

Chapter 14

Policy Making in Defence

R. J. May and James Laki

At independence the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF), under the command of a Papua New Guinean officer, was widely regarded as one of the best trained and most cohesive institutions of the new state — though defence policy was still largely determined by Australia. The PNGDF's successful intervention in support of the newly independent government of Vanuatu, in the 'Santo rebellion' of 1980, further boosted its image and morale (see Gubb 1994). Over the years — against a background of growing problems of internal security culminating in the Bougainville conflict of 1988–2001, increasing pressures on government resources, occasional tensions between the PNGDF and civil authority, and recurring problems of discipline within the PNGDF — the objectives of defence policy, and the role of the PNGDF, have been reviewed on several occasions. Measuring the effectiveness of defence policy, in the absence of a visible external threat, is always difficult, and Papua New Guinea has enjoyed a relatively benign external security environment. However, the PNGDF has also played a significant role in supporting the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) in internal security operations, where its performance has been more visible. As in other areas of policy, the record of policy making and implementation in defence has been a mixed one, with changing (and sometimes conflicting) objectives, poor follow-through in policy decisions, and a perception, both within the PNGDF and amongst many outsiders, that the resources allocated to defence have been less than adequate and often poorly managed.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the record.¹

The colonial inheritance

In the decade or so before independence there was some debate as to whether Papua New Guinea needed a defence force, and especially about whether an army, if there were to be one, should have any role other than that of defending the country against external aggression. There were some who supported the idea of a paramilitary force with police and military functions, and some who suggested not only that there should be a defence force but that it be represented in cabinet.² Others, seeing Papua New Guinea's emerging military as a 'super tribe', saw it as a potential threat to a post-independence democratic state. In

the event, the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC) proposed that Papua New Guinea have a defence force, but it expressed the view that the defence force should be 'firmly oriented towards external defence' and added:

...we have very serious reservations about the possibility of a future Papua New Guinea Government using the army against its own people in any but the most extreme cases of civil disorder, and then subject also to specific conditions (CPC 1974, chapter 13 p.3).

The CPC report provided the basis for the constitutional provisions defining the functions of the PNGDF (see Constitution Ss 201–205). Following the CPC's recommendation that there be 'a dual but integrated structure' in which the minister for defence would be advised 'by senior civilian and military officers of equal status' (CPC 1974, chapter 13 p.4), the constitution recognized the commander, PNGDF as principal military adviser on matters relating to the Force, and an officer of the public service (in practice the secretary of the Defence Department) as the civilian adviser, with powers prescribed by legislation. A *Defence Act* was passed in 1974 and a Department of Defence created the same year. Coordination of defence policy was achieved through the creation of a Defence Council, comprising the minister, Defence secretary, and PNGDF commander. Broader questions of national security policy are referred to a ministerial National Security Council, and a National Security Coordinating Committee.

The Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR), the forerunner of the PNGDF, was created during the Second World War, disbanded in 1946 and re-formed in 1951. It was, however, until 1964, part of the Australian Army's Northern command, with headquarters in Brisbane. In that year PIR headquarters were established in Port Moresby, but Australian officers continued to predominate and orders came from Canberra. A marked expansion of the force took place in the 1960s, in the context of perceived expansionist threats from Indonesia, and a program of localization was commenced. The PIR's first Papua New Guinean officers, Ted Diro and Patterson Lowa, graduated from Officer Cadet School at Portsea in Australia in 1963. In 1973, what had become Joint Force Papua New Guinea was redesignated Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF), and two years later Brigadier-General Diro became its commander.

Defence policy post-independence

At independence, the underlying assumption of defence policy in Papua New Guinea was that if Papua New Guinea were attacked, the PNGDF's role would be to mount a holding operation until its allies — principally Australia — arrived to assist. There was, however, no formal treaty between the two countries; until 1987 defence relations were covered, in fairly broad terms, in an exchange of letters. In that year defence was included in a Joint Declaration of Principles

between the two countries (amended in 1992), but an undertaking to consult in the event of external armed attack still fell short of a firm security commitment by Australia. In the event, the relationship has not been put to the ultimate test.

In 1975 the PNGDF consisted of a Land Element (comprising 1PIR based at Taurama and 2PIR based at Moem), and a Maritime Element (comprising a Patrol Boat Squadron based in Manus and a Landing Craft Squadron based in Port Moresby). An Air Element, based in Lae, was added, and an Engineering Company, established in 1973, was upgraded to battalion status in 1976. With an actual force size of 3614 the PNGDF included 490 Australian officers and men (14 per cent of the Force). By 1979 this number had been reduced to 141 and by 1988 to 30 (most of whom were with the Air Transport Squadron).

It was clear, however, that if defence spending after independence were to be maintained at anything like its pre-independence levels Australian assistance would be required, and this has been provided through the Australian Defence Cooperation Programme (DCP). The DCP has met the salaries of Papua New Guinean personnel training in Australia, and certain mutually agreed projects. An Australian Defence Cooperation Management team, based in Port Moresby, oversees the DCP with Papua New Guinea. In 1991 Australian Defence sources estimated that about 90 per cent of the PNGDF officer corps had trained or studied in Australia. In addition, the two countries carry out joint exercises, and until 1999 the Australian Army maintained a civil engineer works unit in Papua New Guinea (based in the Southern Highlands).

