

Military diplomacy

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Executive summary

- In an increasingly complex global security environment military diplomacy adds a new and very useful dimension to traditional diplomacy.
- Military diplomacy requires an investment in relationships and takes time to develop.
- The success of military diplomacy provides the lead to new types of diplomacy from the Australian Federal Police and eventually the Australian Border Force.

In international affairs, diplomacy has been the primary means by which countries have advanced their national interests. When diplomacy failed, those interests were most often pursued through the use of military power. In national security terms diplomacy is often referred to as soft power while military power is referred to as hard power. Today the distinction is not that clear cut. Military diplomacy is proving to be an extremely useful means of pursuing national interests short of conflict.

Some might view the concept of military diplomacy as something of an oxymoron, somewhat akin to military intelligence, but in an increasingly complex global security environment it is proving its worth. So much so that recently the Minister for Defence, David Johnston, declared himself to be very strong on military diplomacy.

The Minister for Defence's recent enthusiasm for military diplomacy is no doubt linked to two recent examples demonstrating the clear benefits to be accrued. Chinese involvement in the international search for the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, off Perth, was generous and well received. It also opened an opportunity for further cooperation and dialogue between the two countries. An example is a joint exercise with Australian, US and Chinese forces in the second half of 2014.

Following East Timorese independence there were strains in the relationship between Indonesia and Australia. These tensions were eased by the extensive involvement of Australian military forces in relief efforts after the tsunami off Northern Sumatra in 2004. The soldiers of both countries realised that they could work together and patterns of dialogue were re-established between senior military officers. Another example with Indonesia is the development of a broad based alumni association of military officers. At a time of strained diplomatic relationships between Australia and Indonesia, David Johnston's warm reception at the Jakarta International Defence Dialogue in 2014 would certainly have reinforced in his mind the value of military diplomacy.

Diplomats in Uniform - How does it work?

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is the lead agency pursuing Australia's overseas efforts to strengthen its security and enhance its prosperity. They work together with other departments including the Department of Defence. This is the formal aspect of military diplomacy as military officers are accredited to overseas missions and work at the direction of the Ambassador or High Commissioner. They carry diplomatic passports and have the same rights and privileges as other embassy staff. They are diplomats in uniform.

In this role the Military Attaché and their staff support the formal diplomatic mission through direct diplomacy such as meetings and negotiations, delivering defence cooperation programs, providing advice on capability development options, supporting humanitarian and disaster relief missions and directly participating in evacuation and intervention operations.

Some may be surprised by the involvement of the military in diplomatic activities. They may be wondering how 'rough' military types can behave in a diplomatic or tactful manner. Military officials world-wide share a common culture and professional approach based on directness, precision and common experiences. The military clearly understand the

dangers of war and are keen to take every step to foster peace and security and avoid conflict if at all possible. Even adversaries work well together at the task of military diplomacy. As an example, during Konfrontasi with Indonesia in the 1960s, military attachés from both countries remained in place.

Essentially the military talk to each other in both a formal and informal manner. This dialogue strengthens established relationships with allies and friends to support alliances, aid interoperability and build capability by exchanging technology, enhancing training, improving doctrine and sharing lessons from military experiences. It is not only military officers who engage in military diplomacy. Defence diplomacy happens when defence civilians, rather than military officers, work to enhance relationships. An important example of this is when senior civilian officials travel to regional countries to inform them of the contents of defence official documents including Defence White Papers.

Dialogue can also occur with the military of countries where formal diplomacy is poorly developed or undergoing strain. In these instances military diplomacy can help to maintain dialogue and build confidence to avoid confusion, misapprehension and misunderstanding. It also establishes relationships and provides the chance for more formal discussions at later occasions.

Military diplomacy doesn't just happen. But it is not as though it can be planned. It requires a broad based investment, takes time to mature and doesn't work in every case. Often it can develop from attendance at schools or courses or participation in United Nations missions years prior. More recent activities have involved cooperation on the all too frequent humanitarian and disaster relief missions. In this case improved relationships between Japan and Australia can be linked to cooperation on UN missions in Cambodia, East Timor, Iraq and Australian military support to natural disasters in Japan.

A strong example of the long term investment required is the warm relationship between the recently retired Australian Chief of Defence Force David Hurley and his Indonesian counterpart General Moeldoko, who recently attended General Hurley's retirement ceremony in Canberra. As a young cadet at the Royal Military College David Hurley hosted Indonesian cadets on a visit to Australia. His subsequent respect for and interest in Indonesia is well known in Indonesia and has carried forward to include his involvement in frequent and substantive contact with senior Indonesian military officials.

Most of the dialogue is among senior officers but efforts are made to include more junior officers such as through exchanging cadets at respective military colleges. This is an important investment in future relationships. Another example of lower level engagement is the conduct of rifle shooting competitions. The Australian Army's Skill at Arms Competition attracts enthusiastic teams from across the globe, including teams from Indonesia.

Not every investment in military diplomacy will pay off. Everyone leaves the military at some stage, careers paths may change and respective national interests may be so divergent that military diplomacy may not work. But when it works it works well and can be a force multiplier of considerable impact. In my own experience, as a senior Army officer, military diplomacy meant that I was able to talk to foreign colleagues to speed up the acquisition of military capabilities and ammunition for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I was also able to use personal contact to defuse potential tension over Australian military deployments to East Timor in 2006.

It is good that the Minister for Defence is strong on military diplomacy. He would do well to make sure his department knows of his enthusiasm. In an area where the payoff is not immediately obvious there can be a temptation to look for savings. Military diplomacy is not the place to look. If he is looking for a place to reinforce his message he should focus on the Staff College and the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies at Weston Creek. They are model programs of military diplomacy and deliver great benefit to Australia and the region.

Conclusion

To many the involvement of the military adds a new dimension to diplomacy. To some there are suspicions about its efficacy. Well they better get used to it as it is proving to be a very effective way of improving trust and confidence among countries and enhancing overall efforts to build peace and security. In a globalised world it is clear that the task of

diplomacy does not only belong to diplomats. Critics should anticipate the continuing use of military diplomacy and might well anticipate an increased involvement of other 'non-diplomatic' types in diplomatic efforts such as the Australian Federal Police and the about to be established Australian Border Force.

Policy recommendation

That the Minister maintain his interest in military diplomacy and direct the ADF to seek ways of further enhancing military diplomacy with a focus on the Asia Pacific Region.