

Operations

- 3.1 Throughout 2008-2009, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) continued to follow the government's strategic objectives in line with the 2000 Defence *White Paper*. These objectives - defending Australia, contributing to the security of the immediate neighbourhood, and supporting wider interests - were reaffirmed in the new *White Paper* released in May 2009.¹
- 3.2 The most significant contribution remained in support of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan helping to deny international terrorist safe havens, and in the mentoring and training of Afghan national security forces. On a smaller scale, but nonetheless of significant importance, ADF personnel continued to be deployed on international operations to the Solomon Islands, Sudan, Lebanon, Israel, Iraq, Syria, the Sinai and East Timor.²

Afghanistan

Background

- 3.3 Australia's military contribution to Afghanistan is part of the Government's comprehensive approach to supporting international efforts to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe-haven for terrorism. The mandate for this peace enforcement mission is provided under Chapter VII of the United Nations (UN) Charter and at the invitation of the

1 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2008-09 Volume One*, p. 124.

2 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2008-09 Volume One*, p. 124.

Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and under the United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1833.³

- 3.4 There are about 1550 Australian personnel based in Afghanistan whose focus is on reconstruction and development efforts and disrupting the Taliban led insurgency. Most of these personnel are located in Oruzgan province in a junior partnership with a contingent from the Netherlands. The Netherlands will give up their leadership role from 1 August 2010 and a new partner to the Australian Mentoring Task Force will need to be found. The Australian Government has made clear to NATO that Australia cannot lead in Oruzgan nor operate alone.⁴

Current status

- 3.5 Defence categorised the prognosis for success in Afghanistan as 'mission possible'⁵ on the basis that the right strategy is being fully resourced and implemented by the right leaders.⁶ Defence stated:

The strategy is an integrated military civilian strategy, which looks at establishing security, providing governance and providing development right across the board. With the approach being taken by General McChrystal⁷ and its emphasis on protecting the population, we have a lot of optimism that we will eventually prevail. Indeed, I would submit that the tide is starting to turn. We are seeing the coalition starting to get on top of the insurgents. However, I would not overstate that; there is a long, long way to go.⁸

- 3.6 The committee noted that there is a 'widespread misconception in the community' that the war is 'unwinnable' because the current conflict is similar to past state-on-state conflicts such as the Soviet-Afghanistan war. However, the committee agrees that there is a critical difference between the current situation and past conflicts.
- 3.7 Defence told the committee that part of the strategy being followed in Afghanistan is the *clear, hold and build* process whereby an area is cleared

3 Department of Defence, 'General Information', viewed on 11 May 2010, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/op/afghanistan/info/general.htm>>

4 The Hon. Dr Mike Kelly Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, viewed 11 May 2010, <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/KellySpeechTpl.cfm?CurrentId=9613>>

5 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 72.

6 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 72.

7 General McChrystal is the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

8 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 72.

of Taliban, local community leaders are engaged by way of tribal meetings or *shura*, and then the right level of governance and support infrastructure is established.⁹ By way of example, Defence told the committee of the ongoing operation in Helmand province, Operation MOSHTARAK. This operation, which Australian forces and assets have supported, has seen the Taliban cleared from around the town of Marjah, *shuras* held and the beginnings of 'establishing the right level of governance, good policing services and delivering the appropriate services.'¹⁰

- 3.8 Complementing operations such as MOSHTARAK, the strategy in use also involves building up the competency of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) leading to a point where they will 'take care of their own affairs.'¹¹ In this regard, Australia is responsible for the training of the ANA's Fourth Brigade in Oruzgan province by means of operational mentoring and liaison teams.
- 3.9 Defence, referring to media reporting that suggested otherwise, reminded the committee that Australian forces do regularly operate outside Oruzgan province by highlighting operations in the contiguous zones of Helmand, Kandahar, and within Zabul and Paktika provinces. Furthermore, Australian Special Forces have, and will continue to operate in northern Kandahar while the Chinook helicopters operate widely throughout the southern provinces.¹²
- 3.10 The committee asked Defence whether the participation of Oruzgan based ANA battalions, or kandaks, in any operations in Kandahar would be a good training opportunity. Defence opined that the experience would be valuable while highlighting that in Oruzgan the Kandaks are 'in the fight all of the time anyway.'¹³
- 3.11 In relation to who is likely to take-over from the Dutch, when they leave the province in late 2010, Defence told the committee:

We were hoping that the Dutch would remain in the province. They have been very good partners ...We were hoping that they would be able to continue. With the collapse of their government in February, I guess all bets are off. The advice we have is that they will cease their leadership role on schedule on 1 August this year and we start to see their forces drawing down. My expectation is

9 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, pp. 67-68.

10 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, pp. 67-68

11 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 71.

12 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 68.

13 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 71.

that most of the military people will be out of the province by the end of the year.