In 1985 incoming PNGDF commander Tony Huai called for a diversification of Papua New Guinea's defence relations. As well as agreements with New Zealand and the US, Papua New Guinea has established military ties with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, China and Fiji, and has purchased military aircraft from Israel and Spain.

Writing in the same year, former PNGDF chief of staff Colonel Colin East criticized what he saw as Australia's failure in 1975 to do other than undertake 'cosmetic surgery to the existing Australian service components' of the PNGDF. 'The result', he argued:

...is the present PNGDF, its individual elements meaningful in the framework of the Australian Defence Force of a decade ago, tailored in the Australian military tradition and reflecting that approach. As a separate force, it is militarily unbalanced, expensive and non-viable (East 1985, 11).

Notwithstanding this, the basic structure of the PNGDF underwent little change until the 1990s. The Defence Department initiated a review of the PNGDF in 1978, and subsequently received assistance under the DCP to carry out specialist studies of the Maritime and Air Transport elements and of Special Forces. A

report, completed in 1982, provided the basis for the government's first post-independence defence policy statement. This endorsed the PNGDF's 'prime role in defending the nation' (*Defence Report* 1982, 1) and placed emphasis on its greater participation in national development, and on the increased importance both of maritime surveillance and of patrolling the border with Indonesia.

Following this, a review of defence policy was carried out by a ministerial committee. Its 1983 report resulted in a decision to undertake several policy changes, namely: to shift the patrol boat base from Manus to Port Moresby (a decision reversed the following year) and the Air Transport Squadron from Lae to Nadzab (see below); to establish a forward infantry company base near the Indonesian border at Kiunga and upgrade the Vanimo outstation; to relocate the Engineer Battalion from Port Moresby to Lae; to form a special forces unit to be located at Nadzab; to undertake a long-term re-equipment program, including the purchase of helicopters; and, for budgetary reasons, to reduce the force strength ceiling to 3050.

The National Executive Council (NEC) also endorsed a list of six PNGDF 'priority functions', based on the 1982 policy statement. This placed security against external threat, securing the nation's borders, and maritime surveillance as the top priorities, and assistance to the police when required in maintaining internal security at the bottom. In fact, few of the decisions were implemented at the time, though steps were taken — in the face of opposition within the defence establishment — to reduce force size.

From as early as 1977–78 there were complaints about inadequate force size and structural deficiencies in the PNGDF, specifically the under-manning of infantry battalions, lack of adequate reserves of materiel, and inadequate mobility, especially with regard to air transport (see *Defence Report* 1977–78). Such complaints were repeated in subsequent years. In 1981 the assistant secretary, Finance and Programming Branch commented that, with limited manpower and deteriorating equipment capability, there was no way the Defence Force could effectively meet any serious contingency (*Defence Report* 1980–81, 4). Four years later, Colin East observed that the 'acute shortage of funds over recent years' had resulted in a major reduction in patrolling and training of soldiers, restrictions on flying time and naval operations, and obsolescence of vehicles, weapons and equipment, all of which had impacted on morale and leadership (East 1985, 4). In 1984 a defence manpower review had revealed a wastage rate among officers of 7.7 per cent and among other ranks of 15.8 per cent (*Defence Report* 1984–85, 44). The following year it was reported that discipline in the force was 'below the required standard' (*ibid.* 39).

Less than a year after independence, in 1984, the PNGDF was called out to support the civil authority, during a state of emergency declared in response to rising criminal activity in Port Moresby. This was followed by several other

deployments to assist police in law and order operations in the national capital and in the highlands and other provinces (see May 1993).

In 1985 Prime Minister Somare promised an increase in defence spending, but his government lost office soon after. Two years later the new Defence minister, former PNGDF officer James Pokasui, sought to increase force strength to 5000, improve salaries, initiate a review of military equipment, and deploy PNGDF troops overseas; but before these proposals had passed through cabinet there was a further change of government. In 1988 the *Defence Report* noted that most operational units were 70 per cent below strength and that the PNGDF was having difficulty retaining specialists.

That year, however, the government produced a *Defence Policy Paper* which contained proposals for a ten-year program to replace major equipment, reorganize force structure to emphasize operational mobility, enhance capabilities in several areas, and generally make Papua New Guinea more self-reliant in defence matters. Cabinet approval for the PNGDF's Ten-Year Development Plan did not come until late 1991, after the government had undertaken a review of internal security. However, several policy changes were initiated in 1988–89, against the background of the emerging Bougainville conflict. These included decisions to increase force strength to 5200 by 1995, and to proceed with plans (approved in 1985) for the development of a reserve force. It was further announced in 1991 that a military base was to be established, for a proposed engineer and infantry unit, in the highlands at Banz, and that from 1992 women would be recruited into the PNGDF.

