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CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE**

**Opening Statement  
Senate Estimates Hearing**

**17 October 2012**

Good morning Chair and Senators. Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement to the Committee. I would like to use this occasion to record my condolences to the families of the six Australian soldiers who have been killed in action in Afghanistan this year.

Sergeant Blain Diddams was a member of the Special Air Service Regiment. Sergeant Diddams was serving with the Special Operations Task Group on the 2nd of July when he was shot and killed during a small arms engagement with insurgents.

On August 29, three Australians were killed in an insider attack at Patrol Base Wahab in the Baluchi Valley region of Uruzgan province. Sapper James Martin from the second Combat Engineer Regiment, Lance Corporal Stepan "Rick" Milosevic and Private Robert Poate were killed when a man in an Afghan National Army uniform fired a weapon into a group of Australians.

Hours later, Private Nathanael Galagher and Lance Corporal Mervyn McDonald were killed in a helicopter crash in Helmand province. The Special Forces soldiers from the 2nd Commando Regiment were conducting a mission with their Afghan National Security Force partners at the time of the incident.

Without exception, these men were proud Diggers, who volunteered to serve this country as members of the Australian Army. While Army continues to support the soldier's families, the Australian Defence Force honours their memory through our ongoing work in Afghanistan.

I have visited Afghanistan twice since August - once immediately following the loss of the five Australian soldiers and again last week with the Minister for Defence. Both visits reinforced my confidence in the extraordinary group of Australians who are currently serving in Afghanistan. I can report that morale is high and, apart from a brief lull in response to Commander ISAF's direction to address the insider threat, operations have been conducted at the normal tempo. These men and women are committed to our mission to train the Afghan National Army to take lead responsibility for security in Uruzgan province and we are making good progress.

Senators, since the last Estimates hearing in May, the transition to an Afghan security lead commenced on July 17 in Uruzgan province. Our forces will move from a mentoring role at Kandak level to an advising role at Brigade level by the completion of this process. Throughout the year the ANA 4th Brigade has increasingly assumed greater responsibility for operations in Uruzgan to the point where last week, one of the four Australian mentored infantry kandaks began independent operations without ADF advisers. On October 7, Australian forces formally transferred a patrol base in the Mirabad Valley to Afghan National Security Forces. The Afghan National Army's 3rd Kandak is now operating Patrol Base Wali without any Australian presence on the ground. The ADF continues to provide indirect support to this Kandak in an advisory role in the Brigade Headquarters and the Operational Coordination Centre in Uruzgan.

The three remaining kandaks are currently rated as effective with advisers and we expect those kandaks to be in a position to conduct independent operations by the end of the year. We will continue to develop further the two specialist Kandaks, numbers 4 and 5, over the next 12 months.

This is the transition process at work.

To use a simple analogy, it is like teaching someone to ride a bike. You have to gradually reduce your grip on the handle bars until eventually you step back and let the learner take control. Over the next 12 - 15 months we will see the progressive hand over of responsibility for security from coalition to Afghan forces in Uruzgan with the full hand over all security responsibilities at the national level by the end of 2014. These milestones will occur as the Afghan security forces demonstrate their

capacity and capability to accept this responsibility. As we progress through transition the size and structure of our own deploying task groups will also be adjusted. The 7RAR Task Group which will leave Australia later this month will be the first rotation to assume a role that is primarily advisory in nature to the Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade in Uruzgan province - another milestone and another indication of the ANA's growing capability.

Once all the ANA 4th Brigade infantry kandaks are operating independently, we expect the majority of the Australian task group will operate from Tarin Kot but retain the capability to operate across Uruzgan as the situation requires. The Special Operations Task Group will continue to operate more broadly across Uruzgan and the surrounding provinces.

Our Special Operations Task Group has also been very effective in working with our Afghan and ISAF partners to build the local forces' capability to disrupt and degrade insurgent networks in and around Uruzgan province. These partnered operations have successfully targeted insurgent leaders and IED facilitators. These targeted operations are supported by the ADF's detainee management framework.

You will be aware that for a short period last month mentoring patrols were suspended as part of the International Security Assistance Force response to an increase in insider attacks. Commander ISAF, General John Allen, issued the directive as part of a range of measures to increase force protection and mitigate the threat of insider attacks. While an element of risk will always exist, the ADF conducts regular force protection reviews so that we remain agile and able to adjust the state of force protection if circumstances warrant. In this instance the suspension gave the Coalition and Afghans time to conduct an intensive biometric enrolment program and allowed the Afghan National Security Forces to undertake a re-vetting process. I am pleased to report that the conditions for resuming mentoring patrols have been met and members of the 3RAR Task Group and the ANA 4th Brigade have now recommenced joint patrols in Uruzgan.

Shortly the ADF will deploy 65 RAAF Airfield Defence Guards to undertake security and access control duties at Multinational Base - Tarin Kot. The deployment

of RAAF personnel is planned to coincide with the withdrawal of the Slovakian Force Protection Platoon which have provided outstanding service at Multinational Base Tarin Kot since the formation of Combined Team - Uruzgan in mid 2010. Slovakia will maintain its mentoring and advisory support to the Logistic Kandak of the Afghan National Army's 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 205 'Hero' Corps in Uruzgan. We are grateful for the Slovaks' contribution and for their continued commitment to Combined Team – Uruzgan.

