

Overall observations about Australia's commitment to the International Coalition Against Terrorism

Introduction

- 8.1 This Chapter summarises the key conclusions and observations arising from the visit to the Australian forces currently deployed as part of the International Coalition Against Terrorism.

Quality and relevance of Australia's contribution

- 8.2 In all of the locations visited the delegation observed, and was told of, the value and quality of Australia's contribution to the International Coalition Against Terror.
- 8.3 The quality of the ADF contribution is shown by the extent to which all of the deployed Australian force elements are involved in the planning, coordination and conduct of operations.
- The Australian Special Forces Task Group in Afghanistan continues to provide an important contribution to Coalition operations in Afghanistan. They are respected by their Coalition partners, are fully integrated into the Coalition effort and provide a niche capability, built upon a unique mix of training, skills, tactics, temperament and equipment.
 - In the Persian Gulf, RAN ships were operating at a high tempo and playing a lead role in enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq and preventing illegal smuggling operations. Moreover, at the time of

the delegation's visit, tactical control of the Maritime Interception Force was being exercised very successfully by the Australian Naval Task Group commander and staff.

- In Kyrgyzstan the air-to-air refuelling operations being conducted by the RAAF's 84 Wing Detachment are contributing directly to the capacity of the Coalition air forces to operate effectively over Afghanistan. Such coverage provides essential air support for the conduct of ground operations.

8.4 The overwhelmingly positive and consistent nature of these observations reflects extremely well on the quality and relevance of the contribution being made by the ADF to the International Coalition Against Terrorism.

Professionalism and commitment of our troops

8.5 The delegation was impressed also by the morale, professionalism and commitment displayed by all of the Australian troops with whom they met.

8.6 Without exception, the deployed troops expressed a strong commitment to their tasks and a professional pride in the performance of their duties.

- In Afghanistan, the Special Forces continue to conduct hazardous and demanding operations in a manner that brings great credit to the ADF.
- The personnel deployed to Kuwait are working in very testing climatic conditions and providing highly professional command, coordination and logistics support to the forces deployed in forward positions.
- The RAN personnel operating in the Persian Gulf are working at the front line of the United Nations sanctions regime, also in oppressive climatic conditions, and making an intense, sustained commitment.
- The professionalism and commitment of the RAAF personnel deployed to Kyrgyzstan is demonstrated by the extraordinarily high rates of aircraft serviceability and mission success being achieved.

8.7 The importance that all of the troops placed on being able to communicate easily with friends and family at home was also notable. The standard of communication services seemed high, with Internet, e-mail and telephone services being particularly valued. Notwithstanding the good communication services, many personnel made it plain that they missed loved ones and were, of course, keenly looking forward to returning home at the completion of their tour of duty.

Issuing an Australian Campaign Medal

- 8.8 On a number of occasions ADF personnel proposed that an Australian campaign medal be issued to those troops deployed as part of the International Coalition Against Terrorism.
- 8.9 We consider that it would be appropriate for a medal to be awarded in recognition of this specific warlike deployment. Moreover, as the lead Coalition nation, the United States, has given no indication that it intends to issue such a medal to contributing nations, the Australian Government should take the initiative and issue a medal to the ADF personnel involved in the deployment.
- 8.10 We support also the announced awarding of the Australian Active Service Medal (with an International Coalition Against Terrorism clasp). We note with some concern, however, that there seems to have been significant delays in issuing the AASM to those who have already returned from service.
- 8.11 It is important that these decorations are awarded in a timely manner, ideally, immediately upon completion of a tour of duty.
- 8.12 We have already written to the Minister for Defence about these matters, making the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

- 8.13 **The Minister for Defence should consider issuing an Australian campaign medal to those Australian Defence Force personnel who have served on operations in support of the International Coalition Against Terrorism.**

Recommendation 2

- 8.14 **The Minister for Defence should:**
- **expedite the awarding of the Australian Active Service Medal to those Australian Defence Force personnel deployed as part of OPERATION SLIPPER who have already returned from their deployment; and**
 - **ensure that, in future, the Australian Active Service Medal is awarded immediately upon completion of a tour of duty.**

Integration with other Coalition Forces

- 8.15 It was apparent that all of the deployed Australian forces are well integrated into the International Coalition's command and operational structures. Of particular note is the close working relationship that has developed between the ADF and the various elements of the United States military.
- 8.16 The relationship with the US is built upon language and cultural similarities and, importantly, a long history of conducting joint training exercises and sponsoring personnel exchanges. Other key elements in the relationship are significant levels of equipment compatibility, comparable skill levels and similar approaches to military strategy and tactics. It was clear also that Coalition commanders had developed great respect for the ability of Australian troops and high regard for the manner in which they performed their duties.
- 8.17 Without this level of interoperability and respect it would not be possible for Australian forces to have achieved the level of integration that has been evident in this campaign.
- 8.18 Such integration allows Australian commanders an unprecedented level of access to critical intelligence and operational information. As a result, more accurate, complete and timely information is available to support operational planning and more reliable judgements can be made about national interest considerations. It also allows Australian forces to call on and benefit from a wide-range of Coalition assets and capabilities in the conduct of operations, thereby improving effectiveness and safety.
- 8.19 These observations apply consistently to each of the service elements deployed.
- In Afghanistan, the Special Forces Task Group has access to various Coalition assets to support its operations, including close air support, attack helicopters, tactical airlift aircraft and medical and logistic capabilities. Australian troops work regularly with the ground and air forces of the other Coalition contributing nations.
 - The National Command Element deployed to Kuwait has high-level access to intelligence, operational information and key Coalition leaders and staff.
 - The RAAF personnel at GANCI Airbase in Kyrgyzstan are operating in an especially cooperative Coalition environment. Not only are Australian crews conducting air-to-air refuelling operations for US and French aircraft but an Australian Officer is intimately involved in

operational planning and coordination as the Coalition Air Operations officer.

