Part 1

Strategy and policy

1

Peacekeeping after the Gulf War

Australian defence policy, 1991

This volume describes the six Australian overseas peacekeeping missions that began in the year after the Gulf War ended in March 1991. All were initiated to enhance Australia's status as an international good citizen. The first of these missions was to Cambodia. In the mid-1980s the Australian Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden, had tried to resolve the conflict in Cambodia, where Vietnamese troops had been supporting a puppet regime since their 1979 invasion, but it was not until the end of the Cold War that a solution seemed possible. Vietnam began withdrawing troops from Cambodia in 1987 and, as support from the Soviet Union waned, completed the task in 1989. That year Senator Gareth Evans, who had succeeded Hayden as Foreign Minister, undertook diplomatic initiatives that contributed substantially to the signing of an agreement in Paris in October 1991 to facilitate UN-organised elections for a new Cambodian government. An Australian signals detachment arrived in Cambodia in November 1991. The contingent grew in size in 1992, before returning to Australia in 1993 after the successful conduct of the election.

The second mission was to Western Sahara, where there was a long-running conflict between Morocco and the Sahrawi national liberation movement, Polisario. The initiative for the mission owed less to the end of the Cold War than had been the case with Cambodia. Rather, the success of the UN mission in Namibia in 1989–90 (described in volume 2, *Australia and the 'New World Order'*) encouraged the UN Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, that he could achieve a similar outcome in Western Sahara. In July 1990 the Australian Defence Minister, Senator Robert Ray, approved the despatch of Australian military personnel as observers. This deployment did not eventuate, but an Australian officer took part in a UN technical mission later that year, and Australian signallers began arriving in September 1991. The last Australian contingent returned to Australia in 1994 when it was clear that the UN mission was not achieving its aims. Good international citizenship had its limits.

The end of the Gulf War in early 1991 gave rise to three Australian missions. When in March 1991 the Iraqi Government cracked down on Kurdish dissidents in

the north of the country, large numbers of Kurds fled into nearby Iran and Turkey. The Kurdish refugees in Turkey suffered terribly in the cold and wet of the mountains just inside that country's border. The United Nations authorised the United States to lead a multinational force to establish a safe haven in northern Iraq and to bring aid to the refugees. An Australian medical assistance group, on Operation Habitat, arrived in northern Iraq in May 1991 for a six-week deployment.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council had established the UN Special Commission on Iraq (Unscom) to oversee the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Australia agreed to provide personnel to Unscom, and the first of these began work in May 1991; the commitment continued until the demise of Unscom in 1999. Also, the United Nations authorised sanctions against Iraq until it fulfilled the ceasefire conditions, including cooperation with Unscom. In May 1991 the Australian Government approved the deployment of an Australian frigate, HMAS *Darwin*, on Operation Damask, to assist with the sanctions operations, and it became the first of seven single-ship deployments through to 1999.

While Australian military personnel were deploying on these missions during the second half of 1991 the government faced the possibility of being asked to contribute to a UN peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia, where fighting had broken out between the forces of some of the federation's constituent republics and the central government. Unlike the other cases mentioned above, the government was very reluctant for Australia to become involved, partly for fear of inflaming ethnic tensions in Australia; but in January 1992 the government agreed to the redeployment of an Australian officer serving with the United Nations in the Middle East to command the UN observers in Croatia. Three more Australians became observers in Bosnia in mid-1992, and eventually more than 260 Australians were to serve in the Balkans in various capacities over the next twelve years.

All these missions were peacekeeping activities, although with different characteristics. The force in Cambodia was required to supervise the conduct of elections. Later, Australians returned as part of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, assisting the Cambodians to deal with the mines left over from the wars. In the midst of this activity, in July 1997 Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) aircraft evacuated more than 400 Australians and other nationals from the country during a period of civil unrest. This was not a peacekeeping mission, but its story will be told here as a part of Australia's participation in the international intervention in Cambodia in the 1990s.

