

Role of the Far East Strategic Reserve (Military History)

Report by M W Hudson, Admiral AC RAN (Rtd) (undated)

On 1 April 1955, as a result of high level discussion between the Governments of UK, Australia and New Zealand the Far East Strategic Reserve came into being as the force to halt the spread of Communism in South East Asia. All three Australian Services were committed.

The roles of the Strategic Reserve were established as follows:

The Primary Role was to provide a deterrent to, and to be able at short notice to assist in countering further Communist aggression in South East Asia. Within this role, it would form part of the forces required for the external defence of Malaya and Singapore.

The Secondary Role was to assist in the maintenance of the security of Malaya by participating in operations against the Communist terrorists.

All three Australian Services contributed to those roles in diverse ways and the perceived threat was very real in the highest political and military planning processes of the day. The Cold War was not a declared war, but one in which the visible readiness and operational capability of our deployed forces were essential parts of the ANZAM campaign to deter and ultimately defeat the communist aggression.

This is set out in the Top Secret Directive issued by the ANZAM Defence Committee, which, in addressing States Readiness said:

"The Strategic reserve is to be equipped and trained to a level at least sufficient to enable it to participate in operations at short notice against the forces of a first class Asian Power."

Such a requirement, which applied to all three Services, dictated a very high level of operational training. This form of exercising goes well beyond that maintained in normal peacetime, and prepares individuals and units in a material, physical and psychological sense for all the rigours of war.

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