In 1989 PNGDF troops were deployed to Bougainville to assist police in what was initially seen as a law and order problem. The 'Bougainville crisis' quickly escalated into an armed rebellion which continued up till a ceasefire in 1998 and a Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001. The PNGDF did not come out well from the Bougainville conflict: while some blamed the government for indecision in its dealings with the Bougainville rebels and the PNGDF, it became clear that the PNGDF lacked the resources, strategy and training to conduct a successful guerilla campaign in unfamiliar territory (see, for example Liria 1993; Rogers 2003). Frustrated by their inability to contain the rebellion, and resentful of what they saw as lack of commitment on the part of the government, elements of the PNGDF became involved in human rights abuses and acts of defiance against the civilian authority. The PNGDF also made several incursions into Solomon Islands' territory in pursuit of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and its supporters, creating tensions between the two countries.³

In 1991 the Defence minister told a PNGDF passing-out parade that 'the real future of our Defence Force is to assist the civil authority deal effectively with (internal) threats'. Following a review of the Australian DCP it was announced that Australia would give highest priority to internal security needs.

Between 1988 and 1992, the appropriation for Defence rose from K33.4 million to K56.5 million, and its percentage of total government spending from 3.7 to 4.5. However, from 1987 actual spending on Defence substantially exceeded budget estimates: by 1991 Defence spending had risen to K92.0 million, 81 per cent above the appropriation for Defence. The Defence Department justified this by arguing that its budgetary allocation was inadequate, especially in view of the cost of the Bougainville operation, and that in the restoration of government services in Bougainville, Defence had had to meet costs which should properly have been met by other departments (such as Health, Public Works, and Provincial Affairs). By 1993 this had become a source of tension in civil-military relations.

Notwithstanding the increase in Defence spending, from at least 1990 there were complaints from local suppliers that PNGDF bills were not being paid. In August–September 1993 the PNGDF was said to be owing more than K3 million to businesses in Rabaul (*The Times of PNG* 12 August 1993) and naval and air craft could not be used because of lack of funds (*Sydney Morning Herald* 14, 15 September 1993). In Port Moresby, soldiers returning from Bougainville attacked the pay office when they did not receive due pay and allowances; at this stage unpaid special allowances and compensation payments were said to total K4.8 million.

In presenting the 1993 budget the minister for Finance announced new strategies in the law and order sector, which included a ‘scaling down’ of the PNGDF. In future the PNGDF was to be ‘more involved in civic action, more involved with the village and community, more coordinated with other agencies in both the law and order and other sectors, and better disciplined’ (1993 Budget Documents, vol.I, 122). This was to be achieved through an expansion of the civic action program (CAP) and a shift in training to engineering, construction, infrastructural development and community relations. The shift to civic action was to be accompanied by a reduction in force strength, through attrition, from the current level (4200) to 2500–3000; most of these would perform CAP activities at the village level, but a core group of 1000–1500 would ‘receive specialized combat training to prepare them to effectively counter any major internal threat’ (*ibid.*).

Thus, in 1993 there were two contradictory policy positions on defence: one, embodied in the Ten-year Development Plan, foresaw an expanded and re-equipped defence force, oriented primarily towards external defence; the other envisioned a reduced force, geared primarily towards civic action. Both policies had been endorsed by cabinet, and no one seemed to be concerned about their incompatibility. In practice, the contradiction was alleviated by the fact that little attempt was made to implement either policy.

Two years later, in March 1995, Australian defence experts Paul Dibb and Rhondda Nicholas⁴ were commissioned by then Defence minister, Mathais Ijape to prepare a report on the future role and structure of the PNGDF. The report was to serve as an input to a policy review. The Dibb Report (as their report became known) was submitted towards the end of 1995.⁵ It recommended changes to the structure and organization of the Defence Force 'to reflect more accurately Papua New Guinea's strategic outlook'.

Dibb and Nicholas foresaw no external threat but argued that Papua New Guinea needed to demonstrate that it could manage to protect its territorial integrity against any low-level incursions which might occur in the future. They also argued for close attention to the PNGDF's contribution to internal security and national development tasks, which they saw as 'the most serious and credible challenges to Papua New Guinea's future stability'. To meet the tasks of protecting territorial integrity and resources, assisting with internal security, and performing civic action tasks, the Dibb Report argued, the PNGDF required a geographical presence 'in those key areas of the country where security problems are likely to arise', improved training, communications and surveillance equipment and intelligence, and greater involvement with the community (Dibb and Nicholas 1996, 1–2). Restructuring was recommended to provide a smaller, more balanced, and operationally more effective force. Specifically, Dibb and Nicholas recommended an immediate reduction in force size, from 4375 to around 3100 (to be achieved by retrenching some 1260 personnel on the reserve short list/unallotted list), at a saving of some K12 million per year; recruitment of additional infantry and pioneers/engineers, over five years, however, would bring force size back to around 3700. The effect of restructuring would be to reduce the proportion of the Defence budget spent on personnel from 68 per cent in 1994 to around 50 per cent over five years, and to substantially increase spending on operational costs and equipment and facilities. Recommended contracting out to the private sector of maintenance of aircraft, patrol boats and vehicles, and support services such as catering, security, stores and clerical support, as well as sharing some support facilities with the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC), was seen as a further source of saving. For the longer term, once restructuring was completed and the recommended savings achieved, the government should consider a third infantry battalion, to augment the Force's capabilities for border patrolling, resource protection, internal security operations, and civic action, with a corresponding increase in Defence spending (to K70 million per year).

The Dibb Report was not received with great enthusiasm either within the PNGDF or by the government, but it provided a basis for a new Defence White Paper, *Defence in National Development*, which was accepted by the National Parliament in 1996. Brigadier General Singirok, who became PNGDF commander in 1995, had a substantial hand in the drafting of the White Paper. In a preface,

Defence Minister Ijape said: 'While the fundamental functions of the defence of PNG remain unchanged, emphasis is now being placed on the role that Defence must play in nation building and development' (Defence White Paper 1996, 1).