Every Australian who has deployed to Afghanistan over the past decade has helped create a more stable and secure environment. Earlier this month I met with Major General Abdul Hamid, Commander of the Afghan National Army's 205 Corps in Canberra. Major General Hamid is the former Commander of the 4th Brigade in Uruzgan. It is the first time a senior ANA officer has visited Australia and Major General Hamid spoke highly of the close working relationship between the ANA and the ADF. He also spoke about the significant improvements in Uruzgan province. In Major General Hamid's words: *A few years ago there were no schools, work or security. Now there are schools and work opportunities. People are more secure and there is a good relationship between the local people, our soldiers and the coalition forces who are helping us right now.*"

In relation to other operations, since my last operational update in May a two person Liaison Team has deployed with the Japanese Self Defense Force in Juba, South Sudan. The Japanese Self Defense Force has deployed an engineer unit to South Sudan as part of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan known as UNMISS. The Australian Liaison Team will assist communication and coordination between the Japanese contingent and relevant agencies, including the United Nations, in South Sudan. While the ADF has previously worked with the Japanese in East Timor and Iraq, this deployment is characterised by a much closer working relationship.

If I could turn now to operations closer to home. As part of Operation RESOLUTE, the ADF's contribution to the whole-of-government border protection effort, Defence force personnel have assisted with the establishment of off-shore processing centres on Manus Island and Nauru. The ADF has completed the construction of temporary

facilities on Nauru and only a small contingent remains on the island. Work is currently underway to establish similar temporary accommodation on Manus Island. I expect this task to be completed by the end of the month.

Overall we have experienced an increase in tasking of naval assets under Operation RESOLUTE. The Navy's Patrol Boats Force Assigned to Border Protection Operations have responded to all tasking from Border Protection Command to intercept potential unauthorised boat arrivals. The work is difficult, dangerous and unrelenting. The men and women who are deployed on Operation RESOLUTE do an outstanding job under intense scrutiny. Their remarkable efforts are typical of Australia's Defence Force personnel.

Earlier this year approximately 250 Australian and New Zealand Defence Force personnel also deployed to Papua New Guinea to support the country's national election. The PNG Government requested our assistance to provide niche capabilities to support the country's own limited resources. The Combined Joint Task Force included helicopters and fixed wing aircraft to assist in transporting election and PNGDF personnel and materials. In addition to these assets HMAS *Tarakan* transported cargo in support of the NZDF deployment. During the mission the ADF also assisted Papua New Guinea emergency authorities to recover three deceased people from a crashed civilian helicopter near Mt Hagen.

The successful conclusion of the East Timor national elections in July marked a turning point for our operations in that country. After six years in East Timor we are now planning the drawdown of the Australian-led International Security Assistance Force in parallel with the planned drawdown of the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste. This will occur as a staggered transition to Timor-Leste authorities in close consultation and coordination with Timor-Leste, the United Nations, Australia and New Zealand. While there are a number of variables influencing our timeline, I would expect this drawdown to occur in the first half of 2013.

Similarly Australia's contribution to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands or RAMSI is drawing to an end after almost ten years. Australian personnel who deploy on Operation ANODE are primarily drawn from Reservists and they

have made a lasting contribution to security in the region. Defence is currently working with RAMSI and our international partners from New Zealand, PNG and Tonga who make up Combined Task Force 635 to develop a transition strategy that considers the security situation and in the Solomon Islands.

Senators in many ways the ADF is on the verge of a major change in its operational tempo. We will need to offer new challenges to maintain interest and retain our people. But perhaps most importantly, we will need to provide an environment in the future that ensures our members have the best opportunity for a rewarding and enduring military career as we reset the ADF for the future.

As the Chief of the Defence Force, support to operations will always be my highest priority after Defence people. This is closely aligned with the need to maintain ADF preparedness and sustain an effective "backbone" in terms of our capability. Since the budget was handed down in May we have continued to achieve our first priority and there has been no reduction in funding to our current operations. In saying that, I also acknowledge that most funds are appropriated on a no-win, no-loss basis. To date, we have also maintained ADF preparedness at the required level for this financial year and will consider our capacity to do so in medium term during the White Paper process. Significant savings have been made in Defence's "backbone" or functional areas particularly in administrative costs such as consultancies and accountable and consumable items. It is evident that the greatest proportion, two thirds of the budget savings, were found in our capital investment programs. Reductions have also occurred in some high profile capability areas such as Army Reserves and Cadets. These reductions do not take away from the importance of those capabilities, but demonstrate the breadth of reductions necessary to achieve the budget requirements.

Our cultural reform program, known as the Pathway to Change is driving our wide reaching reform agenda. It draws together the recommendations presented in the recent Cultural Reviews and details how those recommendations will be implemented across the Defence Organisation. Of the 139 recommendations contained in the document, 33 have been completed and another 99 recommendations are in progress. The seven remaining recommendations will commence as follow on actions as the reform program matures. The Human Rights Commissioner, Elizabeth

Broderick also made 21 additional recommendations when Phase 2 of her Review was tabled in August. Defence is currently finalising the implementation plan for that report as part of the Pathway to Change.

Senators, the tempo over the past six months is typical of the ADF's workload over the past 10 years. As we look to the immediate future, the ADF will maintain our commitment to overseas operations while we prepare for the summer storm season here at home so that we stand ready to assist our own.

**ENDS**

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