

Introduction

Annual Report Review objectives and scope

- 1.1 The review of the *Defence Annual Report* is an important task as it provides an opportunity for the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to inquire into a broad range of Defence issues as part of the process of accountability of Government agencies to Parliament.

Focus areas

- 1.2 The Sub-Committee focussed on five main areas for its review of the *Defence Annual Report 2013-14*. These issues and the chapters in which they are addressed are:
- First Principles Review – addressed in Chapter Two;
 - Personnel matters – addressed in Chapter Three;
 - Mental health – addressed in Chapter Four;
 - Capability development and major projects – addressed in Chapter Five; and
 - Defence support – addressed in Chapter Six.

Conduct of the Review

- 1.3 The Review was announced via media release on 5 December 2014.
- 1.4 The Sub-Committee received two submissions from:
- The Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL); and

- Mr Michael Wunderlich (private capacity).
- 1.5 The Sub-Committee held a public hearing on 5 June 2015 and received evidence from the following witnesses:
- Senior Defence officials; and
 - A representative from the RSL.
- 1.6 The Sub-Committee held a subsequent public hearing on 16 June 2015 and received evidence from the following witnesses:
- Senior Defence officials; and
 - Senior Department of Veterans' Affairs officials.
- 1.7 The transcripts of the hearings are available on the Committee's website, along with published submissions.

ADF operations

- 1.8 The Australian Defence Force (ADF) participated in three whole-of-government operations in 2013-14. Operation Sovereign Borders commenced on 18 September 2013. It is a military-led, border security operation supported and assisted by a range of federal government agencies aimed at combatting people smuggling and protecting Australia's borders.¹ Operation Southern Indian Ocean is the ADF's contribution to the multi-agency and multi-national search for missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370.² Operation Bring Them Home was the AFP-led government response to the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine.³
- 1.9 The ADF completed two operations in 2013-14. Operation NSW Bushfire Assist was conducted to help the Blue Mountains community recover after a series of bushfires.⁴ Operation Philippines Assist was conducted in the

1 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 'Operation Sovereign Borders', <<https://www.border.gov.au/about/operation-sovereign-borders>> viewed 4 August 2015.

2 Department of Defence, 'Global Operations: Southern Indian Ocean', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/Operations/SouthernIndianOcean/>> viewed 4 November 2015.

3 Department of Defence, 'Defence Support to Operation Bring Them Home', 31 July 2014, <<http://news.defence.gov.au/stories/2014/07/defence-support-to-operation-bring-them-home/>> viewed 4 August 2015.

4 Department of Defence, 'Past Operations: NSW Bushfire Assist', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/Operations/PastOperations/nswbushfireassist/default.asp>> viewed 4 August 2015.

aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, providing humanitarian assistance to the Philippines, in particular the Tacloban area.⁵

- 1.10 Australia's drawdown from Afghanistan continued in 2013-14 as the ADF's mission changed to mainly support roles.⁶ The ADF concluded its mission in Uruzgan on 15 December 2013, with the transfer of security responsibility to the government of Afghanistan and the Afghan National Security Forces.⁷ Operation Slipper, Australia's military contribution to the International Security Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, ended on 31 December 2014. It has been replaced by Operation Highroad with the transition from ISAF to the new NATO-led Operation Resolute Support with its 'train, advise, assist' mandate on 1 January 2015.⁸
- 1.11 The numbers of Defence personnel on ADF operations, current as at 10 September 2015, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Defence personnel on ADF operations

Operation	Location	Personnel	Government Mandate
Accordion	Middle East Region	400	Ongoing
Aslan	Sudan	20	Reviewed Annually
Manitou	Middle East Region	241	Ongoing
Mazurka	Egypt	25	Ongoing
Okra	Middle East Region and Iraq	780	Ongoing
Paladin	Israel/Lebanon	11	Reviewed Annually
Palate II	Afghanistan	2	Reviewed Annually
Resolute	Australian Maritime Interests	500	Ongoing
Highroad	Afghanistan	250	Ongoing
Southern Indian Ocean	Indian Ocean	2	Ongoing

Source: Department of Defence, 'Operations', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/operations/>> viewed 4 November 2015.

5 Department of Defence, 'Past Operations: Philippines Assist', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/Operations/PastOperations/philippinesassist/>> viewed 4 August 2015.

6 *Defence Annual Report 2013-14*, p. 12.

7 Department of Defence, 'Last days at Tarin Kot', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/defencenews/stories/2014/Jan/0115.htm>> viewed 4 August 2015.