- The RAN personnel operating as part of the Maritime Interception Force are likewise working in a highly integrated and collaborative manner with US, UK and other Coalition vessels and crew. Not only are the HMAS *Melbourne* and the HMAS *Arunta* acting in concert with the other vessels in the Interception Force, but the Australian Naval Task Group onboard the *USS Hopper* are exercising tactical control over the Interception Force.

8.20 The level of interoperability between the ADF and its Coalition partners (especially the United States), the extent to which ADF personnel at all levels have been integrated in Coalition command and operational structures, and the high regard in which Australian forces are held augurs well for the continued success of this operation.

Command and control arrangements

8.21 The delegation was interested to learn more about the complex command and control arrangements in place for the ADF contribution to the International Coalition Against Terrorism. A description of these arrangements can be found in Chapter 7.

8.22 The main observations about these arrangements are that:

- the National Commander plays a key role in ensuring that the Government's objectives and interests are protected and advanced;
- the deployment of the National Commander in the area of operations is of critical importance – it enables face-to-face, daily interaction with senior Coalition commanders. This means that concerns about national interest protection can be addressed immediately, greatly enhancing the value of Australia's contribution to the Coalition. In a practical sense, undue delays in resolving such issues can mean that some coalition forces are sidelined rather than given meaningful tasks to perform;
- as the National Commander neither commands nor controls the deployed Australian forces, his capacity to make operational decisions is limited; and
- the capacity of Australian-based environmental commanders to maintain up to the minute situational awareness, to maintain focus on the International Coalition Against Terrorism, and, if necessary, to

respond immediately to a crisis on the other side of the globe and in a different time zone is limited.

- 8.23 We should make it plain that at no point was the delegation told of, or observed, any significant failings which could be attributed to the command structure of Australia's commitment to the International Coalition. To the contrary, they observed a system working extremely well: protecting Australia's interests and ensuring the safe and appropriate deployment of ADF personnel.
- 8.24 It is, however, a system that relies on extensively on goodwill, cooperation and a strong commitment to maintaining clear and effective communication between commanders. While this is perhaps true for all command systems, it may be appropriate to review aspects of the arrangement for any future commitment to Coalition operations.
- 8.25 We acknowledge that command arrangements can be structured in various ways, each with advantages and disadvantages. We are convinced, however, that the lines of accountability, responsibility and authority must be clear and unambiguous to all. It is highly desirable also that commanders, especially those in forward locations, have sufficient operational authority to allow them to fulfil their responsibilities.
- 8.26 We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these and any future command and control arrangements.

Relations with Kuwait and Kyrgyzstan

- 8.27 Australia's profile in the Middle East and Central Asia has been raised as a result of its commitment to the International Coalition Against Terrorism. In the case of Kuwait, the deployment of forces has increased already significant defence links dating back to the Gulf War. For Kyrgyzstan, it has stimulated contact with a nation with which Australia has had a limited relationship.
- 8.28 The Kuwait-Australia relationship continues to develop at a measured pace, with agricultural and other trade links being enhanced by a growing defence relationship. The Kuwaiti Government retains a strong interest in developing closer links with Australian defence training, education and equipment suppliers. We are very grateful for the tremendous hospitality and friendship that Kuwait has extended to the Australian troops deployed in Kuwait since the end of the Gulf War.
- 8.29 The Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein remains the key security concern for Kuwait. The Kuwaiti Government judges that Iraq's chemical and

biological weapons capability, and the existence of potential delivery systems, pose genuine security threats to the Gulf region. The return of Kuwaiti prisoners of war held by Iraq since the end of the Gulf War is an issue of great concern to Kuwait.

- 8.30 The Government of Kyrgyzstan has welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the War on Terrorism, having experienced, in recent years, the security threat posed by terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. The people of Kyrgyzstan have been friendly hosts to the Australian forces deployed at GANCI Airbase and are keen to use the connection that has been made to build closer economic, social and cultural relations with Australia.
- 8.31 Other nations in the Gulf region, including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, have continued to support and assist Australian defence personnel and activities. Their support is much appreciated.

Final comments

- 8.32 The visit was a remarkable opportunity to meet with the soldiers, sailors, and airmen and women of all ranks involved in these operations, to better understand the nature of the operations in which they are engaged and to appreciate the circumstances and environments in which they are operating.
- 8.33 Although they are working in dangerous, hostile environments and in oppressive climatic conditions, they are performing their duties with pride, commitment and professionalism. All of the deployed forces, from the Army, the RAN and the RAAF, are performing with distinction and attracting great credit to themselves, their Service, the ADF and to Australia.
- 8.34 Importantly, the visit was an opportunity also to convey directly to all of the ADF personnel with whom the delegation met a strong and bipartisan message of support from the Parliament. The International Coalition Against Terrorism is a just cause, and every Australian service man and woman serving in support of the Coalition does so with the goodwill, gratitude and absolute support of the Australian community.