

# State and Federal cooperation in VIP protection

By Assistant Commissioner Alan Mills

**T**he terrorist threat to Australia stems largely from incidents and situations occurring well beyond our own shores.

The resurgence of nationalism and changing global power structures have a significant impact upon the nature and the direction of the terrorist threat to Australia and internationally.

Terrorism does not recognise national barriers. Equally it can be expected to disregard the integrity of Australia's multi-jurisdictional composition.



Prime Minister R.J. Menzies (centre) pictured with J.G. Gorton (left) and A.S. Hulme at the swearing in of the 1958 ministry. Prime Minister Menzies was the first Australian Prime Minister to be assigned a close protection officer.

It is necessary therefore, to deter the terrorist threat in Australia through measures both preventative and reactive which are capable of being coordinated nationally and which enjoy the support, cooperation and participation of state and Commonwealth agencies.

Terrorism may occur in many forms. It is an unfortunate fact of public life that one of the most common and publicity attaining manifestations of terrorism is often directed at the individual holder of high office. Even to Australia this is not a new phenomenon, for the most notable act of politically motivated violence to have occurred in Australia during the 19th Century took place in NSW in 1868 with the attempted assassination of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, who was wounded by a bullet from the gun of a would-be assassin while attending an out-of-doors function.

In 1868 this was clearly a matter for the Colony of NSW alone.

The advent of Federation in 1901, however, introduced an additional player into the game in the form of the Commonwealth. In more recent times we have experienced the wounding and kidnapping of the Indian defence attache in Canberra in 1977, the bombing of the Sydney Hilton in 1978 and the murder of the Turkish Council-General and his body guard in Sydney in 1980.

Additionally there have been a number of bombings and attacks upon property with potentially life-threatening consequences, these include the bombing of the Hakoah Club and the attack upon the Iranian Embassy to name but two.

Without attempting to delve into the intricacies of the constitution, both the states and the Commonwealth now clearly have a vested interest in matters pertaining to the protection of individual office-holders against politically motivated violence.

Prime Minister Billy Hughes, after being on the receiving end of a well aimed egg at a political rally in the Queensland town of Warwick in November of 1917, set about creating his own police service to deal with such incidents following the refusal of the local police to arrest the offender.

The first recorded Commonwealth close protection officer was 'Shanghai' Jack Tilton of the Commonwealth Investigation Service, formally a RAF Provost Marshall in India and police officer in China. 'Shanghai' Jack was assigned to Robert Menzies during his second period as Prime Minister from 1949 to 1966. Tilton was of similar build to Menzies and was often to be found similarly attired to the Prime Minister. He performed his escort duties using his private car, an Allard, and was grudgingly paid a small allowance for doing so. The performance of his escort duties predominantly took place in Canberra.

Menzies' ill-fated successor, Harold Holt, Prime Minister from 1966 to 1967, was assigned a sergeant from the

Commonwealth Police for his protection. This, however, was on a needs basis. The officer rarely travelled out of Canberra and never overseas. This travel appears to have been reserved for senior officers unconnected with mundane day-to-day protection. There is no record of any protection officer ever travelling with the Prime Minister on his Portsea excursions. Certainly on the fateful day of his disappearance, while swimming in rough surf, none were present.

Prime Ministerial protection was stepped up in the Gorton era (1968-1971), although not yet on a round-the-clock basis. An inspector and a sergeant were assigned to the Prime Minister but only on a one-on-one basis and not on all occasions when the Prime Minister travelled outside of Canberra. There was however, one visit of note when the Prime Minister travelled overseas to Manila accompanied by six Commonwealth Police officers including the Commissioner. The reason for such numbers remains unclear.

Prime Minister McMahon (1971-1975) was afforded full-time close protection although at times while in Canberra this amounted to only one member per shift. For the first time the Prime Minister's wife and children were also provided protection and the McMahon's private residence in Sydney was under guard on a 24-hour basis. During this era the regional offices of the Commonwealth Police throughout Australia were called upon to provide assistance as required to travelling close protection officers.

Leaders of the Opposition have been provided with close protection during election campaigns following the attack upon Federal Labor Party leader Arthur Calwell in 1966.

During recent election campaigns the coverage has been extended to other high-profile members from both the Government and the Opposition.

The modern form of protection began during the years that Gough Whitlam was in office (1972-1975). This, as is now the case, consisted of full-time protection officers travelling with the Prime Minister at all times in Australia and overseas. Static security at overnight accommodation stops was introduced

together with the searching and securing of venues. Advance teams preceded the Prime Minister at all sites and the practice of providing protection to acting prime ministers began.

Close personal protection of the Governor-General began only after the 1975 sacking of the Whitlam Government by Governor-General Kerr when feelings against the Governor-General were running high in some quarters. There maybe some irony in the fact that the officer-in-charge of the deposed Prime Minister's close protection team became Sir John Kerr's first close protection officer, (another fine example of police impartiality).



*Above: US President George Bush and Mrs Bush on a visit to Australia. There has been a steady increase to Australia of overseas dignitaries. Security in these circumstances becomes a cooperative effort between state and federal agencies.*

The acceptance of close protection by prime ministers and governors-general has varied with each incumbent. Each protectee is different with each having his own way of coping with the intrusion into their private lives that close personal protection brings.

The relationship of trust between protectee and the Close Personal Protection (CPP) team, and equally as important, between the team and the protectee's staff, is an integral part of the security package.