Echoing the Dibb Report, the White Paper asserted that strategic assessments indicated no identifiable external threat. Notwithstanding the benign external security environment, however, the White Paper acknowledged Papua New Guinea's vulnerability to 'low level incursions', including air and maritime space intrusion, illicit activities such as arms smuggling and drug trafficking, terrorist acts and piracy, and exploitation of the country's EEZ by illegal foreign fishing vessels (*ibid.* 7–10). The last of these had become a significant problem, particularly in the 'Dogleg' area in the Papuan Gulf. A more serious concern for Papua New Guinea's security planners, however, was seen as arising from within:

Internal security is a major concern with increased law and order problems in the urban areas and the escalation of the land compensation disputes....Our country's politics is unpredictable and Parliamentary groupings have been loose. Personalities and political and regional groupings have given rise to a high rate of votes of no confidence. Ethnic aspirations based on regionalism and the push for greater autonomy have the potential to become the source for wider and serious internal security concerns....Future uncontrolled ethnic and secessionist movements will be very costly as protagonists would be better prepared and armed than is the case now (*ibid.* 9–10).

Spelling out the defence management implications of this analysis, the White Paper concluded that what the PNGDF needed was 'a small balanced response force' that was rapidly deployable, operationally mobile, and versatile, with improved surveillance and intelligence capability (*ibid.* 10–12).

The principal elements of the proposed new defence strategy, which was given the title 'Banis Strategy' (perimeter defence strategy), were fourfold.

First, it argued for a rationalization of the existing force structure, to achieve a small, balanced, responsive force with appropriate guerilla and conventional warfare skills, adaptable to the country's internal security needs.

Secondly, it supported diversification of Papua New Guinea's defence relations and military sources of assistance. It acknowledged Australia's 'generous assistance' through the DCP, but endorsed the recommendation of a 1994 Defence Co-operation Evaluation for DCP in Papua New Guinea for a shift in policy 'from one which is predetermined by Australia's DCP priorities in PNG, to one determined by those priorities that are consistent with Papua New Guinea's Defence Policy'. It supported the idea of PNGDF participation in UN peacekeeping operations, recommended formal defence and security arrangements with neighbouring South Pacific countries, and supported the formation of a regional

peacekeeping force. It also supported joint intelligence arrangements, joint exercises, and bilateral security operations, while noting (with specific mention of the Joint Declaration of Principles with Australia) that such arrangements did not offer a 'total security guarantee'.

Thirdly, the White Paper recommended decentralization of Defence Force establishments — engineer, infantry, air and maritime — to the country's four administrative regions. As part of this it proposed improved capability of the engineer battalion and the construction of four engineer bases, at Banz, Madang, Port Moresby and Kimbe. It also proposed that under a Defence Civic Action Program the PNGDF should assist provincial works programs and participate in public tendering (*ibid.* 22). Other measures included improved capability of the medical platoon and the creation of a mobile field hospital (which could assist communities in remote areas), improved capacity to assist in emergency and disaster relief operations, and improved national surveillance capability.

Fourthly, having identified internal security and law and order as the country's 'credible threats' to peace, stability, and socio-economic prosperity, the White paper stated that, 'defence's priorities should be directed at internal security responsibilities through closer co-operation between the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary' at all levels, including joint internal security operations, joint intelligence, and joint training (within a joint internal security operational doctrine). Noting that the government had 'directed the establishment of a para-military force (the Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU)) whose basic function is to maintain law and order and internal security', it called for the formation of a third battalion, within the existing manpower ceiling, and for the RDU to be made part of the proposed third battalion, which would be based at the Goldie River training establishment.

As part of its guidelines for defence policy development, the White Paper further endorsed the principle that 'Defence must become a major participant in nation-building and development', though it should move away from 'the traditional civic action concept to a more constructive approach with new commitments' (*ibid.* 15). (In fact there had been virtually no civic action program since 1988.)

The following year the Papua New Guinea and Australian governments signed a New Defence Partnership, which placed emphasis on improved management and strategic planning, capacity building and rehabilitation of infrastructure.

The 1996 White Paper generated expectations of some restructuring and improvements in defence capability, equipment and training. Once again, however, policy recommendations were overtaken by events. In March 1997, in the celebrated 'Sandline Affair',⁶ the PNGDF commander, Brigadier General Singirok denounced a secret government contract with 'military consultants' Sandline International, aimed at ending the Bougainville conflict, detained and

subsequently deported Sandline personnel, and called on the prime minister, deputy prime minister and defence minister to resign. Prime Minister Chan accused Singirok of 'gross insubordination bordering on treason', and dismissed him. In the ensuing national elections Chan lost his seat and there was a change of government.

While Singirok's actions in the Sandline Affair received widespread popular support, they exacerbated existing factional tensions within the PNGDF. Specifically, there was resentment of the role played in the affair by the Special Forces Unit which had been set up by Singirok following the recommendations of the 1996 White Paper, but which was disbanded by Singirok's successor General Nuaia and replaced by a Special Operations Group chosen by Nuaia. There were also divisions along regional lines, particularly between soldiers from the Momase Region, who had supported Singirok, and those from the Islands Region.

