



**GENERAL D.J. HURLEY, AC, DSC
CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE**

**Opening Statement
Budget Estimates Hearing**

3 June 2013

*Delivered by
Air Marshal Mark Binskin, Acting Chief of the Defence Force*

Good morning Chair and Senators. Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement this morning. I would like to begin by conveying the Chief of the Defence Force's apologies to the committee. As you are aware, General Hurley is returning from a visit to Afghanistan with the Defence Minister and cannot be here today. I will represent General Hurley in my capacity as Acting Chief of the Defence Force.

Senators, General Hurley's visit to Australian personnel in Afghanistan is timely. We are in a significant phase in our mission as Afghanistan moves towards final transition when the Afghan National Security Forces will take full responsibility for their country's security. The International Security Assistance Force has closed, or transferred the majority of bases to Afghan forces and today, Afghan soldiers and police are responsible for providing security to almost 90 per cent of the Afghan population.

The Afghan National Security Forces participate in all operations and are in the lead in 95 percent of these - from routine tasks to high-level and special operations. The ANSF are also taking increasing responsibility for combat service support missions including medical evacuations and route clearance operations. These gains are noteworthy, but more importantly, the people of Afghanistan are developing a sense of pride and confidence in their own security forces. In Uruzgan, the locals are encouraged by the progress they have witnessed in the province over the past decade.

Early last month, representatives from the Australian War Memorial conducted a series of interviews with six eminent people from different tribes and professions in Uruzgan. All six spoke highly of Australian Defence Force personnel. Without exception, they conveyed their respect and appreciation for the sacrifices of the Australian Government, its people and particularly for the families of those Australians who given their lives in Afghanistan. The six people who were interviewed have the benefit of hindsight. They remember what Uruzgan was like before the Coalition arrived and they are able to contrast that with the way they see the province today. In their view, Australia's efforts have brought about positive change. They praised Australia's work to improve infrastructure - irrigation, schools and roads. For some, the changes they have witnessed over the past decade in Uruzgan have surpassed their expectations.

Their views are backed by ISAF statistics that show how life has improved for the people of Afghanistan. Under the Taliban's rule, only one million children attended school and most of them were boys. Today, almost eight million Afghan children are in school and around 40 per cent of students are girls. In 2002, less than 10 percent of the population had access to basic

health care services. Today, 85 percent of the population lives no more than an hour away from a medical facility and the average life expectancy is rising.

While these statistics demonstrate tangible progress, we must be mindful that we still face some challenges. We know the Taliban is resilient and experience tells us that the insurgency has the ability to regenerate. The international community recognises it will take a sustained effort to ensure our Afghan partners have the best possible chance to establish a sustainable future. For our part, the ADF remains committed to its mission: to train the Afghan National Army to take full responsibility for security in Uruzgan; and ensuring we maintain the gains our partnership has achieved to date. Australia's Special Operations Task Group continues to conduct partnered operations in Uruzgan and surrounding areas to disrupt insurgent activities and their supply routes. We expect our Special Forces to maintain this workload throughout the remainder of 2013 to allow Afghan forces to coordinate and conduct operations with the Coalition's assistance.