8 Department of Defence, 'Australia supports new mission in Afghanistan', *Media Release*, 31 December 2014, <<http://news.defence.gov.au/2014/12/31/australia-supports-new-mission-in-afghanistan/>> viewed 31 July 2015.

Operation Okra

- 1.12 Operation Okra is the ADF's 'contribution to the international effort to combat the Daesh (also known as ISIL) terrorist threat in Iraq and Syria'. Australia's contribution is being closely coordinated with the Iraqi government, Gulf nations and a broad coalition of international partners. About 780 ADF personnel have been deployed to the Middle East in support of Operation Okra. These personnel make up the Air Task Group (ATG), the Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) and Task Group Taji (TG Taji).⁹
- 1.13 In a 10 September 2014 speech, US President Barack Obama stated that the international coalition aimed to 'degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy'. This would be done through:
- A systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIL;
 - Increased support for forces fighting ISIL on the ground;
 - Using counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks; and
 - Providing humanitarian assistance to civilians.¹⁰
- 1.14 Task Group Taji is deployed as a part of the coalition Building Partner Capacity (BPC) mission. The aim is to train the Iraqi Security Forces and build their capacity to defend their borders and restore Iraq's sovereignty. Training is focussed on core operational skills including planning and conducting operations, basic manoeuvre and integration of intelligence into operations.¹¹
- 1.15 Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin, Chief of Defence Force, stated that force protection is a key element of 'what we have structured the force for' and that significant force protection and logistics support is committed to the force in Iraq.¹²
- 1.16 At the time of the 5 June 2015 public hearing, Defence reported to the Committee that Iraqi troops trained through the BPC with Australia had not yet been on operations. In line with this, Defence further reported that

9 Department of Defence, 'Operation OKRA', <<http://www.defence.gov.au/Operations/Okra/default.asp>> viewed 31 July 2015.

10 P Jennings, 'A holding strategy: the campaign against ISIL', in Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), 'Strike from the Air: The first 100 days of the campaign against ISIL', *ASPI Strategy*, December 2014, pp. 6-7. See also <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>>.

11 Department of Defence, 'Task Force Taji farewelled', *Media Release*, 21 April 2015, <<http://news.defence.gov.au/2015/04/21/media-release-task-force-taji-farewelled-21-april-2015/>> viewed 31 July 2015.

12 Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin, Chief of Defence Force, Department of Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 5 June 2015, p. 14.

troops trained by the BPC mission did not take part in the fighting involved in the city centre of Ramadi falling to Daesh. Iraqi forces advised and assisted by the ADF were involved in fighting at Ramadi.¹³

- 1.17 The Chief of the Defence Force advised that the ADF does not have any formal relationship with any Shia militia groups in Iraq. Although ADF personnel may 'occasionally bump into them around a base or see them', Defence does not train or support Shia militia groups.¹⁴
- 1.18 The Chief of the Defence Force stated that the first measure of its operations in Iraq was to 'disrupt and degrade' Daesh through airstrikes and working with Iraqi security forces. Defence characterised this as a success thus far, noting that 'Iraqi security forces have reclaimed probably about 25 per cent' of the territory Daesh had taken in 2014. Defence observed that success in Iraq would be measured by the training of the Iraqi forces and their ability to take and hold ground against Daesh, and ultimately secure their borders.¹⁵
- 1.19 The Chief of the Defence Force noted that then Prime Minister had planned a review of Operation Okra at its 12 month mark. This review will measure the success of Iraqi forces in being able to take and hold ground, and also their logistic capability and 'their ability to be equipped, supported and sustained'.¹⁶
- 1.20 The Committee notes that on 9 September 2015 the Government announced that air strike operations against Daesh would be extended into Syria.¹⁷

Committee comment

- 1.21 The Committee thanks both ADF and APS personnel on operations for their service, and those at home who support them. We owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women of the Defence Force for their service to Australia and wish them a safe return to their friends and families.
- 1.22 The Committee looks forward to the work of Task Group Taji showing results. As a key indicator of the success of Operation Okra overall, seeing

13 Air Chief Marshal Binskin, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 5 June 2015, pp. 14–15.

14 Air Chief Marshal Binskin, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 5 June 2015, p. 14.

15 Air Chief Marshal Binskin, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 5 June 2015, p. 15.

16 Air Chief Marshal Binskin, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 5 June 2015, p. 15.

17 Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, 'Australia to extend air operations against Daesh into Syria', *Media Release*, 9 September 2015, <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/2015/09/09/prime-minister-and-minister-for-defence-australia-to-extend-air-operations-against-daesh-into-syria/>> viewed 7 October 2015.

Task Group Taji-trained Iraqi security forces take and hold ground will be an important marker of progress in the fight against Daesh.