Although Operation Habitat in northern Iraq was an Australian humanitarian mission, bringing aid to Kurdish refugees, the larger multinational mission, Operation Provide Comfort, was designed to create a situation whereby the Kurds could return to live in Iraq with a measure of security and peace. The mission ended when the Kurds were re-established in Iraq.

Unscom and the sanctions regime against Iraq began with high ideals. The Australian Government did not list Unscom as a peacekeeping mission, but the world, and particularly the Middle East, would be far more peaceful if Iraq could be compelled to destroy its weapons of mass destruction. Australia's desire to play a role in international disarmament – the good international citizen again – was complicated by an even more pressing need to strengthen its alliance with the United States. With this latter imperative uppermost, Australia deployed forces to Kuwait in 1998 to support American and British air strikes against Iraq if they proved necessary. This operation, known as

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Operation Pollard, is therefore part of the UNSCOM story and is recounted here, even though it was not a peacekeeping activity.

Australia's very modest and reluctant commitment to peacekeeping in Yugoslavia began because Australia felt some obligation to assist the United Nations – the good international citizen writ very small. But as time passed Australia's main motivation was the opportunity to provide ADF personnel with operational experience.

This volume is therefore about a series of missions that began at a time of high optimism, encouraged by the apparent success of the Gulf War, although many of the commitments continued until the end of the decade and beyond, by which time the international environment had changed markedly. To understand why the government agreed to these commitments and to appreciate their place in the history of Australian defence and foreign policy, we need briefly to outline the story of Australian peacekeeping and overseas operations in the preceding decades. The chapter will then describe Australian defence and foreign policy in 1991, focusing particularly on Australia's approach to peacekeeping.

AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPING AND OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS, 1947–83

The missions that began in 1991–92 followed a trend of increasing Australian peacekeeping commitments that had begun a few years earlier, following the end of the Cold War (see volume 2). But even before then, Australia had a long, if modest, history of supporting international peacekeeping missions.[1] In 1947 Australia had sent four officers to Indonesia to observe the ceasefire between Dutch and Indonesian forces, and this commitment, with increasing numbers, had continued until 1951. By that time another group of observers had gone to Kashmir to help maintain the ceasefire between Pakistani and Indian forces. This commitment, later supplemented by a Caribou transport aircraft, continued until 1985. In 1956 Australian observers joined the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East, and this mission continues to the present day. In 1964 a contingent of Australian police went to Cyprus, and this commitment also continues to the present.

These peacekeeping activities received little publicity and were not considered to be major military commitments. With the Cold War at its height, Australia deployed naval vessels, two infantry battalions and an air force fighter squadron to the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. Australia had already deployed aircraft to assist Britain in operations against Communist Terrorists in Malaya, and in 1955 an Australian infantry battalion joined the campaign. Australian Army units remained in Malaya, and after 1963, in the new state of Malaysia, until the 1970s.[2] In 1965–66, during Indonesia's Confrontation with Malaysia, Australia sent combat troops to Borneo to help British and Malaysian security forces. Australia's largest and most contentious military commitment

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1 Australian peacekeeping missions that began before 1988 are described in the first volume of this series: Londey, *The Long Search for Peace*. For a shorter but still comprehensive account, see Londey, *Other People's Wars*.

2 Australian infantry companies still serve three-month tours at Butterworth airbase in northern Malaysia.

was to the Vietnam War, between 1962 and 1972; in all 50 000 Australian military personnel served there.[3]

With the burden these major commitments, the Australian Army had little capacity to send large numbers of troops on peacekeeping missions even if the government had wanted to. Australia's military observers in Indonesia, Kashmir and the Middle East were drawn primarily from the part-time citizen force, not the Regular Army. Regular officers could not be spared and, in any case, peacekeeping observer missions were not seen as providing relevant experience for officers preparing for counterinsurgency operations in South-East Asia.

