

AUSTRALIAN GENDARMES: BRIDGING AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH PACIFIC CAPABILITY GAP

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SYNOPSIS

Since the end of the Cold War, Australia's police and defence forces have repeatedly deployed to respond to security crises in the South Pacific. These law-and-order, peacekeeping, and humanitarian responses have been hampered by a capability gap in Australia's security forces. This capability gap is between Australia's Military and Police, where the former are armed and trained for conventional war-fighting and the latter trained for peacetime policing. Neither is well suited to peacekeeping and law-and-order responses in unstable, but not war-time environments. Australia is likely to continue to carry out such operations in the Pacific. To better respond to these types of crises, Australia needs to develop new capabilities to bridge this capability gap by building a gendarmerie-like force – a force armed and trained to respond to riots and violent insurrections, while also equipped for non-lethal and general policing roles. The development of an Australian Gendarmerie force will bridge the existing capability gap in Australia's security forces, allow Australia to better respond to crises in the Pacific and complement our operations internationally.

AUSTRALIA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The South Pacific has long been a focus for Australian strategists and defence thinkers, going back to the [Dibb Report](#) in 1986, and beginning with [Operation Morris Dance in Fiji in 1987](#). Since the late 1980s, Australia has been nearly continuously engaged in the Pacific carrying out a significant number of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. Major pace

stabilisation deployments include to East Timor in 1999, to the Solomon Islands between 2003 and 2017, and the redeployment of forces to East Timor in 2006. Major HADR operations include Operation Niue Assist to help the small island country recover from Cyclone Heta in 2004, Operation Sumatra Assist following the 2004 Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami, Operation PNG Assist following Cyclone Guba in 2007, and most recently Operation Fiji Assist in the wake of Cyclone Winston last year. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) have also accompanied Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel on major deployments. The AFP have deployed on various missions across the South Pacific and maintain active police training and governmental support missions.

Australian operations in the Pacific have featured both ADF and AFP working in conjunction to bring peace and stability to unstable countries and enforce law-and-order, as well as to build the local capacity for countries to maintain peace and stability. Such operations have tended to focus heavily on the policing side, such as in the case of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), where [the AFP took the lead](#) in the operation with the ADF in a supporting role.

This type of engagement is unlikely to change in the coming decade. The region will continue to suffer problems of weak governments and small economies, while also facing increasing pressure from extreme weather and rising sea levels brought on by climate change. But despite the recurrent policy focus on the South Pacific, and the many security and military operations we have carried out there, such operations would continue to struggle if Australia conducts them in the similar way.

THE CAPABILITY GAP

Australia suffers from capability gaps that will probably reduce the effectiveness of addressing peace and stability issues in the South Pacific. Australia is failing to prioritise and prepare for the missions and operations our defence and security forces carry out most frequently and with the least outside support.

The AFP and ADF are being asked to operate in environments they are not equipped or trained to attend. The AFP is used to normal policing in a stable situation, while the ADF are trained to operate in war-like environments necessitating lethal responses. Security crises in the Pacific are [often too unstable for the AFP to operate normally](#) but are also not war-like environments which require lethal force. The current solution to this problem is to deploy the AFP into conflict situations to try and establish law and order. Because these conditions are too dangerous for the AFP to operate on their own, the ADF is deployed to protect them and patrol alongside them. This problem was encountered during RAMSI where the AFP was seen by the ADF as overly passive, while [the AFP saw the ADF as too aggressive](#) in carrying out joint operations.

This capability gap can be summarised by four key issues. First, ADF personnel still lack adequate training for low intensity scenarios – such as in Timor-Leste in 2006, when ADF forces were over-equipped with lethal weapons unsuitable for riot control.¹ Second, AFP forces lack the training and capabilities for the relatively higher intensity operations in peacekeeping and conflict stabilisation. In Timor-Leste in 2006, AFP was frequently put at risk because they initially lacked long-range, non-lethal weapons such bean-bag guns. Third, the ADF and AFP have poor inter-agency cooperation due to lack of joint training, separate leadership and command structures and different approaches to operating environments and engagement with local populations. Finally, peacekeeping in the Pacific continues to be conducted by raising forces on an ad hoc basis, with no dedicated response teams or best practices doctrines. These issues have led to [costlier](#), more prolonged, and less effective operations.

BRIDGING THE GAP – AN AUSTRALIAN GENDARMES

Australia can bridge this capability gap by building a new force of Australian Gendarmes. This force will be able to support the ADF, protect the AFP, while also being able to operate on its own as required. The gendarmes concept originates from French ‘men-at-arms’ which were raised to provide internal security in France and later other European countries, both as early police forces in rural and regional areas, and as military forces as required. Several continental European countries, such as France, Poland, Spain, and Russia, still operate gendarmerie forces. These forces have broad roles encompassing national policing and border protection, in addition to riot control, counter-terrorism, and even peacekeeping and counter-insurgency abroad.

