> This chapter’s examination of the procedural, bureaucratic and relational context of Australia’s overseas disaster responses will seek to uncover a similar ‘plurality of mandates’ in the motivations for military involvement in these responses. This will begin with a discussion of the turf war that emerged during the seminal period of the 1950s and 1960s over which agency had primary responsibility for Australia’s overseas disaster relief program.

---

## INTERDEPARTMENTAL DISPUTES

---

Australia developed during the 1950s the practice of providing financial grants to the international community after natural disasters, as noted in [chapter 2](#), but there were no policies in place to guide bureaucrats and no one department with overall control. Nevertheless, several discernible trends and precedents had emerged in the practice by the time Australian military forces participated in the response to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) cyclone in January 1960 (see [chapter 6](#)). In general, the PM’s Department managed the process, although officials from DEA were usually consulted and involved. The release of government funds required the approval of the Treasurer, leading to a situation where Treasury, DEA and the PM’s Department all exercised some influence over these *ad hoc* disaster grants.

---

3 Cabinet minute, ‘Decision no. 6828’, 18 November 1985, p. 3, NAA: A14039, 3391.



Any decision to provide grants was fundamentally based on the severity of the humanitarian emergency, but diplomatic and political considerations influenced the size and timing of any contribution. To take one example, Patrick Shaw, an Assistant Secretary in DEA, recommended a grant amount of £5,000 after flooding in India in 1954. He noted that the amount should be seen in the light of previous larger grants to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, both of £50,000, but should not be out of proportion to grants provided by India totalling £2,000 directly to New South Wales and Queensland after flooding earlier in the year.<sup>4</sup> Australia was also concerned not to become obligated to provide grants after every flood season, leading Arthur Tange, then Secretary of DEA, to express a need to 'break the circuit' of continual grants in these cases.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing disputes over which department should control administration of the grants and the precedents of material assistance in the early years of the decade (see [chapters 5 and 6](#)) led to the adoption of new procedures by early 1962. After several years of often bitter interdepartmental discussions, DEA emerged as the lead agency, PM's Department was generally consulted and supportive, and DEA considered that Treasury continued to do 'their best to ignore' PM's Department in the process.<sup>6</sup> Procedures distributed by DEA in August 1963 specified that draft submissions prepared by the relevant geographical section of the department would be used as the basis for consultation with PM's Department and Treasury, and after satisfaction from these agencies, the proposal would go to the Minister for External Affairs for approval and to the Treasurer to arrange payment.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the adoption of these procedures, a key issue in these discussions remained the nature of grants made to foreign countries after disasters. During the debate in 1960 over the grant to India introduced above, PM's Department staff recognised that diplomatic concerns were important – one official earlier noted that a disaster grant 'depends to some extent upon who we wish to "butter up" at any particular time' – but there was also a recognition that these were not the only considerations.<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Herde, a senior official in the PM's Department, noted that 'all [disaster] grants are on humanitarian grounds and the PM is the custodian of the national conscience'.<sup>9</sup> In this way, they were different from the ongoing interests represented by longer-term development and relief programs, such as the Colombo Plan and support for UN relief programs, which were widely considered the domain of the DEA.<sup>10</sup>

The processes of consultation and approval were also hotly debated. PM's Department had expressed concerns that failure to consult early on could lead to the situation where late refusal of a proposal could result in international embarrassment.<sup>11</sup> DEA proposed to establish an interdepartmental committee, chaired by the PM's Department, which would fill the need for procedure, help develop criteria for proposals for contributions, and provide an avenue for recommendations to the three ministers.<sup>12</sup>

4 Minute, P. Shaw to Minister, 10 August 1954, NAA: A1838, 742/1/3.

5 Minute, A.H. Tange to A/g Minister, 14 October 1955, NAA: A1838, 742/1/3.

6 Minute, A.J. Eastman to Secretary, 21 March 1962, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 1.

7 Administrative circular no. 38/63, DEA, 5 August 1963, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 2.

8 Minute, (unspecified) to E.J. Bunting, 5 February 1960, NAA: A463, 1960/3375.

9 Note on file, K.H. Herde, 19 June 1961, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.

10 Memo 60/3497, PM's Dept to Treasury, 13 December 1960, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.

11 Memo 60/3375, PM's Dept to DEA, 10 February 1960, NAA: A463, 1960/3375.

12 Memo, DEA to PM's Dept, 28 June 1960, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.



This was an early manifestation of what was later called the 'whole-of-government' approach, evident in the formation of an interdepartmental emergency task force to coordinate multi-agency responses to significant disasters overseas. Bunting supported DEA's proposal for an interdepartmental committee, noting that the committee should be 'as informal as possible so as to encourage quick decisions', but it was not adopted.<sup>13</sup>

