

Operations

Background

4.1 Over the Financial Year 2010-2011, Defence conducted 17 Operations. These were:

- Pakistan Assist II (Pakistan);
- Christchurch Assist (New Zealand);
- Hedgerow (Darfur);
- Kruger (Iraq);
- Astute (East Timor);
- Palate II (Afghanistan);
- Yasi Assist (Queensland);
- Pacific Assist (Japan);
- Anode (Solomon Islands);
- Riverbank (Iraq);
- Tower (East Timor);
- Slipper (Afghanistan);
- Queensland Flood Assist (Queensland);

- Azure (Sudan);
- Paladin (Israel/Lebanon);
- Mazurka (Sinai); and
- Resolute (Australian Border Protection).¹

Current Status

Afghanistan

- 4.2 Defence stated that Afghanistan remains a highly complex and dangerous environment and, while every attempt is made to minimise risk as much as possible, an element of risk will always exist. Defence noted that the tragic shooting of Afghan civilians in Kandahar was not indicative of the tenor of the relationship that Australia and coalition forces have with the people of Afghanistan.²
- 4.3 Defence commented that operations in Afghanistan have been constrained over the past few months due to a particularly difficult winter. Snow and weather has limited operations and, in some cases, aerial resupply. Similarly, the winter has impacted on insurgent operations, resulting in a lower combat tempo during the winter period.³
- 4.4 Defence advised that Mentoring Task Force 4:
- . . . has used the reduced combat tempo as an opportunity to conduct training with the Afghan National Army with a focus on core skills such as their planning capability and weapons training. We continue to see encouraging progress with our partners in the Afghan Army 4th Brigade. Over the past few weeks independent ANA [Afghan National Army] patrols have uncovered a number of significant weapons caches. The Special Operations Task Group [SOTG] has continued operations throughout the winter, but the harsh weather has also caused some disruptions. In the past two months partnered SOTG and Afghan security force operations have resulted in the death or detention of a number of insurgent commanders who were believed to be responsible for supplying

1 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2009-2010 Volume One*, p. 4.

2 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 3.

3 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 3.

materials to build IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices] as well as marketing or trafficking illegal drugs.⁴

- 4.5 Defence observed the Operation is at an important transition point from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) led to Afghan led security operations. This model of operation will be shaped at a Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) summit in May 2012 where the long-term strategic plan for Afghanistan, including the size and composition of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and the international community's enduring assistance will be developed.⁵
- 4.6 On 16 May 12, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence issued a joint press release about their intentions for continuing support to Afghanistan. They advised these intentions would be taken to the NATO summit in May 2012. These include reaffirming Australia's commitment to supporting Afghanistan after transition, through helping to train and mentor the ANA and police. They also advised an ongoing Special Forces presence would be considered.⁶
- 4.7 The Committee questioned whether progress is being maintained in Afghanistan, specifically, how ANA and Afghan National Police (ANP) units are progressing towards functioning without continued mentoring.
- 4.8 Defence outlined that, under the ISAF performance management framework within the Uruzgan province, the 4th brigade of the ANA is classified as a whole as 'effective with advisers'. This means that:
- . . . they are capable of undertaking operations - conceiving operations, planning operations and executing them - by themselves, but we will plug into certain parts of that process, help lead them through the planning process, but not necessarily do it for them. The key to that is that they are now, under the better utilisation of the intelligence and so forth, initiating plans to go into particular areas and determining what needs to be done in each of those areas by themselves. We then support them and make sure that the enablers are available to support them in the operation.⁷
- 4.9 Defence noted that three of the infantry battalions, or Kandaks, are capable of varying degrees of autonomy. In fact, one of them is virtually

4 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 3.

5 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

6 Prime Minister of Australia Website, Press Office, <http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/australia-commits-ongoing-stability-afghanistan>, viewed on 12 Jun 2012.

