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UK police forces play a prominent role on the international stage. Financed and coordinated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the most widely known international policing mission undertaken by officers is that of reintroducing, and in some cases introducing, community or 'democratic' policing to war-torn nations. But missions are not restricted to patrolling the streets. Many officers also travel overseas to impart their expertise through training or conducting independent inquiries.

At present there are in the region of 300 UK police officers serving overseas: from Kosovo, Macedonia and Croatia to Iraq, Jordan and Sierra Leone. Perhaps the best recent example, however, would be in South East Asia where UK officers worked alongside colleagues from Australasia using their expertise to help identify victims of the Tsunami.

Protection: life and livelihood

From a staff association's perspective, it is vital that no officer should receive any less protection – be that financial or personal security – than they do in their own country. A robust risk assessment is therefore essential and responsibility for duty of care falls on both individual forces at home and operational commanders abroad.

Following an increased number of post traumatic stress cases both at home and abroad we called for appropriate counselling to be made available to all officers on a strictly confidential basis. This is largely provided.

In terms of remuneration, all officers receive their normal pay plus subsistence and living allowances. These vary according to the cost of living in the country. In some cases officers can gain financially where tax benefits may be available. Frustrations are caused, however, where inconsistencies arise – be that between officers from other forces receiving more allowances, better equipment or facilities. We would expect health provisions to be made available to officers serving abroad, to the same level they would enjoy at home.

The Police Federation has held discussions with the government and the Association of British Insurers to remove or reduce any exclusions from a police officers' personal or professional insurances.

Wider concerns

There needs to be a clear understanding that rank and skills vary from country to country. In some cases individuals have been required to work with and/or for officers from another country who may be of a higher rank but do not share the same knowledge of experience of policing.

On joint operations it is essential that there is consistency on both standards and tactics. Recently, during cases of joint deportations, we have witnessed problems as officers from different jurisdictions have operated according to different laws.