Singirok was later reinstated by the new prime minister, Bill Skate, and in late 1998 it was announced that the PNGDF would undergo 'a change of culture', with greater emphasis on civic action, and that in accordance with the recommendations of the White Paper a new PNGDF engineers base was to be established in the Western Highlands.

Apart from that, little progress had been made toward the implementation of the 1996 White Paper before the Skate government announced that it was to review the PNGDF's priorities. This review resulted in the publication in 1999 of a new PNGDF white paper, titled *Service to Others*, which replaced that of 1996. Although it did not represent a radical departure from the previous policy, the 1999 white paper argued that the defense force should de-emphasize its internal security role and focus its efforts on the three other roles laid down in the constitution: defending sovereignty and national interests, contributing to regional and collective security, and nation building and development.

In 1997–98 the PNGDF had played an important role, with Australian army support, in delivering emergency supplies to rural communities affected by a major drought and frost which impacted heavily on food gardens in the highlands (see chapter 16).

The shift in emphasis in the 1999 White Paper reflected events in Indonesia, where, following the demise of President Suharto, East Timor voted for independence and separatist tendencies in West Papua gathered strength, fuelling concerns about further instability along the border with Indonesia. In a departure from its earlier policy position, in 1999 the PNGDF offered to take part in coordinated operations with the Indonesian army, following a hostage-taking incident attributed to the OPM (though this policy change does not appear to have been pursued).

As part of its commitment to nation building and development, the defense force finally began work on a Regional Construction Engineers base in the Western Highlands, with plans to establish two more such bases in Madang and West New Britain. Other priority areas included improved maritime capacity (with proposals to acquire two additional patrol boats and an operations support ship); strengthening of the air element (including fixed and rotary wing aircraft to provide air transport, medical evacuation, search and rescue, surveillance, and minimal capability for close air support for ground troops and maritime interdiction); and the creation of a third army battalion 'to strengthen the PNGDF's overall capacity to maintain a credible operational land force'. The new white paper endorsed the 1996 recommendations for a smaller, more mobile and capable force, and for improved intelligence. It also proposed the reactivation of the PNG Volunteer Rifles as a reserve force capable of assisting in law and order and internal security operations, and the reintroduction of a school cadet scheme. Following another recommendation, the PNGDF recruited its first women soldiers in 1999. The 1999 white paper envisaged a reduction in PNGDF force size by about 18 per cent to 4309, with an additional reserve force of 112. At the end of 1999, however, force size stood at 4500, a reduction of only 100 from the previous year.

Also in 1999, a publication, *Foundations of Maritime Doctrine*, set out the basis for the PNGDF's maritime operations, focusing on illegal fishing, drug and arms trafficking, and people smuggling. It was also announced that Papua New Guinea's surveillance capacity was to be enhanced by the construction of a satellite earth station network supported by the Defence Force National Surveillance Organization and the National Fisheries Authority (NFA). (In 2002 a memorandum of agreement between the PNGDF and the NFA formalized arrangements for regular patrols by the PNGDF Maritime Element throughout Papua New Guinea's EEZ, with the NFA contributing to the cost of operations.)

In July 1999 the Skate government lost office. The incoming government of Sir Mekere Morauta suspended General Singirok (and appointed as acting commander one of several senior officers who had been retired by Singirok in 1998); however it supported initiatives to strengthen the capability of the PNGDF and address problems of discipline and morale. Nevertheless, problems remained. In September 1999 troops on Bougainville threatened to withdraw in protest against poor food (due largely to non-payment of local suppliers) and non-payment of salaries and allowances. In early 2000 soldiers staged a protest outside the Department of Defence, demanding a 100 per cent pay rise (they eventually received 5 per cent). Then in September, as celebrations of Papua New Guinea's twenty-five years of independence were under way, soldiers at the Second Pacific Islands Regiment's Moem Barracks went on a rampage, burning down the regimental headquarters and officers' mess and causing visiting Papua New Guinean and Indonesian dignitaries to flee. The following week PNGDF

personnel were involved in another incident, in which about 100 soldiers marched on the Port Moresby General Hospital to retrieve the body of a colleague shot dead by police following an armed holdup. Rocks were thrown and a police vehicle set alight in suburban Port Moresby, and rumours that soldiers were about to march on the National Parliament forced the parliament to postpone its session.

In the aftermath of this, a parliamentary Ministerial Task Force on Defence, headed by Defence Minister Muki Taranupi, reported on the status of the PNGDF. Introducing the report to parliament in October, Prime Minister Morauta spoke of a 'culture of instability' in the PNGDF and commented: 'the PNGDF and the Defence Department cannot provide the protection that the people of Papua New Guinea need'; if hostilities or a national emergency occurred, 'a credible force could not be mobilised in less than 30 days'. The institutional breakdown of the Force, he said, was a result of years of neglect and mismanagement. The report itself argued that the basic needs of Defence members were not being met, that basic management structures and systems were not appropriate or not working, and that critical issues relating to the mission and purpose, capacity, resourcing and structure of the Force needed to be examined by government. The prime minister foreshadowed a 'radical overhaul' of the PNGDF and said he would ask the Commonwealth Secretary-General for assistance in this. The government would consider the possibility of creating a coast-guard-type air and maritime service and a highly mobile specialist unit, 'the latter possibly as part of the police'. There was also talk of reducing force size from 4200 to around 3000 at the end of 2000 and 1500 by mid 2001. Following talks with the Australian government, it was announced that Australia would increase its support for the PNGDF under the DCP, from \$A8 million to \$A25 million, and would provide up to thirty defence advisers. The bulk of the financial assistance was to be a once-off payment to enable the PNGDF to pay entitlements owed to soldiers and meet other outstanding debts, and to cover the costs of downsizing.