Over the next 18 months, the Coalition will continue to shift its emphasis from fighting the insurgency to supporting the Afghan National Security Forces. As a result, the ADF's role and posture in Afghanistan will continue to evolve. At present, the ADF is operating from three main bases. In Kandahar, Australia's 205 Corp Advisory Team is providing training and mentoring assistance to the Afghan National Army while in Kabul, a small Logistics Training Advisory Team is working with their Afghan counterparts. The majority of our deployed personnel are based in Uruzgan, advising the Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade Headquarters, as well as training and assisting the service and combat support Kandaks and the Operations Coordination Centre. An additional 150 people are also currently deployed as part of the Transition and Redeployment Planning Team working on the complex task to remediate ADF facilities and redeploy ADF personnel and equipment. This is not a small task. Over the past 10 years the ADF has built and purchased a variety of equipment, vehicles, buildings and infrastructure including approximately 275 vehicles, 1300 armoured accommodation modules, 600 shipping containers and other utilities such as water treatment plants. ISAF has directed that infrastructure may only be gifted to the Afghan National Security Forces if they are able to sustain it in the future. In accordance with this direction, Australia intends to transfer residual Australian facilities at Multi-National Base – Tarin Kot to Afghan control. All of Camp Russell and part of Camp Holland will be transferred to local forces when Australia's training and advisory mission concludes at the end of 2013. This will also mark the first significant decrease in ADF personnel in Afghanistan. Approximately one thousand people are expected to return to Australia when the Afghan National Security Forces take full responsibility for security in Uruzgan at the end of the year.

We still have a great deal of work ahead as we move toward the end of transition in Uruzgan. Government is yet to consider options for an Australian Special Forces mission beyond the end of 2013. Those deliberations are subject to Afghan, US and NATO decisions and announcements regarding the size and nature of their future missions. At the Chicago Summit in 2012, ISAF and NATO nations agreed to play an ongoing role in sustaining the Afghan National Security Forces beyond our current mission. The ADF will be represented at the NATO Ministers' Meeting in Brussels this week where discussions are expected to shape the NATO mission to commence in 2015. The full detail is yet to be determined, but the ADF expects to continue to work with the United Kingdom and New Zealand at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Kabul.

In addition to our operations in Afghanistan, the ADF has 60 people deployed to five peacekeeping operations throughout the Middle East and North Africa. This includes 25 ADF members who are deployed to the Multi-national Force Observers in Egypt and 12 ADF

officers deployed to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation under Operation PALADIN, including three officers who are employed on the Golan Heights in Syria. Defence continues to monitor the deteriorating security situation in Syria. Given recent concerns about the potential use of chemical weapons, I would like to reassure the Committee that, as a precaution, all 12 ADF personnel who are attached to Operation PALADIN have completed appropriate training and have been issued with personal protective equipment.

Outside the Middle East, the ADF's main weight of effort centres on our contribution to maritime and border protection. Approximately 500 Defence personnel are assigned to support Operation RESOLUTE and up to seven Armidale Class Patrol Boats, one major Fleet Unit, three AP-3C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft and a Transit Security Element. This forms part of a multi-agency, multi-layered approach incorporating intelligence systems, aerial surveillance and maritime patrols.

Senators, since the last Estimates hearing, the Australian Defence Force has formally concluded Operation ASTUTE in Timor-Leste. The last ADF personnel returned to Australia on 27 March, marking the end of the Australian led International Stabilisation Force. Approximately 29 thousand deployment orders were issued since our first deployment in 1999 and our people have done an outstanding job to help provide a supportive environment for the development of Timor-Leste. Today, 24 Australian military and civilian personnel remain in Timor-Leste to provide training and mentoring support to the Defence Force and the Secretariat of Defence.

In the Solomon Islands, continued stability has enabled Government to determine that the military contribution to Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands or RAMSI can be withdrawn later this year. On the 24th of July, RAMSI will mark its 10th anniversary. Over the past decade Australian Defence Force personnel have worked with their colleagues from the New Zealand and Papua New Guinea Defence Forces, and the Tongan Defence Services in support of our whole-of-government and regional efforts. Following our withdrawal, Australia will maintain an enduring Defence relationship with the Solomon Islands through the Defence Cooperation Program, training and exercises and a capacity to respond rapidly if the security situation deteriorates.

The status of Australia's long term operations in Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands demonstrates great progress. Over the past decade tens of thousands of ADF personnel have contributed to achieving Australia's objective to support peace and stability in those nations. They should be proud of their contribution to the mission and their colleagues in Afghanistan and the Middle East should be encouraged by their success as we prepare the Afghan National Security Forces to take full responsibility for their nation's security.

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