7 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 38.

capable of conducting independent operations in its own space, certainly within the Uruzgan province, and the Brigade Commander has a very clear idea about distribution of his forces and frequency of operations.⁸

4.10 Additionally, the Combat Support Kandak encompasses the engineer capability and the artillery capability. The artillery capability has been declared able to operate by itself, while the engineers are still under mentoring and advice as they develop route clearance abilities. The combat service support is still being developed, and there is still one Kandak, formed later than the others, that is being progressed.⁹

4.11 Overall, there has been progress. While the Taliban declared a number of objectives they planned to achieve in this year, they have not achieved any of their operational objectives.¹⁰

4.12 Defence advised:

At the operational and tactical level there has been a good two years of hard work put in by ISAF and the Afghan forces. You see the strategic implications of all this, though, playing out now. The reconciliation processes, the thinking through about transition, and what the state of the ANSF and the coalition force will be in 2014 are all playing themselves out as a consequence of that work.¹¹

4.13 The Committee queried how the Afghan people viewed the insurgency, noting that, during their delegation visit to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) in 2011, they had been briefed on Afghan people reporting insurgents, reporting arms caches, and IED caches. The Committee questioned whether this level of support was continuing.

4.14 Defence responded that, as competent ANSF forces were developed, they were able to interact with their own people. There had been some potential setbacks as a result of the Koran burning incident, and there is a proportion of the population that will never be won over, however, in Uruzgan there is a good working relationship with the majority of the population. On the whole, Defence assessed that working relationships with the Afghan people are positive.¹²

8 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 38.

9 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 39.

10 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 39.

11 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 39.

12 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 39.

- 4.15 The Committee asked about the retention rates of personnel in ANA Kandaks after completion of their initial period of engagement.
- 4.16 Defence advised that monthly progress reports sourced from NATO indicated the retention rate of ANA soldiers on completion of their initial engagement period had been 73 per cent in August 2011, 33 per cent in September 2011, 75 per cent in October 2011, 64 per cent in November 2011, 62 per cent in December 2011, and 59 per cent in January 2012. These retention percentages include both recontracting of those eligible for separation and reenlistment of previous soldiers returning to the ANA.¹³
- 4.17 Defence further noted that the ANA is a young organisation, only four years old, so it lacks the depth of leadership at the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO), Warrant Officer, and junior officer levels. This, combined with many other factors, means that the retention rates post initial period of engagement are still not as high as hoped. Positive steps are being taken, with updated equipment, infrastructure, and confidence in their own abilities all improving attitudes. However, it will take time for change to occur.¹⁴
- 4.18 The Committee queried the effects of community engagement activities, such as sealing the road to the Chora valley, on the relationship with the Afghan people.
- 4.19 Defence noted that there has been positive feedback on such activities from local villagers. The sealing of the road to the Chora valley has also reduced the risk of IEDs in this location.¹⁵
- 4.20 The Committee queried the success of the interrogation capability situated in Tarin Kowt.
- 4.21 Defence responded that this capability has been very carefully constructed and supported throughout implementation. Interviews are recorded using Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and other technology, and interrogations are observed minute by minute. Defence noted that this capability has already produced good results by identifying personnel who are of interest but may not have been picked up under previous arrangements.¹⁶
- 4.22 The Committee inquired about the ongoing viability of AusAID programs once Australia draws down its military capabilities in Afghanistan.
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13 Department of Defence, *Submission 16*.

14 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 39.

15 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 40.

16 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 40.

- 4.23 Defence observed that the aid program assists with three dimensions: security, governance and development. However, in terms of continued government effort in Afghanistan post drawdown, AusAID would work directly with the Australian Government to develop an ongoing plan for the delivery of aid.¹⁷
- 4.24 The Committee asked about the report into the CH-47D Chinook Helicopter that was lost in Afghanistan.
- 4.25 Defence advised that the accident investigation had been conducted.¹⁸
- 4.26 Defence subsequently informed the Committee that a Commission of Inquiry has now been appointed, and the Aviation Accident Investigation Report will not be released prior to the conclusion of the Committee of Inquiry.¹⁹
- 4.27 The Committee inquired as to the current maintenance situation with CH-47s Chinooks deployed to Afghanistan, given the operational tempo and ongoing deployments.
- 4.28 Defence responded that a changed maintenance approach to these helicopters was introduced over the winter period in Afghanistan. Whereas helicopters had previously been returned to Australia for maintenance over the January/February period, on this occasion the helicopters were left in Afghanistan and deep-level maintenance was conducted onsite. This not only reduced the cost of maintaining the capability, but also enabled the Chinook workforce to be managed more effectively. Defence noted that this deep-level maintenance is primarily conducted by contractors.²⁰
- 4.29 The Committee questioned whether, as a consequence of the CH-47 Chinook commitment in Afghanistan, the raise, train, and sustain function for these helicopters in Australia was under stress.
- 4.30 Defence responded that having a small fleet of only six helicopters has always been an issue. This number will now grow to seven, but the issues of managing a small fleet cannot be easily alleviated. Defence noted the ongoing challenge of maintaining two helicopters in Afghanistan, out of a fleet of six to seven helicopters, while still keeping crews adequately prepared.²¹
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17 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 40.