Australia's defence policy changed quite fundamentally after the Vietnam War, which ended with the fall of South Vietnam to Communist North Vietnam in 1975. In the late 1960s Britain decided to withdraw from 'East of Suez', and in 1969 US President Richard Nixon declared that in the future US allies would need to be able to defend themselves except in extreme circumstances. Once the Vietnam War was over Australia would need to look after itself. Hence by 1976 Australia's defence policy had been refocused to emphasise self-reliance in an alliance framework and, while there was no discernible threat to Australia, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) began to concentrate on defending continental Australia.[4] The mantra that the first priority was the defence of Australia was to dominate all peacekeeping decisions for the next quarter century.

While the ADF focused on the defence of Australia, attitudes towards peacekeeping began to change. Partly this was a result of the election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972. But in addition, military leaders realised that, after the Vietnam War, peacekeeping might, after all, provide valuable operational experience for Regular Army officers, who started to take over from the citizen force officers as observers in the Middle East and in Kashmir. The Liberal–Country Party coalition government, under Malcolm Fraser, which succeeded the Whitlam Government in 1975, approved further peacekeeping missions, such as the deployment of helicopters to Sinai in 1976–79, the provision of observers to Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in 1979–80, and the commitment of personnel to the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai in 1982–86. In 1979 the government agreed to send an engineer construction squadron to Namibia as part of a force that would manage the transition of that territory to independence. The squadron was not deployed until 1989, when the end of the Cold War enabled the peace process to be revived.

Nonetheless, the psychological effect of the Vietnam War, which had become increasing unpopular, continued to influence politicians and the general public. Successive Australian governments seemed determined never again to send Australian forces overseas on any tasks other than peacekeeping missions. Indeed, when in 1982 Prime Minister Fraser suggested committing personnel to the Multinational Force and Observers – a peacekeeping mission – it aroused illogical criticism from some commentators, and even from the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Hayden, that Australia was becoming involved

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3   For Australia's involvement in these conflicts see the official histories: O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53*, two volumes, and Edwards (General Editor), *The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1975*, nine volumes.

4   The policy was spelt out in Department of Defence, *Australian Defence*.

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in another Vietnam.[5] Critics did not appear to be drawing a distinction between peace-keeping and other overseas deployments.

THE HAWKE GOVERNMENT

As memories of the Vietnam War faded, however, the possibility of deploying forces overseas began to re-emerge. The Labor Party came to power in March 1983, and the new Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, was a strong supporter of the US alliance, which he and other senior ministers saw as a vital pillar of Australian's defence and foreign policies. The Defence Minister, Kim Beazley, who took over the portfolio in December 1984, matched Hawke in his belief in the importance of the alliance. Gareth Evans, who succeeded Hayden as Foreign Minister in 1988, also appreciated the role of the US alliance but, more significantly, was optimistic that the United Nations might be able to resolve some of the world's conflicts. In October 1988, just a month after his appointment, he spoke of his 'profound sense of hope for the future' when considering the manner in which the United Nations had already contributed to the peaceful resolution of conflicts around the world.[6] In December he urged the advantages to Australia of being, and being seen to be, 'a good international citizen'. Australia had a role to play in dealing with global environmental problems, just as it did 'in other fields of international action such as decolonisation, peacekeeping, and the whole arms-control agenda'.[7] Whereas Hayden had been wary of peacekeeping commitments, Evans enthusiastically supported the deployment to Namibia, and he was driven towards resolving the conflict in Cambodia, which would include sending hundreds of Australian peacekeeping troops.