In November 2000 a Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (EPG), headed by a former New Zealand secretary of defence, arrived in Port Moresby to undertake yet another review of the PNGDF. Its report was presented to the government in January 2001. The EPG report made a number of observations about structural imbalance, maintenance and supply deficiencies, financial and personnel management, and discipline. One of its key recommendations, however, was a dramatic reduction in force size, from the current 4150 to 1900 within six months, through a Voluntary Release Scheme. While the recommendation of a cut in force size was not new, PNGDF personnel were not adequately consulted about the EPG recommendations and after the report had been accepted by cabinet in March, rumors of imminent downsizing generated anger amongst the troops. Within PNGDF HQ at Murray Barracks, where there was already a large number of soldiers who had been made redundant but were still awaiting

redundancy payments, a group of soldiers called on the government to resign, and there were reports of soldiers breaking into the armory. The soldiers also called for the removal of Australian military advisers, a reaction to the Australian government's offer to underwrite the cost of the PNGDF downsizing. In the event, the dispute was resolved fairly quickly, but only by the government's agreement to rescind the cabinet decision to reduce force size (though in fact force numbers continued to decline).

Following the incidents at Murray Barracks, yet another review of the PNGDF was completed in mid 2001. This review, conducted within the Department of Defence and entitled Defence Organisational Restructure 2001, largely endorsed earlier proposals for restructuring of the PNGDF to achieve a small, balanced, mobile and effective force, and a decentralized operational command structure. Under the proposed arrangements, an elite rapid response Joint Task Force headquarters was to be set up, headed by a second brigadier general, to command forces in operations and conduct low-level operations, but without its own force. The review also recommended that defense policy and resource control roles be separated from PNGDF HQ, and supported earlier calls for a reduction in force size, from 3340 (at June 2001) to 2000 over three years, but building back up to 2500 over ten years. This downsizing would fall most heavily on the land element. It was subsequently announced that certain financial powers had been decentralized down to unit commanders.

Soldiers' grievances again came to the fore in the latter part of 2001. Soldiers claimed that while retrenched soldiers were still awaiting funding for their repatriation, and serving soldiers had not received outstanding allowances and leave fares, money had been lost through financial mismanagement and fraudulent deals involving Defence Department officials. In representations to newly-appointed Defence Secretary John Vulupindi, the soldiers demanded a commission of inquiry into the affairs of the PNGDF and the Department of Defence. Vulupindi, who had been highly critical of management within the PNGDF and the Defence Department, was himself replaced as Defence secretary. This was the sixth change in Defence secretary since 1997; in the same period there had been six changes of commander (substantive or acting) and seven different ministers of Defence.

Subsequent to this, Prime Minister Morauta announced that his government had allocated an additional K35 million in 2001 to help meet the costs of Phase One of the PNGDF rebuilding program. Most of this amount was to be spent on redundancy payments and other outstanding entitlements due to PNGDF personnel. The new initiatives identified in the 1999 White Paper appeared to have been shelved.

Problems persisted. In early 2002, mutinous soldiers and retrenched personnel took control of Moem Barracks in Wewak, burning down buildings, raiding the

armoury, and chasing some officers and their families out of the compound. In a 13-point petition presented to then opposition leader Sir Michael Somare (a resident of Wewak) the soldiers listed, as well as industrial demands, calls for the resignation of the prime minister and of the commander PNGDF, and several other political demands, including a halt to the privatization of government assets and proposed land mobilization. After negotiations between the soldiers and a PNGDF crisis team failed to resolve the dispute, the Barracks was retaken in a military operation and around thirty soldiers arrested. In a sequel to this, the Wewak courthouse was burned down just before the soldiers' scheduled trial.

In the lead-up to the 2002 national elections, a new Defence minister was appointed and changes in senior PNGDF positions were announced, but deferred after a legal challenge. A Defence Intelligence report to the PNGDF commander, Commodore Peter Ilau (a naval officer who had been appointed in October 2001), suggested that this reshuffling was 'election-related' and evidence of a plot to halt the retrenchment exercise and change the current command structure. Amid allegations that the PNGDF was being subjected to 'outside (political) influences', it was decided that the PNGDF would not be used in routine operations to assist police in providing security during the 2002 elections. (In 1997 troops had been so used, but some soldiers had been accused of acting in a partisan way, and several had been arrested.) Subsequently it was reported that some soldiers, as well as the civilian Defence secretary, had taken part in the election campaign, and several were later charged with electoral offences. Notwithstanding this, troops were deployed in the Southern Highlands in 2003 during new elections in six electorates where polling had been declared void in 2002, and later assisted police during a state of emergency in that province aimed at restoring law and order and enforcing a surrender of weapons in civilian hands.