A statement of policy regarding the use of defence forces in overseas disasters emerged in the course of this debate. In answering a query from the Treasurer regarding reimbursement for Defence involvement in the response to the cyclone in the New Hebrides the previous year (see [chapter 6](#)), Prime Minister Robert Menzies outlined the significance of 'political aspects' in considerations of Australian actions. The purpose of such action, Menzies explained, was to 'express Australian sympathy and earn goodwill', and the 'circumstances of each case' would be the deciding factor in the decision to send money, supplies or Defence personnel. The most likely recipient of this goodwill was considered by Menzies to be those countries 'within close proximity' to Australia 'together with Malaya ... and Singapore', and Menzies valued military participation in terms of the benefit to defence relations with these countries.<sup>14</sup>

Menzies was at the time External Affairs Minister in addition to Prime Minister, which might explain his emphasis on the strategic and diplomatic benefits of such humanitarian gestures. Nevertheless, this was a clear statement of the plurality of motivation underlying Australian actions – to express sympathy and to earn goodwill. Further, Menzies linked the political benefits of humanitarian actions with military benefits to defence relations in the region, an attitude that effectively limited military involvement in disaster responses to countries 'within close proximity'.

Criticisms and public scrutiny of the international and Australian responses to several catastrophic disasters in 1970 led to a review of the government's overseas disaster relief policies. An  $M_w$  7.5 earthquake on 31 May off the coast of Peru killed more than 66,000 people and left 530,000 homeless. On 12 November, a Category 3 cyclone and storm surge over the heavily populated island and coastal areas of the Ganges delta in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) left more than 300,000 dead and millions homeless.<sup>15</sup> Compounding this disaster, political turmoil and conflict following contested elections in East Pakistan in March 1971 led to severe hardships within the country and millions of refugees fleeing to India.<sup>16</sup> In each case, Australia made a cash contribution followed by larger donations of relief food and supplies, but the government was criticised in the media and in parliament for its relatively small initial contributions compared to the international responses, and for the delay in sending some of the promised relief supplies.<sup>17</sup>

The result of the substantial and delayed review into relief grant processes, which incorporated lessons from the international response to the crisis in India and East Pakistan, and referred to current practices in other countries, made no substantial policy changes to the way the government responded to overseas disasters, as it was considered

13 Memo, PM's Dept to Treasury, 8 July 1960, NAA: A1209, 1973/6105.

14 Letter, R.G. Menzies to H.E. Holt, 30 August 1961, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 1.

15 Casualty information from EM-DAT database, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters website, viewed 22 July 2015, copy in AWM: AWM330, PKI/801/16.

16 Gorman, *Historical dictionary of refugee and disaster relief organizations*, pp. 133–4.

17 For example, 'Aid is more than a warm feeling', *Australian Financial Review*, 11 June 1970; 'Australian aid delayed', *Canberra Times*, 25 November 1970; statement by L.S. Reid, CPD, HR, 23 August 1971, pp. 551–3; and statement by L.S. Reid, CPD, HR, 6 October 1971, pp. 1993–4.

primarily 'procedural and administrative'.<sup>18</sup> Policy regarding the use of defence forces reiterated the 1961 statement of Menzies cited above: that service involvement be considered on 'its merits' on the basis of whether such assistance is justified and appropriate, whether defence forces are available, and whether any assistance is 'in accordance with the wishes' of the concerned country. The interdepartmental committee that undertook the review noted that the 'normal humanitarian grounds' for responding to overseas disasters were influenced by 'bilateral relations with the country concerned, by public comment and by the budgetary situation'.<sup>19</sup>

## FUNDING DISPUTES

The influence of budgetary considerations on humanitarian assistance was played out in the wrangling over which department or agency managed overseas disaster responses. Up to the end of the 1950s, the cost of overseas disaster grants was typically borne by the votes of the PM's Department, although several grants to India, Pakistan and the Philippines in 1954 and 1955 were funded by the DEA.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the New Hebrides mission prompted the Treasurer, Harold Holt, to write to Prime Minister Robert Menzies in May 1961 concerning financial arrangements covering the use of defence forces in disaster responses overseas.<sup>21</sup> Holt cited the policy regarding reimbursement of 'out-of-pocket' expenses from the states or territories in cases where defence forces were used in disaster responses in Australia. Of particular concern to the Treasurer was the potential for claims for damages by third parties, such as the awarding of money against the Commonwealth after the death of soldiers during flood relief in 1955 at Maitland, or for other 'extraordinary costs'.<sup>22</sup> Holt proposed establishing a similar recovery from foreign governments of 'out-of-pocket' expenses for overseas disasters, leaving consideration for a waiver of this in certain situations at the discretion of the Ministers for Defence and External Affairs in consultation with the Treasurer.