In the late 1980s Australia not only deployed forces on peacekeeping missions but also began to consider sending forces overseas for other reasons. The first step in changing the post-Vietnam mind-set was the Defence White Paper, *The Defence of Australia 1987*, released in March 1987, which outlined a policy that concentrated on the defence of Australia. Although the priority for force development was to prepare to meet low-level contingencies in the north of Australia, the government also recognised the need 'to be capable of reacting positively to calls for military support further afield from our allies and friends, should we judge that our interests require it'.[8] The case for allowing forces to be deployed overseas had been argued in the Labor caucus and, as Beazley commented later, the White Paper proved to be 'liberating' in allowing for such deployments.[9] He acknowledged this in November 1987, when he affirmed that the new defence program would 'provide Australia with a defence force capable of operating independently throughout our region of direct military interest'. It was 'an essential element of Australia's defence posture that the capabilities we develop to provide for our own defence also provide us with the ability to contribute to regional security'.[10] Beazley was referring to the near region, and he supported the sending of troops to

5   See the first volume in this series, Londey, *The Long Search for Peace*.

6   Evans, 'Australia and the United Nations', p. 394.

7   Evans, 'Australia's place in the world', p. 326.

8   *The Defence of Australia 1987*, p. 8.

9   Interview, K.C. Beazley, 23 May 2007.

10   Beazley, 'Australian perspectives on regional security issues', pp. 173, 175.

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Cambodia, but he also accepted that forces could be sent well beyond the area of direct military interest.

The ink was barely dry on the White Paper when it became clear that troops might need to be employed outside Australia. Following the military coup in Fiji in May 1987, Australia deployed forces to facilitate the evacuation of Australian nationals, had that proved necessary. The following year saw political disruption in Vanuatu, with Australian forces again on standby. By 1988 a civil war had broken out in the Papua New Guinea island of Bougainville, with the possibility that Australia might become involved. It was the start of a long saga of regional peacemaking and peacekeeping that moved from mediation to peacekeeping in Bougainville and a decade or so later to peace enforcement in East Timor and Solomon Islands.[11]

Events further afield were also affecting Australia. At the end of 1987 the government agreed to deploy a naval clearance diving team to the Persian Gulf to protect neutral tankers under threat during the Iran–Iraq War. Despite criticism again that Australia was about to become involved in 'another Vietnam', the government had responded to a request from the United States, indicating that the demands of the US alliance were still paramount. The divers never actually deployed, but the decision was the beginning of Australia's military involvement in the Gulf region, which was to persist beyond two decades.[12]

These decisions were made in the context of a changing global strategic environment. On 7 December 1988 the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, addressed the United Nations in New York and spoke about the 'emergence of a mutually connected and integrated world'. Further world progress was 'now possible only though the search for a consensus of all mankind, in movement toward a new world order'. This would be a different world in which 'force and the threat of force can no longer be . . . instruments of foreign policy'. He also announced large-scale cuts in Soviet armaments and the withdrawal of some troops from Eastern Europe.[13] The Soviet Union's willingness to compromise indicated a fundamental change in its approach to international affairs, but initially the United States President, George H.W. Bush, reacted slowly to this initiative. Eventually, after a summit meeting in Malta between Bush and Gorbachev early in December 1989, a Soviet representative declared that the Cold War had ended.

The end of the Cold War allowed the United Nations to start to resolve some international crises. In 1988 a ceasefire was arranged between Iran and Iraq (which had been at war since 1980) and Australian officers joined the UN observer group in Iran, with successive contingents remaining until the end of 1990. After the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the United Nations established a mine clearance training organisation in Pakistan to help Afghan refugees to clear mines in their war-ravaged country. Australian engineers joined the organisation in 1989 and remained involved in the program until 1993.[14] Elsewhere, the end of the Cold War allowed the United Nations to rejuvenate the peace process in Namibia and Angola

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11   These crises and the ADF's reaction are discussed in Breen, *Good Neighbour Operations.*

12   See Horner, *Australia and the 'New World Order'.*

13   Gorbachev, 'Address to the UN General Assembly', p. 459; also Gorbachev, 'USSR arms reduction: Rivalry into sensible competition', pp. 229–36.

14   For an account of these missions see volume 2 in this series, Horner, *Australia and the 'New World Order'.*

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and to facilitate elections in Nicaragua. As noted earlier, Australian engineers went to Namibia in 1989. In addition, Vietnamese forces began leaving Cambodia, setting up conditions for a peace agreement there.