18 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 40.

19 Gen. Hurley, *Letter to Committee*, dated 2 April 2012.

20 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 40.

21 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 40.

- 4.31 The Committee observed that, in the past 18 months, there has been a significant change with regards to embedding of media, with the military opening up its forces to allow journalists and cameramen in to observe activities firsthand. The Committee questioned whether this change was beneficial from Defence's point of view.
- 4.32 Defence responded that this has been a positive change as it enables clearer messages and informed debate about Defence activities in Afghanistan. This program will continue for at least the next 12 months.²²
- 4.33 The Committee noted that concerns had been raised with Committee members about the night vision goggles currently provided to the Australia Special Forces, specifically, that they are not state-of-the-art technology.
- 4.34 Defence advised that different night fighting equipment is provided to Special Forces personnel in Afghanistan compared to those undertaking domestic operations, including domestic counter-terrorism elements. The night fighting goggles issued in Afghanistan are smaller in size and weight, significantly reduce 'blooming' and flaring when exposed to bright light sources, and provide increased resolution and depth perception.²³
- 4.35 Defence stated:
- Noting the continual improvement in technology of this type, a proposal is being prepared for consideration by the Defence leadership that seeks to refresh the Special Operations' night fighting capability. This will ensure Special Operations forces are provided with the most suitable equipment.²⁴

East Timor

- 4.36 Defence noted that it continues to maintain a force of about 390 personnel in East Timor, and has been consolidating its bases in that country. Consequently, the bare base at Gleno and the forward operating base, Chauvel, were handed back in 2012. Defence noted that it does not expect any significant change to the level and force structure of the ADF currently in East Timor until after the elections.²⁵

22 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 39.

23 Department of Defence, *Submission 24*.

24 Department of Defence, *Submission 24*.

25 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

- 4.37 The Committee queried how the security role of the ADF in East Timor will be transitioned to the Timorese and whether this will occur in 2012.
- 4.38 Defence replied that the armed forces of East Timor are not currently dependent on Australia for their capability, rather, they are capable of conducting independent operations. Defence noted that Australia's ADF presence will remain at current strength and force structure until after the elections. After that time, discussions will be held with the government of East Timor about Australia's continuing security and defence engagement in this country.²⁶

Solomon Islands

- 4.39 Defence noted it had agreed to maintain its existing commitment to RAMSI in the Solomon Islands until at least mid 2013.²⁷

Papua New Guinea

- 4.40 Defence noted it is continuing to assist with the preparation for national elections in Papua New Guinea this year.²⁸

Pakistan Assist II

- 4.41 Defence observed that involvement in operations such as Pakistan Assist, and even Pacific Assist in Japan, strengthens relationships between Australia and those countries.²⁹
- 4.42 The Committee noted that many commentators have linked success in Afghanistan with the actions of authorities in Pakistan. The Committee questioned whether, in Defence's opinion, it would be of value for the Australian government to seek further engagement with the Pakistan military.
- 4.43 Defence responded that it already has a robust relationship with the Pakistan armed forces. Australia is the second largest provider of individual training to the Pakistan military, offering about 140 positions a year across all ranks and course types. Pakistan accepts about half of these opportunities each year, with language being the main barrier to

26 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 41.

27 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

28 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

29 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 41.

increasing that number. There are a range of senior officer visits and a willingness for interaction at all levels, including through sport.³⁰

Flood Assistance

4.44 The Committee noted the ongoing flood assistance provided by the ADF across Australia and expressed its appreciation of this continued support. The Committee asked Defence to outline the number of personnel, the capabilities provided, and the issues that confronted the ADF when providing assistance during the Queensland floods.