Some prime ministers we know as colourful ebullient figures in office who are most comfortable in dealing with

those around them as 'mates'. In such a climate it is necessary for the CPP members to constantly reaffirm the respect and discipline required to fulfil their responsibilities professionally.

The demands upon a close protection officer assigned to an Australian high office holder include the maintenance of liaison with state and territory police services and the provision of timely information to state and territory services of visits by the office holder.

With the fluid, if not amorphous, nature of the political process priorities are often in a state of flux. There is a tendency by inviters to assume their invitations will be accepted and to

notify local authorities accordingly. This may not necessarily be the case. It is the practice of the AFP not to send out programs until we are reasonably sure of the minister's attendance at the function.

The AFP recognises that within the states and the Northern Territory the protection of VIPs and high office holders, is primarily a responsibility of the police in that jurisdiction. It further recognises that the authority and accountability for the protection of VIPs and high office holders and the subsequent command and control arrangements should rest with the state or territory.

A great deal of cooperation now exists within the current arrangements between the Commonwealth, the AFP, Premier's Departments and state police to ensure that the standards of protection provided are at a level acceptable to all concerned.

Although the main factor taken into account in determining the level of protection is the perceived threat to the visiting VIP or office holder, other factors include police resources and foreign policy considerations.

In the case of visiting dignitaries, AFP participation is generally, but not exclusively, in furtherance of Commonwealth obligations pursuant to specific legislation; the *Internationally Protected Persons Act* in the case of visiting heads of state, *Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers and the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act* in the case of accredited diplomats and their families.

AFP liaison officer involvement with an overseas or interstate visit begins at the planing stage when liaisons will occur with appropriate Commonwealth agencies and the respective state police services.

In the case of visiting VIPs the AFP member will travel as part of the host contingent. In normal circumstances they will achieve their objective relating to the security and dignity of the visitor through the continuation of their liaison role with state police.

The AFP liaison officers are required to approach their responsibilities with a degree of flexibility to minimise security related issues which have the potential to endanger bilateral government relations or to embarrass the Commonwealth. By their presence some continuity is present in the movement of the dignitary between jurisdictions.

At all times the primary objective of the AFP liaison officer is to ensure the safety of the visiting dignitary and to preserve their personal dignity.

On occasions circumstances may arise where events held in Australia like the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the South Pacific Forum require the AFP to provide protection in conjunction with a host state. Heads of state or government attending the Sydney Olympic Games may give rise to other occasions when

such an approach would be both practical and appropriate.

In summary, the role of the AFP liaison officer is essentially a communication and coordination function and is performed by an operationally experienced member. Occasions will arise however, in the absence of state police, by arrangement or otherwise, or for a variety of other reasons, where the member is required to adopt an active close protection role in furtherance of their overall responsibilities. It is incumbent on the AFP officer to recognise such occasions as they occur and to act accordingly.

Australia's growing identification with Asia and its economic and cultural commitment to the Asia Pacific region has been the catalyst largely responsible for the increase in the number of overseas dignitaries and significant events that have been experienced during the last financial year. Overseas dignitaries visiting Australia as official guests of the Government increased by 40 per cent.

Such visits possess varying degrees of sensitivity, not infrequently the dignity of the visitor becomes a consideration which must be addressed as part of the security package. This latter responsibility is often undertaken in the face of a minority hostile to a visitor who is unused to the democratic freedom of expression practiced in this country. In such circumstances the preservation of the principal's dignity can, and frequently does, become a resource intensive exercise for the police service concerned.

The effective protection and security of office holders and visitors must stem from the cooperative effort of all agencies. Demands upon police resources, particularly in the ACT, NSW and Victoria, which receive most visitors, will remain heavy. While the AFP as the Commonwealth's principal law enforcement agency will continue to oversight the Commonwealth's interest, we are conscious of the jurisdiction and resource limitations that apply.

Close personal protection, crowd control, venue and route security are all matters that fall within the scope and responsibility of the host state. As the demand upon police resources continues to grow the need to explore areas for greater cooperation takes on an increased importance in order to conserve resources.

In November 1993, the Australasian Police Ministers Council, adopted a strategic plan entitled *Directions in Australian Policing*.

The strategy provides a framework for cooperation and a basis for strategic directions to the year 2000 with the ultimate aim including improved security in society and greater efficiency in the application of police resources.

Trans-jurisdictional cooperation through the promotion of information sharing, improved mechanism and protocols, the development of resource sharing and purchasing and the adoption of Australian Performance Managements Standards which have obvious application in the broad concept of dignitary protection, are all measures adopted by the Ministerial Council.

Prevention of politically motivated violence encompasses many aspects of the security package of which dignitary protection is but one. Agency participation toward the security of office holders and visiting VIPs is a shared responsibility with overlapping state and Commonwealth interest. During October 1993 the Senior Study Group on Dignitary Protection met in Canberra. Included in recommendations resulting from that meeting were:

- that police services develop an arrangement for the exchange of officers to assist each other in identifying and monitoring groups who are likely to pose a threat to the safety of dignitaries, and
- that police services offer places on close personal protection training courses to officers from other jurisdictions to enhance cooperation and develop compatible procedures and operational techniques.

It follows that such recommendations need to be evaluated by the respective police services and if appropriate their implementation should be monitored. It is encouraging however, that arrangements are already underway between the AFP and NSW Police for the exchange of members to attend close personal protection courses.

Cooperation at a national level remains the cornerstone of dignitary protection in Australia and as we progress towards the year 2000 Olympics it will continue to gain in significance.