The end of the Cold War also allowed a new approach to inter-state conflict. When Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Bush and Gorbachev were united in their view that 'Iraq's aggression must not be tolerated. No peaceful international order is possible if larger states can devour their smaller neighbors.'[15] The UN Security Council initiated economic sanctions against Iraq, and Australia contributed three naval vessels to a multinational maritime interception force. When Iraq refused to withdraw, the Security Council approved the use of 'all necessary means' to expel Iraq from Kuwait, and Australia contributed three warships to the coalition force that conducted the Gulf War between January and March 1991.

The Australian Government's decision to support the operations in the Gulf was driven by two imperatives: the government was keen to strengthen Australia's standing in the US alliance, and as the operations were authorised by the United Nations Australia's role could be justified as part of international efforts to deal with aggression. On 21 August 1990 Prime Minister Hawke made the case for deploying the ships firmly in the context of the changes in the international system. He explained that 'over the past few years the frightening rigidities of the Cold War have dissolved and the threat of global war between the superpowers has receded'. The task therefore was 'to construct a new world order which will guarantee that the end of the Cold War will bring an era of peace'. He argued that as the Cold War faded the United Nations was moving 'back to the position its founders intended for it', and in the future Australia might need to depend on the principles of the United Nations Charter to protect its interests. Australia was 'not sending ships to the Gulf region to serve our allies; we are going to protect the international rule of law which will be vital to our security however our alliances may develop in the future'.[16] The US alliance was certainly important but, fortunately for the government, there was no inconsistency between supporting the United States and operating in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions.

For the first time since the Vietnam War, Australian forces were sent overseas to take part in a war, and after the war began Hawke told Parliament that there were three main reasons for Australia's involvement in it. First, Australia was seeking to establish conditions for peace and stability in the Middle East, and there could be no peace while Iraq remained in occupation of Kuwait. Second, Australia was seeking 'to prevent the catastrophic distortion and disruption of the international economy that would result from Saddam Hussein being placed to pursue his goal of domination of the world oil market'. The third reason, beyond even these vital interests, was that Australia was seeking 'to achieve the promise of a more free, more peaceful and more prosperous world order in which the goals of the Charter of the United Nations can at last be fulfilled'.[17]

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15 'Full text of a joint statement issued at the end of a one-day superpower summit in Helsinki on 9 September between President Bush and President Gorbachev', *Middle East Economic Digest*, vol. 34, no 8, 21 September 1990.

16 Ministerial statement, R.J.L. Hawke, Prime Minister, *CPD*, H of R, 21 August 1990, p. 1128.

17 CPD, *H of R*, 21 January 1991, p. 4.

While the Gulf crisis was unfolding the United Nations did not mount any new peacekeeping missions. The mission in Namibia had concluded successfully in March 1990, and the observer group on the Iran–Iraq border was wound up at the end of 1990, once Iraq – preoccupied in Kuwait – agreed to accept the border as claimed by Iran and formally concluded its war with Iran. With the end of the Gulf War, however, there was a further expansion in UN peacekeeping activity both in Iraq and elsewhere, either as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 or as a general outcome of the end of the Cold War. As the eminent British diplomat David Hannay commented, by the beginning of 1992 – a year after the end of the Gulf War – the United Nations was 'on the crest of a wave, Iraq's aggression successfully reversed and a number of other peacekeeping missions settling relics of the Cold War well under way'.[18] New peacekeeping or associated missions included the UN Iraq–Kuwait Observation Mission (Unikom), the UN Special Commission on Iraq (Unscom), the maritime sanctions regime against Iraq, Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (Minurso), all authorised in April 1991, the second UN Angola Verification Mission (Unavem II), May 1991, the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (Onusal), July 1991, the UN Advance Mission in Cambodia (Unamic), October 1991, the UN Military Liaison Officers in Yugoslavia (Unmloy), December 1991, the UN Protection Force in Croatia (Unprofor), February 1992, and the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (Untac), February 1992.[19] This, then, was the international peacekeeping environment; but to understand why Australia was involved in eight of these eleven missions, we need to appreciate the domestic political scene and the government's general policy framework in this period.[20]