The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington had little impact on Papua New Guinea's perceptions of external security threats but following the Bali bombings of 2002 the foreign minister, Sir Rabbie Namaliu, called for an urgent review of Papua New Guinea's preparedness to deal with a terrorist attack and of its internal security and intelligence gathering resources. From around 2002 some stability seems to have returned to the PNGDF, and restructuring has been under way, with force size down to about 2000 by the end of 2003 and some new recruitment commencing, and an increased budgetary allocation for defence.

In recent years there has been support for the idea of PNGDF troops participating in UN peacekeeping operations. In 2002 the then Defence minister dismissed the idea, saying that Papua New Guinea lacked the resources, but the idea persists. Meanwhile some ninety PNGDF infantry and engineers took part in the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003 —

PNGDF's first overseas engagement since its successful operation in Vanuatu in 1980 — and a smaller PNGDF presence (a platoon once every twelve months on a four-month rotation with Fiji and Vanuatu) has been maintained.

In 2005 the PNGDF produced a publication, *Foundations of Papua New Guinea Military Doctrine*, setting out its 'philosophical approach to the conduct of military operations', ostensibly based on the security objectives identified in the 1999 White Paper but implying some further shifts in priorities. The first security objective was identified as the defence of Papua New Guinea territory and interests from direct threat; the others were stated as contributing to regional security, supporting global interests, and peacetime national tasks. The overall approach was elaborated in the opening chapter:

The PNGDF has traditionally trained for limited conventional operations, and must continue to do so. The PNGDF must be flexible enough to meet the challenges of international efforts to counter asymmetric threats, assist in containing the fallout from intra-state warfare and support efforts to counter transnational criminal activities. This can only be achieved in an environment where the PNGDF develop conventional niche capabilities in support of mid to higher end coalition operations or peace support operations ...

The PNGDF achieves this by developing an affordable and fit for purpose force that has multiple-roles, and capabilities. The PNGDF applies this force by taking the 'Banis Strategy' of home defence and developing it into manageable niche capabilities (PNGDF 2005, 1-2-1-3).⁷

The appropriate 'military response operations' (MROs) were listed, in order, as: surveillance; border security; force security operations; coalition operations, and civil military cooperation.

The emphasis on surveillance and border security reflected longstanding but increasing concerns about illegal fishing, people smuggling, and securing the border with Indonesia. During the Bougainville conflict patrolling of the border with Indonesia virtually ceased, though incidents continued to occur along the border. In September 2004 the PNGDF was deployed to the border following reports that members of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) had attacked a Papua New Guinea citizen, and that people from across the border were poaching in Papua New Guinea. The PNGDF border post at Kiunga in Western Province (closed in 1998) was re-established during 2004 in a move to strengthen surveillance of the border.

Taking up the idea of participating in overseas peacekeeping operations, the *Foundations of Papua New Guinea Military Doctrine* went on to say:

It is unlikely that future major operational deployments by the PNGDF will be unilateral in nature, but rather a part of a coalition or major UN

peace support operation. These factors form the basis that (sic) the PNGDF doctrine and policy that will guide the development of higher level doctrine within the force (*ibid.* 1–4).

Although civil-military cooperation was listed last amongst the MROs, continuous reference was made to the PNGDF's role in nation building. Apart from its deployment to assist the RPNGC in the Southern Highlands by-elections in 2003, a significant new initiative was the decision, in 2005, that, as part of 'Operation Green Revolution', PNGDF aircraft would be used to assist remote communities transport coffee and other agricultural produce to markets (though in 2006 there were complaints that little had been done to implement this policy).

By 2006, the downsizing of the PNGDF had been largely accomplished, measures had been introduced to strengthen command and control and management systems, and the Australian government had promised further support for the PNGDF, with some thirty projects, including assistance in the building of offices and housing, providing improved weapons control, strengthening of the air transport wing, and support for the PNGDF deployment to Solomon Islands. However, reports of the disappearance of a small number of weapons from a warehouse at Murray Barracks and the disclosure that outside contractors had received substantial unauthorized payments, suggested that some problems of capacity and management remained.

Conclusion

At independence, the retiring Australian colonial government left Papua New Guinea with a defence establishment it was unlikely to be able to maintain, even with assistance through the DCP. The fact that Papua New Guinea did not face a significant external threat made it even more likely that these high standards would not be kept up. Even before the Bougainville crisis, the PNGDF had become substantially involved in internal security (that is, law and order) operations in support of the civil authority — though many in the defence establishment did not welcome this involvement, and there was early evidence of emerging problems of morale and discipline. The PNGDF's inability to contain the conflict on Bougainville after 1989 highlighted weaknesses in defence planning and capacity, problems of troop discipline and morale, and tensions in relations between elements of the military and civil authorities.