Defence responded to the Treasurer's bewildering proposal, noting that while there was merit in having a policy in place to clarify the financials of such operations, the reality was that any goodwill gained from an offer of Australian assistance in these cases would be lost if there was some expectation that such assistance would incur a cost. The positive public response after the 1960 cyclone relief in Vila was a case in point. Although the deployment of the Australian engineers had been at the request of the British resident administrator, Defence officials considered that the initiative had been taken by Australia, and any suggestion that a cost would be incurred would be counter to the spirit of the offer. Further, they argued that the motivation for such assistance was 'primarily political or humanitarian', with at best 'indirect' defence strategic interest. The conclusion was drawn that future disaster missions should therefore be funded in the same way as

18 Minute, R.G. Spratt to Minister, 5 April 1972, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 6.

19 Report, 'Relief aid for overseas emergencies', attached to minute, R.G. Spratt to Minister, 5 April 1972, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 6.

20 Minute, A.H. Tange to A/g Minister, 14 October 1955, NAA: A1838, 742/1/3.

21 Letter, H. Holt to R.G. Menzies, 11 May 1961, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 1.

22 Sgt William McGrath, CMF, Sig Eric Chard and Constable William Orrick, Sydney Water Police, were killed when the vehicle in which they were travelling struck a high-voltage power line in Maitland on 27 February 1955 ('Three in army duck electrocuted', *Central Queensland Herald*, 3 March 1955, and 'Soldier's family awarded £13,600', *Canberra Times*, 4 December 1958).

financial grants; that is, through the budget of the PM's Department, and that Defence assistance should be treated like domestic mercy missions with any on-going costs being absorbed by the Commonwealth and not passed on to foreign governments.<sup>23</sup>

DEA agreed that Defence involvement in overseas grants could not be constrained by general rules or expectations of reimbursement, pointing out that ‘political aspects’ differentiated these cases from regular assistance to the states and territories. DEA maintained the line that each case be considered on its merits after appropriate consultations.<sup>24</sup> Menzies replied to Holt along these lines, concluding that in light of the recent decision for DEA to have the responsibility for funding emergency relief grants, DEA, Defence and Treasury come to some arrangement to consider carefully the merits of using Defence personnel over cash or supplies in response to overseas disasters.<sup>25</sup> In practice, reimbursement of costs from foreign governments was never pursued, but Defence usually sought interdepartmental recovery of its costs expended in those instances where its services were called on to assist in overseas disasters.

By the early 1970s, arrangements for using defence forces in overseas responses, particularly RAAF aircraft, were decided in each case as per the precedent established over the previous decade, and any costs were charged to the emergency grants line that was established in the budget of the DEA in the late 1960s. These costs included an administrative levy of up to 20 per cent on goods supplied by Defence, and covered the full cost of use of, for example, RAAF aircraft, including fuel, salaries for crews, and overheads.<sup>26</sup> This charging of full costs was a departure from the practice of seeking recovery only of additional costs, which had been the case previously for domestic disasters. Any proposal to use RAAF aircraft, aside from availability, had therefore to take into account the relative cost of RAAF over chartered aircraft, as these costs were included in the disaster grant budget of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

Officials in the aid section of the DFA, in the context of the above-mentioned review of overseas grant processes, proposed in August 1971 to charge only additional costs for the use of service aircraft in overseas disaster responses. The justification was that continuing costs, such as salaries, would have been expended in any case and that cheaper costs of service aircraft would allow for a potentially quicker response to a disaster.<sup>27</sup> This was motivated by knowledge of similar ‘minimum additional cost’ arrangements in the United States and New Zealand for defence involvement in overseas disasters, which had been reported to DFA the previous month.<sup>28</sup> If adopted, this would have made RAAF transport more economical than commercial freight in many cases, and potentially increased the involvement of the services in overseas disaster responses. A further consideration was that use of RAAF over civilian aircraft, such as was proposed after the 1970 Peru earthquake, would ‘rob Qantas of freight income’.<sup>29</sup>

---

23 Memo, Defence to PM's Dept, c. May 1961, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 1.

24 Memo, Defence to PM's Dept, 7 July 1961, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 1.

25 Letter, R.G. Menzies to H.E. Holt, 30 August 1961, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 1.

26 Working paper, ‘Relief aid to overseas emergencies’, attached to memo, DFA to various departments, 6 August 1971, NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 5.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Memo, Wellington to Canberra, 16 July 1971; and memo 1683/71, Washington to Canberra, 21 July 1971, both in NAA: A1838, 1585/1 pt 4.

29 Note on file, 12 June 1970, NAA: A1838, 1585/1/52 pt 1.