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY IN 1991

Australian defence and foreign policy in 1991 was based on three key documents. The first was the 1987 Defence White Paper, which, as noted above, gave first priority to the defence of Australia but allowed the government to react 'positively to calls for military support further afield from our allies and friends, should we judge that our interests require it'. The White Paper also indicated that Australia could 'usefully contribute to peacekeeping operations'. Capabilities being developed for home defence would allow Australia to 'contribute to wider Western interests on a scale appropriate to our circumstances . . . It is not necessary to develop forces specifically for peacekeeping. Like contributions to allied efforts, such contributions can be mounted from the force-in-being.'[21]

The second defence policy document, *Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s,* was endorsed by the Cabinet in November 1989 once it became clear that the Cold War was over. It provided a sharper focus on the sort of capabilities required to fulfil the defence strategy but did not advocate a change of policy. Although situations could

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18 Hannay, *The World Disorder*, p. 155.

19 For a succinct summary of the establishment of these new missions see Hannay, *The World Disorder.*

20 This volume describes six Australian missions, as the two missions in each of Cambodia and Yugoslavia are considered as single missions.

21 *The Defence of Australia 1987*, pp. 8, 9.

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arise that might require the ADF to become involved in the South Pacific, such as the evacuation of Australian citizens or natural disaster relief, the document considered that appropriate capabilities already existed in the ADF for such tasks.[22]

The third document was a major foreign policy statement, entitled *Australia's Regional Security.* As the Foreign Minister, Evans, explained when releasing it in December 1989, while Australia's military capability was designed for a defensive role, it 'provides the foundation for our capacity to contribute to a positive security environment through the exercise of what might be described as military diplomacy, or politico-military capability . . . The contribution that our military capabilities make to our general national status strengthens our ability to exercise leverage across many fields.'[23] The document signified increased focus on the near region.

The big question was the extent to which these policies needed to change after the events of 1989–91. The apparent success of the Gulf War seemed to indicate some of the possibilities of the new world order but, as Peter Wilenski, Australia's Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York, pointed out, it was not the Gulf War but the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's new attitude of cooperation that was opening up new opportunities for the United Nations.[24]

Earlier, in September 1990, when the Gulf crisis was still in its early stages, the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade had begun enquiring into the effectiveness of Australia's involvement in UN peacekeeping operations. In its submission, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) stated that when considering whether to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations, the government was guided by four broad guidelines:

» whether the mission was 'likely to make a constructive contribution to the resolution of the conflict' and promote international peace and stability
» how the mission would relate to Australia's foreign policy and interests – how participation would be regarded by key allies, regional parties and the parties concerned
» the nature of the commitment and whether resources were available, and
» the risks to be incurred by the mission, balanced against the benefits to be derived from it.[25]

When the committee reported in May 1991, most of its recommendations related to the better management of peacekeeping operations by the United Nations and Australia. It recommended that Australia's contribution to peacekeeping be included explicitly in the objectives of the ADF (although not considered when determining its structure), and it proposed a list of eleven factors to be considered before Australia agreed to future peacekeeping contributions.[26] Broadly, they were similar to those proposed by

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22 Department of Defence, *Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s*, p. 36. For the classified version see AWM330, PKI/700/31.

23 Evans, *Australia's Regional Security*, p. 18.

24 Logue, 'Major reforms advocated for the United Nations', p. 4.

25 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Australia's role in United Nations peace-keeping operations', November 1990, Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Hansard*, 22 February 1991, pp. 557–8.

26 Commonwealth of Australia, *United Nations Peacekeeping and Australia*. The committee also recommended 'that the Official Historian at the Australian War Memorial be commissioned to write a full