These problems have been recognized and partially addressed in a series of defence reviews, which, since the late 1980s, have recommended changes in force structure to achieve a smaller, more mobile and highly trained force and more involvement in civic action. What stands out from this account, however, is that the frequency of reviews and recommendations has not been matched by action (indeed, setting up another review seems, in several instances, to have been an alternative to taking unpopular or unaffordable action). Few of the

recommendations of successive reviews and enquiries have been fully implemented. For example, the downsizing of force strength, first mooted in 1993, had not been fully achieved in 2006, despite Australian assistance in covering the cost of the exercise; the proposed engineers base in the highlands, announced in 1991 and said to be under construction in 1999, has yet to be realized; and plans for a third battalion, around since at least 1996, remain unfulfilled. The high turnover of PNGDF commanders, Defence secretaries and Defence ministers throughout the 1980s and 1990s undoubtedly contributed to weak policy commitment. Meanwhile ageing assets and facilities have not been adequately maintained, and there was substantial damage to the Wewak barracks during the riots of 2001 and 2002. There has been no published report for the Department of Defence since 1994, and there are recurring allegations of financial mismanagement.

As against this, the military coup predicted by many observers at the time of independence has never occurred, and there seems to have been greater stability and consolidation in the Force since the early 2000s. PNGDF personnel have performed creditably in joint exercises with the Australian and other defence forces and as part of the RAMSI contingent in Solomon Islands. It remains to be seen whether this will provide a basis for a new direction in defence operations (though one suggested as early as 1985 following the success of the PNGDF intervention in Vanuatu), namely deployment of the PNGDF in international peacekeeping operations.

References

- Claxton, Karl. 1998. Bougainville. 1988–98. *Five Searches for Security in the North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea*. Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.130. Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.
- Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC). 1974. *Final Report*. Port Moresby.
- Defence Board of Enquiry, Papua New Guinea. 2007. Report Prepared by Chairman and Commissioner Honourable Justice Gibbs Salika, CSM, OBE, Supreme Court Judge of Papua New Guinea, General (retired) Anthony Huai, CBE, Deputy Chairman and Commissioner, and Mr Daniel Liosi, Commissioner. 13 December 2006–16 March 2007.
- Dibb, Paul and Rhondda Nicholas. 1996. *Restructuring the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. Strategic Analysis and Force Structure Principles for a Small State*. Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.
- Dinnen, Sinclair, Ron May and Anthony J. Regan eds. 1997. *Challenging the State: the Sandline Affair in Papua New Guinea*. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies and Department of Political and Social Change,

Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

- Dorney, Sean. 1998. *The Sandline Affair: Politics and Mercenaries and the Bougainville Crisis*. Sydney: ABC Books.
- East, Colin. 1985. PNGDF: colonial legacy, or independent force? *Pacific Defence Reporter* 12(5): 11–13, 60.
- Gubb, Matthew. 1994. *Vanuatu's 1980 Santo Rebellion. International Responses to a Microstate Security Crisis*. Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.107. Canberra Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University.
- Laki, James. 2000a. Challenges for a 'new look' Defence Force, Internal challenges for the Defence Force, and Civil military relations: what are the lessons to be learned? In *Issues and Trends in National Development*, ed. Beno Boeha and James Robins. Searchlight on Papua New Guinea. January-June 2000, Vol.1, 57–66. Port Moresby: The National Research Institute.
- Laki, James. 2000b. Streamlining the Defence Force, Defence relations: Australia and Papua New Guinea and New look defence: an independent perspective. In *Issues and Trends in National Development*, ed. Beno Boeha and James Robins. Searchlight on Papua New Guinea. July-December 2000, Vol.2, 67–68. Port Moresby: The National Research Institute.
- Liria, Y. A. 1993. *Bougainville Campaign Diary*. Melbourne: Indra Publishing.
- May, R. J. 1993. *The Changing Role of the Military in Papua New Guinea*. Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.101. Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.
- May, R. J. 2001/2004. *State and Society in Papua New Guinea. The First Twenty-Five Years*. Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, reprinted by ANU E Press, Canberra.
- May, R. J. and Matthew Spriggs eds. 1990. *The Bougainville Crisis*. Bathurst: Crawford House Press.
- O'Callaghan, M-L. 1999. *Enemies Within: Papua New Guinea, Australia, and the Sandline Crisis: the Inside Story*. Sydney: Doubleday.
- Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). 2005. *Foundations of Papua New Guinea Military Doctrine*. DDP 0.0. Port Moresby: Corporate Express.

Rogers, Trevor. 2003. *The Papua New Guinea Defence Force. Vanuatu (1980) to Bougainville (1990)*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University.

Spriggs, Matthew and Denoon Donald eds. 1992. *The Bougainville Crisis. 1991 Update*. Bathurst: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University in association with Crawford House Press.

Endnotes

¹ For more detail see May (1993; 2001/2004, chapters 10,11), Dorney (1998), the annual reviews in *Asia Pacific Security Outlook* (Tokyo and New York: Japan Centre for International Exchange), Laki (2000a,b), and Rogers (2003).

² The early debate over defence and the defence force is reviewed in May (1993, 3-13).

³ For more detail on this see May and Spriggs (1990), Spriggs and Denoon 1992), Dorney (1998), and Claxton (1998).

⁴ Dibb, then head of the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, was a former deputy secretary in the Australian Defence Department and director of the Joint Intelligence Organisation; Nicholas, a Canberra-based lawyer, had previously worked in the Australian Defence Department.

⁵ The report was subsequently published as a discussion paper by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre of the Australian National University (Dibb and Nicholas 1996).

⁶ For details of the Sandline affair, see Dinnen, May and Regan (1997), Dorney (1998), and O'Callaghan (1999).

⁷ The concept of 'niche warfighting' was referred to again at 4.2 and 4.30 of the document.