A new gendarmerie force does not need to be built newly established; it can be grown out of the AFP’s existing [International Deployment Group \(IDG\)](#) and [Specialist Response Group \(SRG\)](#). The IDG currently consists of 500 federal police on 1-2 year secondments. They are trained to carry out peacekeeping and law enforcement operations overseas in unstable environments. The force is prepared for rapid international deployment and has been deployed to the Pacific and in [support of the ADF in Afghanistan](#). The SRG was formed in 2012 as a merger of specialist teams and capabilities from the ACT’s Special Response and Security and the IDG’s Operational Response Group. The almost-200 person SRG now provides specialist capabilities, such as riot control, police negotiators, and bomb disposal to the AFP across Australia and internationally.

The IDG and SRG have suffered from a variety issues, mostly derived from a lack of a clear mission. The creation of the SRG was partly a response to the unclear role the Response Group had within the

IDG. On the other hand, the SRG has performed well inside Australia and provides niche capabilities to the IDG on an ad hoc basis, but isn't a broad organisation designed for deployment overseas.

Building out the IDG and SRG into a fully-developed gendarme force will allow it to overcome its capability issues, operate as an independent force and better define its mission and its use-cases. This new force should be able to enforce law and order through riot control, peacekeeping capabilities, and community engagement and do so with limited ADF support. Importantly, the force should also build on its experiences and research to inform future operations.

The force must be designed to independently enforce law-and-order in unstable environments, combating rioters and gangs armed with machetes, stones, and darts such as those faced in East Timor. The gendarme must be able to support ADF counter-insurgency operations by providing less-than-lethal and non-military capabilities, while also being able to protect AFP officers performing policing and capacity building in unstable situations.

This new force will allow the AFP to refocus on policing and police capacity building rather than stabilisation efforts and refocus ADF response to higher intensity counter-insurgency efforts rather than AFP-protection. A further advantage is that such a force, having been trained specially for such joint-operations, will be better able to cooperate with ADF and AFP by bridging the two services and avoiding issues of different operating practices.

ESTABLISHING THE FORCE

Building an Australian gendarmes force will first require a clear assessment of what kind of role the Government envisions it performing. Its size and level of capabilities will be defined by where and how it is intended to be deployed. An Australian gendarmerie force would, ideally, perform the police-capacity building missions of the IDG internationally, while also providing a more capable riot and specialist response force both in and outside of Australia.

The force's size depends on how much ADF capability needs to be replaced. In Bougainville, a mixed force of around 300 was deployed, including personnel from civilian agencies like DFAT. During RAMSI an initial ADF force of 2000 was deployed to support an AFP deployment of about 200. The large ADF was then withdrawn relatively quickly but persistent security issues led to the return on the ADF and the decision to maintain a force of around 140 to support the mission. During East Timor's 2006 crisis, an initial ADF deployment of around 2000 was followed by draw-downs to a remaining force of several hundred, including a New Zealand contribution, again supporting an AFP force of around 200.

Assuming ADF support will continue, at least in part, a gendarmerie deployment should ideally aim to provide around 200 personnel to support and protect normal AFP officers. Assuming a normal force

rotation similar to the Army's needs to be maintained, a force of approximately 400-600 gendarmes will be needed. This approach requires an overall size of the force of around 1000-1200 personnel.

The force's mission will be broader than responding to the next Pacific crisis. The force needs to fully embrace and expand the IDG's police development role internationally, train with the ADF to increase civil-military cooperation, and perform the SRG's current missions in Australia. A further possible role would be to support counter-terror operations in Australia. This role is currently undertaken through an awkward arrangement between state police, the AFP, and the ADF.

The organisation of the gendarmes should have at least two parts based on the current roles of the IDG and SRG. The first part will be focused on developing local police capability and security, primarily in the Pacific Islands, but potentially further abroad. The second part will be the force designed for more militarised responses, depending on how much of a role the Government wishes the gendarmes to play. This role might just be a riot control response, but ideally the gendarmes would take on counter-terror and counter-insurgency efforts at home and abroad.

Although where the gendarmes sit in Australia's Government depends on its mission, the still-emerging Department of Home Affairs, with its broad responsibilities of national policing, counter-terrorism, and border protection, is perfectly suited to house the gendarmes. Historically most gendarmes have been under defence or interior ministries, rather than considered civilian police. Australia, however, has followed the Anglo-Saxon tradition of having a clearer divide between military and policing roles. The gendarmerie, which is a policing force, should reflect this tradition by not being a military force.