4.45 Defence advised that Queensland flood assistance commenced early in January 2011 and, overall, about 1,976 Defence personnel assisted in some way. As the situation developed, support requests were submitted to Emergency Management Australia to the Government and back through to Defence. Defence then delivered immediate aid where necessary, and responded to requests through Government channels. There were a number of permanent and reserve Defence personnel providing a range of support. This included helicopter support in the form of Kiowa and Black Hawks which enabled assessment of the situation first through the Kiowa, then action via the Black Hawk or other suitable response.³¹

4.46 Defence noted:

We were involved in a number of emergency issues where the helicopter crews should be commended for the bravery they showed winching people down into really difficult situations – housetops, people in trees, floodwaters and so forth.³²

4.47 Defence detailed that, once the immediate crisis passed, a significant force was committed to the cleanup operation. Additionally, Defence contributed to the planning effort and, ultimately, the leadership effort in Queensland both for the immediate aftermath and the ongoing reconstruction process. Initially, General Slater was in charge before being relieved by General Wilson. General Wilson has now retired from the Army but retained his position with the Queensland Government. Defence continues to support the reconstruction authority with a small number of key planners.³³

30 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 41.

31 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

32 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

33 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

- 4.48 Defence further noted it was currently providing assistance to flood affected communities in New South Wales and Victoria in the form of personnel, transport, and equipment.³⁴

Post-Deployment Reintegration

- 4.49 The Committee requested an update on the post-deployment reintegration program for ADF personnel returning from deployment to Afghanistan.
- 4.50 Defence provided an example of a post deployment reintegration program for Mentoring Task Force 3 personnel who began returning from deployment in late 2011. The program schedule is as follows:
- Up to 14 days prior to returning to Australia, returning members undertake a 3 day program in Tarin Kowt. This program includes a group psycho-education presentation on the 'Realities of Reintegration', completion of a Return to Australian Psychology Screen, completion of Return to Australia Medical Screen paperwork, a one-on-one screening interview with a psychologist or psychological examiner, and various administrative checks. These administrative checks include pay and allowance, honours and awards, security, and, where required, equipment handover and returns.
 - Immediately prior to returning to Australia, personnel usually spend two days at Al Minhad Air Base. This provides an opportunity for cleaning and hand back of equipment, and a half day rest and recreation activity in Dubai.
 - In the week after returning to Australia, dependant on the member's posting or family location, members undertake a three day reintegration program. This program includes briefs, family activities, physical training and unit administration. The activities are scheduled as part-days to enable individuals to integrate back into home life at the same time. Briefs are conducted on reintegration, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, rehabilitation process, Department of Veterans' Affairs processes and entitlements, Veterans and Veterans family counselling service, finance, and Returned Services League benefits.
 - Members usually then undertake a period of leave, the length of which varies depending on the individual.

34 Gen. Hurley, Department of Defence, *Transcript*, 16 March 2012, p. 4.

- 90 to 180 days after returning from deployment, members undertake a structured Post Operational Psychology Screen in their home location. Townsville based Mentoring Task Force – 3 personnel are currently part of a trial program which includes the opportunity for a family member to participate in the Post Operational Psychology Screen interview.
- As required, a four hour Coming home Readjustment Program is conducted. This program focuses on assisting personnel with sub-clinical difficulties with alcohol, anger, sleep, stress, relationships or communication. Members can either self refer to this program, or be referred by mental health providers, medical officers, or the chain of command.
- Defence has developed a new, voluntary, group-based program for individuals with emerging Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Individuals suitable for this program will be identified through the Post Operational Psychology Screen. The program consists of psycho-education and self management/therapy skills for managing symptoms of PTSD, general psychological distress, and socialisation to treatment for PTSD if required. This program will be conducted for the first time in July 2012.³⁵

Conclusions

4.51 The Committee notes the following in respect of Defence operations during Financial Year 2010-2011:

- The ADF continued to conduct a large numbers of operations within Australia and across the world.
- The ADF continues to conduct professional operations that support Australia's interests and reputation across the world.

35 Department of Defence, *Submission 20*, 8 May 2012.