We have been engaging NATO at all levels, from the minister down. ...we are assured by NATO that they will come up with suitable arrangements which will take care of our needs....We have made it quite clear that being a non-NATO nation that we don't expect to lead in Oruzgan.¹⁴

- 3.12 Defence told the committee a significant threat to personnel comes from the use of improvised explosive devices (IED). However, according to Defence, 'the government has invested a lot of money in doing everything we can to enhance our force protection status.'¹⁵ Notwithstanding, countering the problem has been exacerbated by the increased 'use of non-metallic improvised explosive devices, which means that it is more difficult to detect them with conventional detection methods.'¹⁶
- 3.13 On the question of when Australian involvement in Afghanistan is likely to end, Defence told the committee that no withdrawal or exit date has been set although once the job of training of the 4th Brigade of the ANA is complete; this will put Australia in a 'good position to pull our training forces out of Oruzgan.'¹⁷

Iraq

- 3.14 The ADF ceased land combat operations in southern Iraq on 1 June 2008 and handed over security responsibility to the Iraqi forces. During the course of operations in southern Iraq, successive Battle Groups completed approximately 8700 patrols travelling more than three million kilometres, and completed more than 250 reconstruction projects in Dhi Qar and Al Muthanna provinces since April 2005.¹⁸
- 3.15 The committee noted that although the ADF military contribution to the multinational force in Iraq has been withdrawn, there is still an ADF presence in the country via the security detachment at the Australian

14 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 70.

15 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 69.

16 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 70.

17 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 71.

18 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2007-08 Volume One*, p. 42.

Embassy in Baghdad¹⁹ and two military advisers to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq.²⁰

Timor-Leste

Background

- 3.16 Operation ASTUTE is the ADF's contribution to the maintenance of peace and stability in East Timor, following a request from the Government of Timor-Leste to the Australian Government. The ADF deployed to East Timor to assist the Government of Timor-Leste and support the UN in bringing stability, security and confidence to the Timorese people.²¹
- 3.17 The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) is working alongside the ADF to assist with this mission. Together, the ADF and NZDF personnel form the ISF in East Timor. Timor-Leste authorities have primary responsibility for policing and security, supported by UN police officers from Australia and 20 other nations.²²
- 3.18 While the primary role of the ISF continues to be the provision of security assistance to the Government of East Timor, the improving security situation has enabled ISF efforts to increasingly focus on building the capacity of the East Timorese Defence Force (F-FDTL)²³ enabling a drawdown of total ADF numbers in support of Operation ASTUTE.
- 3.19 Operation TOWER is the ADF's contribution to the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and was established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1704 following civil unrest in East Timor in 2006. UNMIT is the UN's fifth East Timor mission since 1999 and the third since Independence in 2002.²⁴

19 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2008-09 Volume One*, p. 124.

20 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2008-09 Volume One*, p. 128.

21 Department of Defence, 'Operation Astute: General Information', viewed on 11 May 2010, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/op/eastTimor/general.htm>>

22 Department of Defence, 'Operation Astute: General Information', viewed on 11 May 2010, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/op/eastTimor/general.htm>>

23 Chief of Defence Force media release 'Chief of Defence Force visits East Timor' MSPA 71/10 <<http://www.defence.gov.au/media/DepartmentalTpl.cfm?CurrentId=10057>>

24 Department of Defence, 'Operation Tower: General Information', viewed on 11 May 2010, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/op/eastTimor/generaltower.htm>>

- 3.20 With representation from 13 countries, the UNMIT Military Liaison Group conducts daily monitoring of the security environment as well as providing military advice on the restoration and maintenance of security. ADF members are also employed as staff officers based at UNMIT headquarters in Dili. These and other Military Liaison Officers play a crucial role in security reform, including contributing to the professional development of the East Timor Defence Force by designing and delivering Liaison Officer training to personnel.²⁵

Current status

- 3.21 Defence told the committee that there is a feeling of 'normality' and confidence, and a certainty amongst senior people in Timor-Leste 'that things are going to be different this time around.'²⁶ This has set the conditions for the ongoing drawdown of Australian troops as 'there is a confidence that [the East -Timorese] can provide the stability that is required to take the nation forward.'²⁷
- 3.22 With the drawdown of forces, there is a 'gradual transition from a stabilisation force into a very large and comprehensive enhanced Defence Cooperation Program, which is all about capacity building.'²⁸
- 3.23 The Defence Cooperation Program has four main pillars: maritime security, peacekeeping, engineering and an English language program.²⁹ This program is, according to Defence, 'going well' and there is hope that in the 'not-too-distant future, we will see the ISF in a position where it is able to leave.'³⁰
- 3.24 In response to a question from the committee on East Timorese maritime security and progress of their patrol boat program, Defence indicated that although the East Timorese are yet to take delivery of their Shanghai Class patrol boats, they have been 'seized with the need to develop the right professional standards within their maritime force'.³¹ This has meant that the East Timorese Armada want to 'adopt a lot of our processes, a lot of our professional standards and, indeed, they want to leverage off our

25 Department of Defence, 'Operation Tower: General Information', viewed on 11 May 2010, <<http://www.defence.gov.au/op/eastTimor/generaltower.htm>>

26 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

27 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

28 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

29 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

30 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

31 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

naval culture.’³² Defence thought that once they got their patrol boats, ‘they will use them quite effectively, provided we can give them the necessary professional training that is needed in the immediate future.’³³

Committee conclusions

- 3.25 **The committee acknowledges that the ADF continues to be an important contributor to a significant number of diverse and challenging operations across the globe. Additionally, in some of these operations, the ADF is leading and commanding forces and assets from other countries, and this reflects creditably on the ADF and Australia more generally.**

32 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

33 Air Chief Marshal Houston, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 30 March 2010, p. 73.

